Escape into Emigration:  
Christian democratic social welfare politician  
Béla Kovrig and the Hungarian State Security  
1946-1948  
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“A dissident from the intelligentsia”

In his poem *A Sentence on Tyranny* the Hungarian poet Gyula Illyés wrote: “where there is tyranny, everyone is a link in the chain.”1 This “link in the chain” existence, by virtue of their position as intellectuals, is most often used to characterize members of the intelligentsia. Any discussion of the relationship between the intelligentsia and the state security apparatus in communist Hungary should always take this situation into account. Éva Cs. Gyimesi, a Hungarian-Romanian literary historian who died in 2011 under tragic circumstances, came up with a term while reading the surveillance reports the Romanian Securitate had on her. She said that because their designation was problematic “dissidents from the intelligentsia” should be assigned to a separate category.2 Gyimesi also suggested that leaving the country is not the beginning of defection, and not all circumstances result in a dissident’s emigration. A dissident may go into an internal or inner emigration — when the decision doesn’t necessarily involve the dissident’s actual departure from his or her country. However, the communist state security agencies, for simplicity’s sake, preferred to define defection as the act of crossing a border. Certainly, “internal emigration” often ended in real emigration but it was usually preceded by a shorter or longer period when the decision to leave had been taken but, on the surface, the life of the would-be defector continued as if nothing had happened.

For some people this transitional period lasted for decades — or never ended — and offered a certain opportunity to a thoughtful intellectual: an opportunity for the freedom of decision, however limited. That
is why Gyimesi introduced the third category to totalitarian society’s offenders and victims — the “intellectual dissidents.” For Gyimesi the individual deliberating on inner or actual emigration cannot be called simply a victim: he makes his own free decision, since he believes that when “living under tyranny, a passage between, over, or under the visible and invisible barriers is always possible through political devices.” Such individuals therefore cannot be seen simply as “victims, insofar as they — through their own free will — embraced an ideological system, worldview, belief, or religion,… and they accepted the consequences of their own views and deeds.”

Our present study traces the life of Béla Kovrig — a professor of sociology, Christian democratic politician, and a prominent member of public life in Hungary — from the First World War to the Second and after. We follow the course of his life to see whether his role as an “intellectual dissident” can be reconstructed and how long it lasted. Though the nature of the documentation makes this difficult, we outline his career using state security records, biographical sources, and his own scholarly writings.

What can be known for certain is that Béla Kovrig left Hungary in October 1948, and, after a short stay in Italy, emigrated to the United States. With his escape he intended to put an end to a two-year-long dead-end situation: his career as an agent of the state security apparatus. Leaving Hungary was a turning point in Kovrig’s life that was preceded by two-and-a-half decades of activity as a bureaucrat, politician and scholar, and was followed by a decade-and-a-half of existence as an émigré intellectual. His emigration, however, cannot be strictly connected to the point when he left Hungary. It includes personal and political experiences of the interim years starting with the end of World War II, which led to his decision to leave. These experiences also left their mark on the second half of his life and on his existence as an émigré.

Béla Kovrig’s career and work

Kovrig was born in Budapest on April 8, 1900, into a Transylvanian family of Armenian-Hungarian stock. His career began in 1920 when he got his diploma from Budapest’s Péter Pázmány Catholic University. He earned his doctorate in political science and law in 1921 and then went on a study-tour abroad that took him to the Hochschule für Politik in Berlin and the Sorbonne and the École des Sciences Politiques in Paris. After returning to Hungary in 1923 he became Prime Minister István Bethlen’s
private secretary while also working in the Bureau of Nationalities and Minorities of the Prime Minister’s Office. During the same period he also served as editor of two journals: Társadalompolitika [Social Policy] and Munkaügyi Szemle [Labour Review]. From 1927 on, he was employed by the Ministry of Social Welfare and Labour where he was deeply involved in affairs relating to social welfare. Following this he became Deputy Director of the National Institute of Social Security [Országos Társadalombiztosítási Intézet, “OTI”]. As one of the drafters of the 1928 XL law on old-age and disability insurance, he reviewed Hungary’s social insurance situation as well as trends in European welfare policy, which he and his colleagues then applied to Hungary’s conditions. Because of the onset of the Great Depression in 1929, many reform ideas on welfare could not be realized.

In the second half of the 1930s Kovrig’s career reached new heights. In 1938 Prime Minister Béla Imrédy appointed him director of the newly-formed V., the so-called Social Policy Department of the Prime Minister’s Office. The Social Policy Department was not a sociological or social policy advisory body, rather it dealt mainly with the government’s propaganda. In addition to the propaganda however, Kovrig never gave up pushing his ideas on welfare policy, towards the achievement of which he saw social propaganda as the most effective instrument. It was under these circumstances that he drew up the bill for old-age insurance for people working in the economy’s agricultural sector. The bill was then enacted by Parliament as the 1938 XII Law. After Prime Minister Pál Teleki merged the Social Policy Department with the Ministry of Religion and Public Education, Kovrig took part in establishing the National Policy Office and became its director. After Teleki’s suicide in April 1941, the National Policy Office was closed down and Kovrig left government service. He became first the dean, then the rector of the newly-established Hungarian university in Kolozsvár/Cluj in Northern Transylvania that Hungary had re-annexed the previous year.

In the history of Hungarian scholarship, the activities of the Ferenc József University during the years that Northern Transylvania was again under Hungarian rule (1940-44) were particularly important. Until Kovrig’s appointment as chief administrator there, the only Hungarian professorship of sociology had been in Budapest. As a result of his work, modern sociology education found a new location in Transylvania. Kovrig was also instrumental in introducing to Northern Transylvania organizations that had been successful in the promotion of public welfare in Hungary proper. An outstanding example of such an institution was
KALOT [National Association of Catholic Agrarian Youth Organizations].

Kovrig was not only a social policy bureaucrat — he was also a scholar. As a productive and talented writer he published continuously from the early 1920s on. His writings included A munka védelme a dunai államokban [Employment Protection in the Danube States], which utilized a comparative approach, and Szociálpolitika [Welfare Policy] which was a theoretical overview. He also produced a plethora of other volumes, articles and papers.

Kovrig’s role in Catholic reform politics

Béla Kovrig was a Catholic social scientist. In Hungary in the period between the two World Wars, but mainly in the 1930s, Catholic social and political thought developed in circumstances that made it possible for certain intellectuals to work out a program that was intended to be politically neutral. This group of Catholic sociologists, publicists and politicians followed, above all, the papal social doctrine of Pope Pius XI’s 1931 encyclical Quadragesimo Anno. Under the influence of such ideas and through an analysis of the Hungarian situation, Kovrig arrived at conclusions that differed from the ideas held by Hungary’s political elite, the advocates of the “Christian national course” regarding the country’s social and political set-up, or the Catholic Church’s role in society. Distinguished other representatives of this reform movement were the sociologist Vid Mihelics, the Jesuit philosophers Elemér Csávossy and László Varga — the latter being the founder and principal editor of the reform Catholic journal Korunk Szava [Voice of Our Age] — Count György Széchenyi, and István Barankovics the future leader of the Democratic People’s Party (the Christian Democratic party formed after the war). In this circle of reformers, Kovrig was the pre-eminent scholar.

Because of his station in life, Kovrig was the government’s bureaucrat, but as a scholar he was also the government’s critic. Originally he had been a conservative, then a reformed conservative, finally in his Christian Democratic period he came to believe in reforming the Horthy regime — which he, unlike many of his contemporaries, considered possible. As a bureaucrat and politician Kovrig had direct contact with national welfare policy; as a scholar however he envisaged its further development. Thus we shouldn’t be surprised that on August 23, 1943 he played a key role in a meeting called together by Vilmos Apor, Bishop of Győr, where those gathered decided to form the organization called the
Catholic Social People’s Movement — which can be considered the predecessor of the Christian Democratic People’s Party that was established on 13 October 1944 — only two days before the removal from office of Horthy by the Nazis and the assumption of power in Hungary by the right-radical Arrow Cross movement. Earlier, at a secret meeting of the Party’s founders, Kovrig had been tasked with working out the Party’s social program, thus he can be considered instrumental in establishing the Christian Democratic People’s Party, which later changed its name to the Democratic People’s Party (DPP). At the time, Kovrig was working on the volume Magyar Tarsadalompolitika [Hungarian Social Policy], a compendium of Hungary’s welfare and social policies between the wars. This work became the basis for the DPP’s platform after the war.

Throughout these years Kovrig, in tune with his views, fought against the relentless advance of the extreme right in Hungary and kept in contact with anti-Nazi political and public figures. Thus it is not surprising that during the war he took part in the anti-fascist resistance as well. After Prince Primate Jusztinián Cardinal Serédi gave Catholics permission to take part in the anti-fascist movement known as Hungarian Front, which worked together with the Communists, Kovrig became active in the Front’s operations — printing and distributing leaflets and hiding people.

In the winter of 1944–45 he himself was forced into hiding, but already in January of 1945, after a new government was established behind Red Army lines, he reported to its Ministry of Religion and Public Education. He worked there for a while, then in the Reconstruction Ministry. Still later he returned to teaching, first at the Royal József Nádor Technical and Economic University, then at the University of Agriculture, and finally from 1947 on, in Eger at the city’s law-school.

Kovrig’s induction as an agent for the State Security Agencies

Because of Kovrig’s prominent past activities as well as his central role in founding the Democratic People’s Party, already in 1946 he aroused the interest of the Budapest Headquarters of the Political Investigation Department of the Hungarian State Police. His irreprouachable conduct and anti-fascist stance, at the same time, didn’t give the police an immediate opportunity to blackmail him. For the time being, Kovrig’s main concern was the illness of his mother rather than being investigated by the police.

By 1946 changes in Hungarian domestic politics had already occurred, which despite the existence of a coalition government, indicated that the country’s Communist Party would use every possible tool to seize
power. The Communists’ “get the people’s enemies out of the coalition” campaign, announced in the fall of 1946, was unequivocally aimed at the Smallholders Party. The denunciations and assaults through the press began — all intended to rankle relations within the coalition. The Communists also tried to weaken the Smallholders’ influence with the country’s electorate. They systematically accumulated information on the Party’s leaders, and later also on members of Hungary’s clerical elite who were considered opponents of the Communists’ ambitions.

In 1945 the Hungarian State Police had formed two Political Investigation Departments [PROs], one for Budapest and one for the countryside — both of which were under communist control from the very beginning. At the outset their declared tasks did not include intelligence and interception work focusing on the Churches. In September of 1946 the two departments were merged and became the State Security Department [Államvédelmi Osztály or ÁVO]. One of the new agency’s overt tasks became the surveillance of the Churches. Because the Churches were so deeply embedded in Hungarian society, the battle against the “clerical reaction” as the Communists called it, soon became the Communist Party’s chief preoccupation. The starting point was the claim that the majority of the Hungarian people’s enemies were “hiding behind the cloaks of the church; mainly the Roman Catholic Church.” Understandably under these circumstances the ÁVO’s anti-church activities were viewed more and more as valuable.

In this atmosphere of political hysteria, on 9 September 1946, Kovrig was taken to ÁVO headquarters at 60 Andrássy Avenue for questioning. According to the State Security Agencies’ reports, the ÁVO had investigated Kovrig for two months prior to this event. His interrogators accused him with having harmed the Hungarian people “as a result of his wartime and anti-democratic activities.”

According to a report prepared a few days after his interrogation, “in the first phase of his questioning we only asked about the subject at hand, while the special group leader observed his behavior. But he still held out. Later when we revealed to him the severity of his situation and the group leader asked him what would happen to his sick family members, that’s when he broke a bit...” Kovrig soon realized that the ÁVO agents wanted something special from him. According to the report, “after questioning him for about an hour, he offered his services.” At that point they had him sign a statement of co-operation and fill out a data sheet documenting his induction, on which the method of induction was listed as
Having come “under pressure.” They attached his *curriculum vitae* to his induction file.  

From the point of view of the emerging new order, Kovrig’s *curriculum vitae* had only one flaw: his anti-Soviet attitudes; and the secret police — according to their working reports — had precise data on this matter. In his *CV* Kovrig had made strenuous efforts to play down his own earlier anti-soviet writings mainly his monograph entitled “*Az új Oroszország (1917–1926)*” [The new Russia]; his chapter on the Russian revolution in a 1940 volume entitled *Korfordulón* [At the turning point of an era]; and a booklet from 1942 entitled *Embersors a szovjetéletben* [Man’s fate in Soviet life]. In these writings it was made perfectly clear that as a social thinker he was absolutely sure of the differences between socialism and communism, as well as among Marxism, Leninism, and Stalinism. Perhaps we are not too far from the truth if we surmise that in his *curriculum vitae* he emphasized his role in the anti-fascist opposition and stressed his original social commitment, in an effort to counterbalance his anti-Soviet stance.

For the next two years until his defection, Kovrig produced reports for the ÁVO on events and trends in Hungarian ecclesiastical life and policy, and on certain Catholic public figures. His cover-name was “Bihari”, though he never used this name in his reports; he always signed with his own name. His tasks were mainly to strengthen the line against Cardinal Mindszenty, and do surveillance of Catholic politicians and clerics around István Barankovics and the Democratic People’s Party.

With the accusation of having “committed war-like and anti-democratic acts to the detriment of the Hungarian nation” hanging over his head, a leading intellectual from the Horthy era became an eminent agent. Kovrig must have known that several dozen public figures (among them four previous prime ministers) similarly charged had paid for their “crimes” with their lives. This explains why the terror-stricken Kovrig lived in continual fear, and his surveillance reports were always precise and accurate. It must have appeared to the secret police that they had entered into what could be called a “successful collaboration.” Already in the late fall and early winter of 1946 Kovrig supplied his masters with a great deal of detailed information on matters relating to the churches, which must have been appreciated by men who knew little on the subject. However, with only one or two exceptions, his reports on particular individuals do not contain negative information. On the pages of such reports one couldn’t really find any more information than someone familiar with Catholic public life would have known anyway: the personalities in
Catholic public life were depicted as irreproachable people who led exemplary lives — they were anti-German, anti-fascist, Catholic–Christian champions of progressive ideas.

Kovrig’s liaison officer, János Tihanyi, praised his work: “I have been in touch with him regularly for about half a year. His helpfulness and activity are outstanding. I have learned a lot from him with respect to the Catholic line. Beyond this, through debate-like conversations I think his view has become clearer, he is politically a realist, deeply religious, but to his benefit, he has changed a lot.”

Regarding Kovrig’s true state of mind, Jenő Kerkai, one of the Jesuit leaders of the KALOT movement who was under Kovrig’s surveillance, knew the most. According to Kerkai “Kovrig suffered from paranoia”. When, for example, he visited Kerkai, “he put his coat over the telephone in the room and pulled out the plug of the radio, to avoid being bugged.”

In this period fear permeates Kovrig’s writings. This also characterizes his reports to his liaison officer. Not long after his induction, he was asked to submit a report entitled: A progresszív katolicizmus és a munkáspártok viszonyáról [The Relationship between Progressive Catholicism and the Labour Parties] in which he shared his views with his liaison officer in scholarly detail. As other historians have also noted, particularly in cases when a member of the intelligentsia came in contact with the secret police, besides the fear that what he says may hurt him, there exists a hidden desire to influence the organization. This can be considered political tactic: a way of finally getting appreciation for their own views, getting certain things done, or getting their narcissistic manifestations into the “secret company of the wise analysts” — or probably a combination of some or all of these factors.

In any case, given Béla Kovrig’s outstanding intellect, from the beginning he twisted the message of his reports so that keeping the “terrorized professor” as a state security agent could only seem successful to a certain degree, and from a certain point of view. At the same time Kovrig did not simply provide incriminating information on the people under his surveillance. With his scholarly discussions he not only put the secret police’s literacy to the test, but he tried to turn the “offered opportunity” around to his own benefit and that of his political allies — the Christian democratic politicians and the Democratic People’s Party. In his first report for the secret police, Kovrig already spoke with a different voice — as a politician. He submitted a plan on how the intellectual Christian
democratic movement could be widened into a social movement supporting the left and what steps would be necessary towards that.\(^{38}\)

Kovrig also used “the opportunity” to characterize Mindszenty (whom the Pope had appointed Hungary’s Prince Primate in September of 1945) and his politics, as being in opposition to the Democratic People’s Party. The conflict between Mindszenty and the Democratic People’s Party, Mindszenty and Barankovics, and Mindszenty and Kovrig was an older issue, and also sprang from actual theoretical and personal differences of opinion — as it comes clear in the report Kovrig wrote for the state security. With the Hungarian Communist Party’s defeat in the 1945 parliamentary elections, Mindszenty came to be seen by the secret police as an individual opposed to the Communist Party’s goals.\(^{39}\) It can therefore be said that Kovrig, on the basis of the “the enemy of my enemy is my friend” theory, designated Mindszenty as a common enemy.

How the state security agencies used the information they got from Kovrig differed somewhat from what he assumed. His background—politicizing through the medium of the secret police wasn’t very successful. It probably wasn’t clear to Kovrig that it actually wasn’t possible to undertake consensus-building political discussion between the Democratic People’s Party and the Communist Party. In the struggle for the control of ecclesiastical policy, Kovrig’s machinations amounted to being merely a sideshow, though the information provided by him was used by the secret police. In the meantime he caused Mindszenty to be considered as an enemy who could be blackmailed,\(^{40}\) while over time he himself, according to reports made on him, “became more and more nervous.”\(^{41}\) As he wrote in a letter to his mother after he emigrated: he defected because “he started to hate politics.”\(^{42}\)

Kovrig continued producing surveillance reports until 1948. A 1950 summary of these lists 24 important reports, only some of which can be found. The earliest report was on the day of his induction, September 9, 1946, and the last one was dated August 7, 1948.\(^{43}\) Kovrig must have seen the discrediting propaganda and campaign against the Catholic leaders and politicians he had reported on. The result was a rapid deterioration of his nervous condition.

Finally at one point in early or mid-1948 he decided to leave the country and in October of the same year he and his wife were successful in escaping. Steve Koczak (an advisor to the Budapest Embassy of the United States) helped them to get out.\(^{44}\) Kovrig left a farewell letter to János Tihanyi who (under the cover name of “Mirkó”) was still his liaison officer. In it he apologized for leaving the country. He explained that the
reason for his escape was that he could no longer teach in Eger, and in Hungary there was no professorship where he would be able to teach in Catholic mentality.\textsuperscript{45} He said he had been invited to the United States in 1947, but state security hadn’t permitted him to go; on the basis of which he concluded that a legal departure would not be possible.\textsuperscript{46} The fact that he left a farewell letter to his liaison officer shows that Kovrig hadn’t yet escaped from his psychological dependence on the secret police.

There is no indication in the files that the secret police were prepared for Kovrig’s defection, or that after he left any quick investigations were made. It is possible that Kovrig’s role as an agent had become superfluous,\textsuperscript{47} given that the Hungarian Communist Party led by Mátýás Rákosi, had already decided to destroy the Catholic Church. Less than a month after Kovrig left, Cardinal Mindszenty was arrested. Then, after István Barankovics also left the country, the Democratic People’s Party disintegrated. Altogether eleven members of the Party’s leadership defected.\textsuperscript{48} Koczak helped many of them to leave the country.

The circumstances of Kovrig’s escape were only reconstructed in 1950 on the basis of Jenő Kerkai’s statements made when he was also put under arrest. According to this, Ágoston Takáts helped with the defection’s technical arrangements. Takáts and Kerkai had both worked with the Jesuits and that is how they knew Kovrig. In a confession made to the secret police on February 20, 1949, Takáts stated that in the late summer of 1948 Kovrig told him he had met Koczak to plan the escape. After that Takáts himself spoke to Koczak about Kovrig’s planned escape. On a Friday, Takáts accompanied Kovrig and his wife to Hidegkuti Street in Budapest. Before that the Kovrigs had placed their luggage in baggage storage at the city’s Keleti Train Station. Takács gave the baggage storage voucher to Koczak. Next, Kovrig and his wife got into Koczak’s car. The car was driven by a US Embassy employee. Koczak took Kovrig and his wife out of the country hidden in the car’s trunk.\textsuperscript{49} In this manner Kovrig was successful in leaving the country. For a while he stayed in Italy, from where he wrote letters to his mother who had remained in Budapest. He apologized for leaving her alone in her old age.\textsuperscript{50} Finally he took up residence in the USA, where he became a professor of sociology at the Jesuit University in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. He probably thought that he had left his mother and his country, along with its secret police behind, but he was wrong about the latter.
The emigration years

Upon learning of Kovrig’s activities in America after his emigration, in 1950 state security investigator Lieutenant Sándor Vadócz proposed that he should be re-recruited. Because of Kovrig’s close contacts with prominent émigrés including Károly Peyer, Ferenc Nagy, Béla Varga and István Barankovics, the security men thought he would be ideal not only for getting information on the Hungarian emigration, but also on science, economics and politics in America.²¹

The first step in trying to re-recruit Kovrig was an evaluation of his old reports, with particular attention to finding information that would could be used to blackmail him. The secret policemen who re-read his reports, however, came to the conclusion that there were few reports whose contents could be construed as being embarrassing to him in the eyes of the American or the Hungarian-American public.²² Therefore the ÁVO turned its interest to Kovrig’s mother in Budapest, and they made a study of her circumstances. They found that she, now Mrs. Imre Drehr (after her second husband), lived in poverty and was “under the influence of the church.” “Before the war she had been amongst the upper 10,000,” but by the early 1950s she was in the process of selling her possessions in order to make ends meet. They guessed that, judging by her circumstances, it was probable that through an intermediary she was in touch with her son and that he contributed to her support.²³ Next they ordered that she be put under surveillance whenever she left her home. Through such means the ÁVO learned for example that Kovrig’s mother, on a certain day went to church, then visited someone in a hospital, then did some shopping. On the pages of the surveillance reports the daily life of the unsuspecting elderly woman roll out before us dramatically. In the reports we can follow the process of the ÁVO fabricating an image of the enemy, since she had been named “an enemy of the people’s democracy”. Because of her advanced age, she was not considered an “active enemy” and her person was handled as an object and thus she was dehumanized as well.

In the meantime a proposal was made to acquire Kovrig’s home address in Milwaukee, which they wanted to get from his mother in a conspiratorial fashion. What this meant was that the communist authorities arranged that her eligibility for an old-age pension be reviewed. Next she was informed that she was not entitled to receive it. Further, she was frequently called into the pensions office, where amongst many other things they asked her what her son’s address was. They also tried to inform themselves with regards to the university where Kovrig taught.
Today it is difficult for us to imagine the scope of this “intelligence” operation, how many man-hours were invested, for how long the surveillance went on and how much money was spent on it. Kovrig’s mother didn’t give the Communists her son’s address, though they most likely harassed her for it for years. It is possible that she really didn’t know it, and knew only the address of her brother-in-law in Munich, through whom she corresponded with her son. In any case, for years János Tihanyi, who had been Kovrig’s liaison officer, visited her pretending to be an employee of the Welfare Ministry. She sometimes got heating fuel for free, and after a while they even reinstated her pension, so that she would continue to trust Tihanyi who kept in touch with her. It seemed that when Kovrig’s mother became seriously ill and was hospitalized in March 1952, the ÁVO was given an opportunity to obtain Kovrig’s address. Tihanyi had a letter sent to Kovrig’s address at his place of work, in which a doctor informed him of his mother’s condition and warned him that if it was important that “his mother be in good hands for her remaining days,” so he should go to a meeting at a place in Washington D.C. The letter was signed with the cover name “Mirkő”, from which Kovrig would have known immediately that Tihanyi was behind the whole operation. Kovrig did not answer — at least not directly to Tihanyi, but he wrote a letter to his mother that contained messages to the security people who would be reading what he wrote: in spite of the fact that the authorities in Hungary — thanks to Tihanyi’s intervention — restored her pension, provided her with fuel, and paid for her hospital treatment, he would not write a letter to anyone else but to “dear mother.”

In the end the secret policemen were not able to establish contact with Kovrig through his mother. Therefore on October 31, 1952, two years after they began trying to contact Kovrig, a new proposal was made for accomplishing this aim. The trivial manner in which they solved the “mystery” of his home address is comical: with the help of a Washington resident, they got a copy of the Milwaukee city telephone directory and simply looked up his address and telephone number. Nevertheless, it wasn’t until quite a bit later, in June 1955, that they finally made another move to make contact. They posted a letter to him from New York — inviting him to another meeting. But Kovrig did not show up for this meeting either, nor did he respond to the letter even though they threatened to cancel his mother’s pension. He had come to the point where he was independent from the pressures of being a link in the Hungarian “tyranny chain.” The price of his freedom however, was that his mother remained at the mercy of Hungary’s state security apparatus.
Kovrig’s example shows that escaping from a mentally and physically destructive collaboration with the communist secret police invited great risks for the victims, and that defection brought further burdens to the life of a “dissident from the intelligentsia” from which it was hardly possible to escape.

Kovrig actively participated in the American-Hungarian émigré community’s politics. In the letters he sent to his mother, on the other hand, he talked mainly about his work at the university. He probably knew that the security people were reading his letters. In 1954 the Hungarian National Committee, an umbrella organization of the Hungarian expatriate community, published a new version of the 1944 Magyar Társadalompolitika [Hungarian Social Policy] re-written in emigration and with a foreword by István Barankovics. To this day, this work stands alone in Hungarian social science as an important documentary source material for historians and sociologists on Hungarian social policy in the interwar period and the immediate aftermath of World War II. The book was re-published again in Budapest in 2011.

Béla Kovrig died in Milwaukee, Wisconsin in 1962. His wife was the only member of his family who was able to attend his funeral.

NOTES

1 In English: Gyula Illyés, A sentence on tyranny. “Where seek tyranny? Think again: / Everyone is a link in the chain, / Of tyranny’s stench you are not free: / You yourself are tyranny.” Translated by: Vernon Watkins. In Hundred Hungarian Poems (Manchester, 1976).


3 Ibid., 12.

4 Ibid., 31.

5 He was a descendant of the Armenian Covrig family whose members settled in Transylvania during the 17th or 18th centuries. Jenő Kerekes, “Kovrig Béla,” in Az erdélyi magyar gazdasági gondolkodás múltjából [Transylvanian Hungarian economic thought of the past] Volume II, ed. József Somai (Kolozsvár: Romániai Magyar Közgazdasz Társulat, 2004), 263.

6 István Borbély, “Kovrig Béla társadalompolitikája. Szociálpolitikai hivatás” [Béla Kovrig’s social policy. The welfare mission], in Félbemaradt reformkor. Miért maradt el az ország keresztény-humanista megújítása?

7 1928: XL. tc. „az öregség, rokkantság, özvegység és árvaság esetére kötelező biztosításról“.[On compulsory insurance for old-age, disability, widows and orphans.] The whole text of the law can be found at: 1000 év törvényei [Laws of 1000 years], www.complex.hu/1000, downloaded on June 12, 2015.


12 Other important works by Béla Kovrig: Az új Oroszország: 1917–1926 [The New Russia: 1917–1926] (Budapest: Franklin Kiadó, 1926); Az antiszociális áradattal szemben [Against the anti-social current] (Budapest: Atheneum, 1930); A magyar szociálpolitika igaza a liberális és szocialista eszmerendszerek közdel-mében [The truth of Hungarian welfare policy in the struggle between liberal and socialist systems of thought.] (Budapest: A Munkaügyi Szemle, 1932); Korfordulón [At the turning point of an era.] (Budapest: Egyetemi Nyomda, 1940).

13 See his text in Miklós Tomka and János Goják, Az egyház társadalmi tanítása: dokumentumok [The church’s social teachings: documents] (Budapest: Szent István Társulat, 1993), 57–103.


22 Állambiztonsági Szolgálatok Történeti Levéltára [the Historical Archives of the Hungarian State Security] (hereafter ÁBTL; 3.2.4. K-384-1. 19.


26 The following comment was added to the bibliography prepared by the State Security: “Make notes on the above mentioned books, write out certain important passages word for word, produce general descriptions of his books.” ÁBTL 3.2.4. K-384-1. 21.


28 Béla Kovrig, *Korfordulón* [At the turning point of an era] (Budapest: Egyetemi Nyomda, 1940), 5–55.

29 ÁBTL 3.2.4 . K-384-1. 54.


31 With his description of Cardinal Mindszenty and his analyses of ecclesiastical policy and environment, Kovrig over-fulfilled the expectations of
the secret police. From his lines one can read political tactic, pressure to perform under intimidation, as well as a personal aversion to the Cardinal.

33 Ibid., 55–56.
34 Ibid., 60–92.
38 ÁBTL 3.2.4. K-387-2, 87.
40 When they tried to renew contact with him in the United States, they tried to use this to blackmail him. ÁBTL 3.2.4. K-384-1, 58.
41 Ibid., 55.
42 Ibid., 57.
43 Ibid., 60-61.
44 Ibid., 45.
45 The Catholic School of Law in Eger was taken over by the state in 1948, and then closed in 1949.
46 ÁBTL 3.2.4. K-384-1, 55.
49 ÁBTL 3.2.4. K-384-1, 56–57. Koczak had also retrieved the Kovrigs’ luggage from the baggage storage room at Keleti Train Station and brought it out with them.
50 Ibid., 57 and 108.
51 Ibid., 58–59.
52 Ibid., 63.
53 Ibid., 66–67.
54 Ibid., 176.
55 Ibid., 277.