



# HUNGARIAN CRIMINALITY

## Six billion Forints in 1990

1990 was a particularly important year in the history of Hungary. In that year, Hungarians were set free from the party state. But to establish the new system will require several years, so the country is in a period of transition in which there is something of a breakdown of order and discipline. Considering that the previous regime could only just keep order by oppression and that the new government wants to build democracy, it is hardly surprising to find the emergence of anarchy and discord.

The Hungarian Attorney's Department and the police force have been collecting criminal statistics since 1964. Since 1983, the Attorney General's Office has collated data about both offences and offenders on computer.

The Ministry of Justice also prepares statistics based on the data provided by the courts. But these figures are distorted for a number of reasons; the record includes only the most serious offence when the sentence was imposed so other minor offences do not show up.



*Dr Sándor Nyiri*

Dr Sándor Nyiri, the Deputy General Attorney of Hungary is well known for his efforts to make statistics both authentic and public. I asked him about the level of crime in 1990.

S.N.: 341,061 crimes were committed during last year, which is an increase of 261% compared to 1980. This has been an explosive increase (over 50%) from 1989 when 225,393 crimes were committed.

A.D.: *Which types of crimes are at the top of the list?*

S.N.: Crimes against property. This was characteristic of the previous decades as well but, during the last year, their number has increased dramatically. The reasons for this can be found in the economic situation of the country. On the one hand, about 80% of the offenders who committed crimes against property had a salary under the national average and supported several children. But on the other hand, the problem might also be attributed to wealthier people who have tried to protect and reinforce their economic position. In 1989, 2,223 million Hungarian Forint worth of property was involved (approximately £111m). By 1990, the value of stolen and damaged property had risen to 6,067 million Forint - a 273% increase.

A.D.: *What about organised crime?*

S.N.: The élite class of criminals has quickly realised that the proceeds of crime can be laundered by investing in legal but not properly controlled businesses.

A.D.: *Has the number of other crimes also risen?*

S.N.: Everything is on the increase. Offences against the person have gone up by 16%, traffic offences by 26% and violent crimes and hooliganism have increased by nearly 20% - just from 1989 to 1990.

A.D.: *What can you tell us about the people who committed all these crimes?*

S.N.: Of the 112,254 people who committed crimes in 1990, 11% were juveniles and 25% were young adults. This represents a considerable increase in both categories, in relation to the previous year. 48% of them committed property crimes, 21% traffic offences and 8% committed offences against the person.

A.D.: *How effective are the police?*

S.N.: In 1990, there was a clear up rate of 28%.

A.D.: *How could this rate be improved?*

S.N.: It is difficult to improve things when we do not have the technological back-up and when we are short of staff and are poorly organised. Crimes committed by policemen (478 in 1990) are a special problem. Although the number was not high, it does say something about the morality of the police force.

A.D.: *What kind of offences are committed by policemen?*

S.N.: Mainly drunken driving and other traffic offences, but, and this is particularly shocking, policemen also are found guilty of the theft offences against the person.

A.D.: *How do you think crime could be decreased?*

S.N.: As far as juveniles are concerned, in my opinion, positive results could primarily be achieved not by penal measures, but by introducing awareness of national identity, moral strength and a clear 'rule of conduct' into their consciousness. Criminal law does not have to play a leading role in this process. Social renewal and progress is not primarily a question for criminal justice.

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