

From 15 Minutes to 9 Hours and a Half

In 1947 I joined The Medical and Pharmacy College in Targu-Mures as a professor; becoming Assistant Rector in 1950.

During the school year 1951-52 I was sent to Moscow to study Preventive Medicine and the Soviet Medical Education: The Organizational and Technical System.

Upon my return I was appointed Director of Medical Education in the Ministry of Health.

At the end of 1953, I was diagnosed with Tuberculosis (TB). After a three month course of treatment in Bucharest, my four sisters took me in to convalesce at Targu-Mures, while specialty clinical care was offered by Professor Dr. Zeno Barbu.

Once cured, I returned to my duties in Bucharest in October 1954. Shortly after, I received a phone call from a very friendly voice which invited me to a fifteen minute meeting with the Party members for next day at 4:45pm, right before the afternoon program.

Four hundred fifty members showed up at that meeting of the Party's General Assembly.

The Secretary, Dr. Agripa Ionescu , introduced Comrade Mitea, a member of the Bureau, who read the sole topic of the day's meeting:

« Comrades, our Party gets stronger when it rejects treacherous elements from within. Such a rotten member is Kelemen Andrei.»

Following the same tone, the report listed some of my insidious actions:

« During his visit in USSR, he spied for and transmitted information to Ionescu Mircea (*the leader of our group of six Romanian doctors invited to Moscow, who was subsequently appointed General Director for Preventive Medicine in the Ministry of Health, but defected to Germany during a medical congress later on*). That decision, continued the report, was taken by Ionescu Mircea together with Kelemen Andrei, who also ran away to Germany in 1946.»

« Kelemen Andrei had a strong anti-Romanian attitude during the Hungarian occupation of Northern Transylvania, as well as during his

tenure as professor at the Medical and Pharmacy College in Targu-Mures. Kelemen Andrei has also taken various anti-revolutionary decisions as Director of Medical Education in the Ministry of Health.»

According to the Party's statutory procedure, I was given the chance to speak. So thus I stated:

« I object to being called a traitor. I am, and will always, be Comrade Kelemen Andrei, member of the Romanian Worker's Party.

Now, first and foremost, I ask the representative of the Regional Committee to stand up and answer if he knew about this report, which I consider an attack to the Romanian Worker's Party itself.» No one stood up.

«I ask the representative of the Municipal Committee the same thing.» No one stood up and no one said a word.

«I ask the representative of the Central Committee of the Party to stand up and answer my question.» No one stood up and no one answered.

«Maybe they are not amongst us today, or maybe they are ashamed, too of this report which I consider a criminal offense to the dignity of the central and local institutions of the Party.

Due to my position in the Ministry, I belong to the higher officials of the Party's Central Committee. The representative of the Central Committee must have known a lot about me from the following documents kept in my recruitment file:

1. the request to the Regional Committee Cluj to be accepted in the Communist Party in 1945, which was granted with the following note: “Request accepted. He's been a member of the Communist Youth Union since 1939.”
2. the resolution of the Committee in charge with my background check dated 1948.
3. my other background check documents issued when I was appointed Assistant Rector of the Medical and Pharmacy College in Targu-Mures and member of the Regional Committee of Mures County.

4. my background check requested by the Central Committee before I was sent to Moscow.

5. my background check requested by the Central Committee before I was appointed Director of Medical Education in the Ministry of Health.

So I am wondering, after reading all these documents, how could someone denounce me as traitor? Evidently, it's false!

The accusation of spying while being in Moscow doesn't even deserve to be taken into account. It is in fact a stupid idea and an offense to the Party's Central Committee. I trust the Romanian and the Soviet Intelligence will prove sick lies such as these completely unfounded.

The accusation of “defection” in 1946 is similarly groundless. My father, Kelemen Matei, was a hard working, strong man and an Auschwitz survivor. Although he outlived the exhausting forced labor in Bavaria, he ended up dying on the way home. His travel companions buried him on a hillock about 40 km outside Munich.

In order to find his place of burial I needed a passport, and my request was approved by the

Party's Regional Committee in Targu- Mures, the Ministry of Education, and the Control Committee.

Once I got my passport, I left the country and there, on the hillock behind Feldafing railway station, I saw his makeshift grave. Hoping I could one day go back and place a plaque in his memory, I left a sign on the ground and returned to Romania without missing a single day of college.

I'd like to mention that on the way home I stopped by the French Cultural and Scientific Agency in Germany, where I ordered a handbook for attending medical studies in Sorbonne, which I received at home in Targu Mures a month after my return. I also made a stop at the University of Vienna, where I bought *Toldt's Anatomy Atlas* for one of my friends who was in her 3rd year of medical school.

To see a link between Ionescu Mircea's defection to Germany in 1953 and the trip to visit my father's grave in 1946 is not only childish, but also an attempt to fabricate extenuating circumstances for Ionescu's actions.

The accusation of being anti-Romanian is absurd, not only objectively (during the Hortist Regime, which had introduced “Numerus Nullus” for Jewish students in universities, I became unable to continue my studies), but also subjectively.

While in charge of pupils who had to repeat their school year, I also acted as a good member of the Communist Youth. I used to pass out poems written by left wing authors such as Iozsef Attila's *At Danube*, who was a strong advocate for a brotherhood between Hungarians and Romanians.

I also managed to get permission that an all-girls class could prepare for their end of high school exam by studying *The True Ady* by Bolony George (Gyorgy), instead of his censored biography.

After Northern Transylvania was freed from Hungarian occupation, I helped to promote the idea that Romanian students, who lost years of school while fighting the war, should be allowed to take their tests in Romanian, using a translator.

In my position as Assistant Rector of the Medical and Pharmacy College in Targu-Mures I took the

initiative to replace the existing head of the Romanian Language Department with a Romanian professor, more suited for the job.

I successfully advocated for remarkable Romanians with teaching and scientific credentials, and fluent in Hungarian, to be promoted to professor (such as Prof. Zeno Barbu) and even dean positions (Prof. Dr. Vasile Sabadeanu).

My co-workers, as well as rectors, professors, and deans at various universities across the country, can testify to my forthrightness as Director of Medical Education at the Ministry of Health. While the report mentions anti-revolutionary actions without any concrete examples, I'd like to underscore a few revolutionary actions I took while working there:

- with the help of the Ministry 's Management I obtained University status for “The Center For Professional Development for Doctors and Pharmacists”, which in 1952 became “The Institute for Professional Development and Specialized Studies for Doctors and Pharmacists”.

- I initiated changes to the medical section of the 1948 Reform for Higher Education, re-establishing by official decree the position of clinical doctor (*Secundariat Clinic si de Igiena has no correspondent in English*)
- With the support of the Minister of Health's Deputy, as well of the Minister of Education's Deputy, I established the basis for generalized “externship”, a way to train medical students in hospitals.
- I firmly objected to the proposal for reducing the duration of medical studies to five and even to four years for an unlimited period of time, and won that case.

I'd like to end my speech here, and conclude by stating that while I've used my experiences acquired in Moscow, I haven't adopted the Soviet model. I merely used it as an extremely valuable source of inspiration, but nevertheless observed all the progressive traditions of Romanian medicine.»

Several debates ensued, with eleven comrades taking the stage:

1. Seropian Ervan, head of department at the Medical Education Sector, who pleaded:

« He was the most knowledgeable, in both theory and in practice, and the most organized amongst the directors to whom I reported to at the Ministry of Health. He played a substantive role in maintaining the six-year structure of the Romanian medical studies (a decision which was taken during a board meeting of the Ministry of Education).»

2. Lungulescu M., a clerk in the Education Department, who said: «He was seen as very capable by all the department heads. He established very healthy and complementary relationships with the other departments. If the charge of espionage can be proven, he should get a well deserved punishment.»
3. Stanculescu, a clerk in the Human Resources Department, who added: «His crimes are no less grave than those described in the novel *The Volokolamsk Road*, where the villain crippled himself to escape the duty to fight for his own country. He deserves the maximum punishment.»
4. Leordeanu, Deputy Director in the Human Resources Department, who stated: «If the accusation of espionage in USSR is true, he must be punished then.»

5. Natalia Scurtu, Director of Social Services For Mother and Child ,who declared:
«During a business trip to Moscow in 1952 someone from the Soviet Ministry of Health inquired if I knew Comrade Kelemen. Since my answer was no, the person told me that Kelemen Andrei was a Romanian doctor sent to Moscow to study the Soviet medical education system. A great specialist, as well as an exceptional communist, he mentioned. I met Kelemen later on, after he was appointed Director in the Ministry of Health, and I was very impressed with his work ethic and style. For example, he always made a point to consult with various departments before introducing new initiatives, thus harmonizing the didactic process through specialized input. He was creative, and the press highlighted that in many instances.»
6. Lac, Secretary of Scientific Counsel in the Ministry of Health, who said : «I met Keleman during my visits to Targu Mures. As Secretary of Party Committee and Assistant Rector, he was honest and cooperative. Interestingly enough, during a dispute between the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Health, and although the

Scientific Counsel's President is an Academician, Comrade Kelemen was brought in as an expert by our Minister, and managed to win our cause.»

7. Zaharia, a clerk in the Human Resources Department, who stated : « We've received many written complaints about Kelemen's reactionary attitude.»
8. Tismaneanu, Human Resources Director in the Ministry of Health, who declared:« I've never been informed of such complaints. This is the first time I hear about it, and I doubt it's true.»
9. Bogdan Iosif, Minister Deputy in the Ministry of Health, who added: « I've met Comrade Kelemen Andrei at The Medical and Pharmacy College in Targu-Mures, as well as at the Party's regional headquarter in Mures County. He was well regarded in both places for his work and as a communist. He is one of the most educated and competent directors in the Ministry of Health. Here is a little story: The Ministry of Education initiated and introduced a decree that would affect all college teachers. Reading through the document, Comrade Kelemen realized that fifty percent of the teaching and scientific personnel would lose

their jobs, if applied. He immediately informed the Ministry of Health's Management, passing along the notification to the Party's Central Committee, as well, which responded by calling up a meeting with Comrade Roller, the head of ideology department, Comrade Muresan Adi, the head of political-administrative department of the Central Committee, several ministers and deputies from the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Health, and Dr. Kelemen. There he spoke concisely and convincingly; he presented the found errors and also the solutions to correct them. At the end of the meeting all the representatives were in agreement to summon the leadership of the Medical College Institutes, along with their heads of human resources and payroll departments. They all got instructed to follow the solutions drawn up by Comrade Kelemen Andrei, and thus all the unnecessary losses were eliminated. This is a vivid example of Comrade Kelemen's work ethic and style.»

10. Gafar Memet, head of the Human Resources Department – Nurses Section, who said: « I've learned a lot in terms of

leadership, issue management, collective work, and personal responsibility from Comrade Dr. Kelemen. He is a man of principle, fair, and not a bureaucrat.»

11. Oprisan Vasile, Director of Planning in the Ministry of Health, who declared:
«Comrade Dr. Kelemen is a broad-minded man, and an active, courageous communist with lots of initiatives. I've recognized these qualities while we were working together to come up with payment solutions for the nurse trainers employed in the nurse schools for girls, as well as with the adequate placement of the doctors coming from the Medical College Institutes. He always finished his projects successfully.»

The Vote.

After all statements were heard, the Party Secretary stood up, announcing the next item of the meeting's agenda:

«Comrades, let's vote!»

«Who is in favor of excluding Kelemen Andrei from the Party?»

A considerable number of members rose their hands.

«Thank you», said the Secretary and wrote down a figure.

-«And who's against it?»

An even bigger number of members rose their hands.

«Thank you, with 242 votes against 158 ,
Kelemen Andrei is excluded from the Party.»

At that moment, Comrade Petre Penciu, Director of Preventive Medicine in the Ministry of Health, stood up and proved that the voting wasn't done correctly, because there was no committee in charge of counting the votes:

« The Secretary has counted the votes adding to the total the room's pillars, as well.»

The Secretary answered him:

«What, you don't trust us? You just elected us a month ago.»

Comrade Oprisan replied :

«If we knew you are not going to follow the procedures from the Party's Statute we wouldn't have elected you!»

Then a group of members shouted from their seats:

«Follow the procedure, elect a committee to count the votes! »

Therefore a committee of five members was immediately elected. The poll was repeated, each

vote being counted one by one. The result was different this time: about 260 votes out of 400 were in favor of keeping Comrade Kelemen Andrei in the Party, while 140 members were against.

Then we heard the Secretary's final statement: «We will reopen Kelemen's case and discuss again the behavior of many other members of our party organization.»

Never again was my case reopened. However, the next day I handed to the Central Committee my own request for an investigation. That lasted ten months.

One day in June 1955, around 2 in the afternoon I got a phone call at home:

«Here is Duduman, the President of the Party College- Bucharest branch. I'd like to invite you to my office at 3pm.» Once arrived, his secretary saw me to his office nicely. Comrade Duduman handed me a document bearing the official heading of the Party's College, and there I read: “The investigation has proved that all accusations brought to Comrade Kelemen were false, and he is a worthy Communist.”

Comrade President Duduman congratulated me with a remark: « Continue the good work that you've done, and be true to yourself! »

P.S.

1. A week after that memorable Party meeting, Dr. Mitea wondered if he could pay me a visit at home.

«I am so ashamed that I was a tool in that horrible set-up», he confessed when I saw him.

«Your speech really shook me and proved that, although young, you've become a promoter for health assistance in Romania. This was also confirmed by the statements of multiple members from the Ministry's leadership. I've come here today to apologize and to thank you for the way you turned the tables around during the meeting: from a plot to a true Party lesson! »

I forgave him. Later on he became one of my closest colleagues.

2. Stanculescu, a dubious character who stole his own employment file, was excluded from the Party and from the Ministry of Health.