

## Emery (Imre) Farkas

### Miracle of October 27 – The Vác Prison Break

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On that day the dream of 1200 political prisoners held captive in the infamous Political Prison of Vác came true. I was serving the sixth year of my life imprisonment, which had been commuted from a death sentence for “anticommunist activities, Western connections and conspiracy and treason against the People’s Democracy and the Soviet Union.” Among the 1200 prisoners were about 500 with life sentences.

In the morning of October 24th the guards didn’t wake us at 6 AM as usual and later told us that the prison factory would not operate that day. The cell doors were locked all day. First we were happy that we didn’t have to work, but later we became suspicious. We felt that something was happening which would decide our future. In the evening of October 25th an ÁVO officer distributed cigarettes among the prisoners, saying “Men, everybody is entitled to one pack.” We couldn’t believe our ears – he called us “men.” After so many years of humiliation, torture and suffering, we were suddenly treated as human beings by our captors?

The next day we were allowed to walk in the prison yard. All the usually bloodless, pale faces were glowing with excitement. From snippets of overheard conversations we managed to put together that there was a revolution going on in Hungary! The people, in whose name Moscow’s lackeys committed all the atrocities, the people said “enough!” and revolted against the Communist regime.

We couldn’t sleep all night. Then came the morning of October the 27th. During the previous 3 days tremendous tension had been building up in all of us. We rushed to the windows and saw that the red star – symbol of the Soviet tyranny – had disappeared from the caps and uniforms of the guards. Instead they wore the red-white-green national colors.

We started to sing the National Anthem, and somebody recited the “Nemzeti Dal” by Petöfi. We reached the limit of our patience and shouted: Let’s break out! With our iron bedframes and every other possible means we hammered on the cell doors and succeeded in breaking them open. In 20 minutes everybody was out of the cells. We agreed that we would not harm the prison guards, regardless of how cruel they had been during the past years. Nobody touched them. We were proud that our liberation was free from vengeance and retaliation. We had to decide how to break out of the prison complex through 4 consecutive heavy iron gates leading to the main street of the town of Vác.

Some people suggested negotiating with the commander of the Security Police, but about 50 of us, the younger ones, insisted on going all the way. We were unsure how the armed Secret Police troops would act who guarded the prison from outside, but we took the risk. We started toward the iron gates and with the help of some friendly, non-ÁVO guards we broke open the last iron gate. Outside the gate several thousand people, the inhabitants of Vác, were waiting for us, crying and embracing us. The people, in whose name we were sentenced, were welcoming us. We sang the National Anthem again. Suddenly, in this emotional moment, shots of automatic weapons rang out. The crowd tried to disperse quickly but some fell already dead or wounded. The Secret Police, the ÁVO men were shooting at us from the roof of the prison building. We ran as fast as we could, still in our prison uniforms. As we ran through streets, backyards, over

fences, the people were throwing civilian clothes to us. An old man gave me his only top coat; children brought their parents' jackets. One of the most poignant scenes was when a little boy about 8 years old, ran to me and said :”I can’t give you anything else, but here, take my comb, you might need it!” In a few days, on October 30th I arrived to Budapest and after 5 & 1/2 years if confinement was finally reunited with my wife!

***Imre Farkas***

*Sentenced to death for anticommunist activities, Western connections and conspiracy and treason against the People’s Democracy and the Soviet Union, Imre Farkas arrived with his wife Lily to the United States on Christmas Eve, 1956. With a Rockefeller Foundation sponsorship he became a teaching fellow at Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts. He worked for W.R. Grace and Company as a chemical engineer, retiring in 1994 as Vice President. He was the President of the American Concrete Institute in 1986 and Chairman of the American Society of Testing Materials in 1992. Imre Farkas has lived with his wife Lily (see her submission), in Sarasota, Florida since 1994. Lily Elizabeth Farkas nee Tersztyánszky  
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