

# Yugoslavia Jails American for 7 Years After Secret Trial on Spying Charges

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Special to The New York Times

BELGRADE, Yugoslavia, Nov. 26—An American was arrested on espionage charges while visiting this country in July and was sentenced in a secret trial to seven years imprisonment.

Disclosure of the case by the man's family and American employer had been delayed until now, in hopes that diplomatic measures would secure his freedom. But such hopes appear to have evaporated.

Since the arrest of 43-year-old Laszlo Toth, a resident of Loveland, Colo., on July 31, American officials have been denied any access to him or even any specific information about his case.

The United States Ambassador to Yugoslavia, Laurence H. Silberman, told American correspondents here today that his many appeals and protests to senior Yugoslav Government officials had been rebuffed. He added:

"Obviously, among friends we do not talk about retaliatory steps. But it's obvious this will affect our relations."

Mr. Toth is laboratory manager of the Great Western Sugar Company of Loveland, the

largest processor of beet sugar in the United States.

Of Hungarian ethnic extraction, he is a native of the province of Vojvodina in northern Yugoslavia, and was a Yugoslav citizen until he was naturalized as an American in 1973. His wife is of Yugoslav birth and a naturalized American.

Yugoslavia apparently never granted Mr. Toth permission to renounce his Yugoslav citizenship, however, and he is thus still a Yugoslav citizen in Belgrade's eyes.

The few details known of his arrest were disclosed mostly by officials of the Great Western Sugar Company rather than by any Government officials.

Mr. Toth was making a visit to his native province in July and was arrested immediately after taking a photograph of the sugar refinery at Vrbas, where he had once been employed before emigrating to the United States.

The machinery in the plant itself was said to have been supplied by West Germany, and experts here say no sensitive or secret technology could have been involved.

The Yugoslav Government has limited its replies to all queries to a statement that Mr. Toth was sentenced under Article 105 of the penal code. The article is a general one covering all forms of espionage—political, military, economic or any other kind.

Yugoslav officials decline even to say when or where the trial took place, although it is known to have been in September and November, and that sentence was passed Nov. 6.

During the last two years—and particularly in recent months—Yugoslav secret police have apparently been given sweeping authority to make hundreds and perhaps thousands of arrests of persons suspected of any kind of political "hostile activity" or spying.

Recently many of these arrests have been of persons suspected of links with pro-Soviet Yugoslav émigrés living in the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia and other Communist countries.

But most arrests in the last few years have been of persons believed linked to anti-Communist or Croatian separatist groups living abroad. Such groups have been a great annoyance to Belgrade.

### Sentence Held Harsh

Mr. Toth is not known here to have been politically active.

His sentence has struck many persons here as extraordinarily harsh, even under the espionage laws. It is assumed that President Tito himself directed the secrecy and form of proceedings against Mr. Toth, as well as having barred American access to information about the case.

It therefore seems possible that President Tito's Govern-

ment is seeking some end other than merely the punishment of a suspected spy.

Yugoslavia is currently pressing the United States for assistance in developing its technology.

### State Department Comments

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WASHINGTON, Nov. 26—A State Department official familiar with the Toth case said today that the Ford Administration "takes it very seriously," in view of the lengthy prison sentence and the failure of Yugoslav authorities to list the charges or to provide consular access.

The official said, however, that, "you can hardly say bilateral relations will fall apart because of this case."