

Effects of an oppressive government in the bridge at andau



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Throughout the history of literature, there are several situations that can prove that the arrangement of political power does in fact impact the thoughts, feelings, and actions of the people being governed. In James Michener's novel *The Bridge at Andau*, the oppressive nature of the Hungarian politics, specifically the AVO, affects the citizens of Hungary by making them feel inferior, unsafe, and eventually leading to the Hungarians rebelling.

In Michener's novel, the Hungarian people are experiencing severe oppression by their government, specifically a group called the AVO, who set several rules and regulations that served to make the people of Hungary feel inferior in their own country. For example, the Pal family explained that they could barely feed themselves because " food was very expensive," but then stated that " communist books were cheap" (Michener 58), which demonstrates that the family felt inferior to their government leaders because the only things they could afford were the materials that the government was trying to force upon them. It was embarrassing for the father, who was trying to apply for jobs but unable to afford a suit, to have to go to a job interview in a windbreaker. There is no doubt that this treatment and organization of economics caused the Hungarians to feel inferior.

Another example is a story of a husband and wife in Hungary who were unable to shop in the stores that had cheaper products simply because they were Hungarian. The wife explained to her husband that " there was a very good store for Russians only,"(Michener 158) that had the best Hungarian products at up to 80% off. The wife finished by explaining that " when everything good has been used up by those stores... what's left is placed in

stores for us workers, and we pay the most expensive prices” (Michener 158). The husband and wife felt inferior due to their oppressive government because even the stores were segregated – the wealthy were given the cheap, high-quality items while those who were already poor were being forced to pay extreme prices for the items that were simply leftovers. This kind of treatment, especially from one’s own government, is more than enough to make anyone feel inferior.

Additionally, the Hungarians were affected by the oppression of the AVO because the methods of AVO rule made the people of Hungary feel very unsafe in their own country. Michener describes a man who was beat every day for 33 days by the AVO simply because the officers didn’t like that his suit looked “ American.” When asked if the AVO were allowed to hold him prisoner for 33 days simply because of the suit he was wearing, the man replied, “ They could have held me for 33 years” (Michener 138) which demonstrates how unsafe life was while under the control of the AVO. Innocent men were being thrown into prison and beat simply because the government didn’t like what they were wearing. If this act doesn’t make someone feel unsafe then what will? Another woman was seen to have a disformed hand. When asked what happened to it, she replied that the “ AVO broke it,” and that they smashed her fingers “ with a rubber hose” and burned two holes into the back of her hand with “ lighted cigarettes” (Michener 138) all because a distant friend had escaped across the border, which further proves how dangerous it was to live under AVO rule. The organization of the political power in Hungary was severely unfair to the

citizens and caused them to be victims of unnecessary violence such as that was committed against these innocent people.

Finally, the oppression of the AVO impacted the actions of the Hungarians, as the citizens eventually rebelled against their rulers. The Russians came to a point where they resorted to using tanks in the streets of Budapest to keep the citizens of Hungary under control. The Hungarians, however, had had enough of the AVO's torture, and "of every hundred Russian tanks...in the streets of Budapest, about 85 were destroyed by young people under the age of 21" (Michener 174), which demonstrates the power that existed within the rebellion. 85 percent of the AVO's tanks had been destroyed, and the fact that it was done mostly by teenagers is remarkable. This event proves that the horrible organization of government in Hungary had fueled a fire so strongly in Hungarian youth that they were able to attack – and succeed – against trained officers alone. Another incident that displays the rebellion against the Russians is when the Hungarians were under attack but carried no weapons. The citizens were forced to unite together, after which one man said, "You can stop a tank even if you have no guns. You do it with gasoline bombs" (Michener 41), and then continued by teaching the large group to all assemble these bombs until a large collection had been created. This represents a turning point in the rebellion – the Hungarians were uniting together against one single enemy, the AVO. Their torturous, murderous government had pushed them all to the point of rebellion, and the fact that the people united together to destroy it only proves the effect that a poorly managed political system has on a group of people.

Ultimately, the fact that the Hungarians felt inferior, unsafe, and eventually rebelled against their own government demonstrates that the management of political power is very important in determining the effect on the citizen's minds and actions.