

Én Apor Péter, teljes felelősségem tudatában kijelentem, hogy a benyújtott értekezés a szerzői jog nemzetközi normáinak tiszteletbentartásával készült. Jelen értekezést korábban más intézményben nem nyújtottam be és azt nem utasították el.

Apor Péter

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Introduction

1

The subject of this work is the labyrinthian history of the ways of evoking the First Hungarian Soviet Republic that subsisted precisely 133 days in the Spring and Summer of 1919. This particular historical event grew from a relatively isolated detail of the self-history of the Hungarian communist movement into the most highly praised national celebration between the years of the 30th and 40th anniversary, 1949 and 1959. These ten years, however, did not mark only the rapid accumulation of historical knowledge, but rather the radical break and re-formation of communist power in Hungary that was demanded by the challenge of the October revolution in 1956. The transformation of the historical appraisal of the first Hungarian commune was inseparable from the role 1919 played in the communist re-vision of 1956.

The First Hungarian Soviet Republic was proclaimed on 21 March 1919. Although the leaders of the 1919 communist system were recruited from different groups, the dominant company consisted of those Hungarian communists who had been in captivity in Russia and had become acquainted with Bolshevik ideas there. Their major figures were Béla Kun and Tibor Szamuely who are still remembered as Lenin's close and personal colleagues. Kun occupied the position of the commissar of foreign affairs in the Hungarian Soviet government and virtually became the leader of the Hungarian proletarian state. The Bolshevik educated Hungarians founded the Communist Party of Hungary which was joined by the group of revolutionary socialists that consisted of young social democrat renegades. The government of the Hungarian Soviet regime consisted of the Hungarian communists and a group of social democrats. The left-wing social democrats supported the idea of the dictatorship, whereas the right-wing socialists did so only half-heartedly. In spite of this the two workers' parties were formally unified on 21 March. The proletarian state had to face inner enemies as well as outer attacks. The Hungarian Red Army was at war from April until its last days in July 1919. The Hungarian Soviet Government resigned on 31 July and after a short transitional period a counterrevolutionary regime came into existence. The general standard textbooks and historical reference works usually described how Admiral Miklós Horthy had become Regent of the country for the next 25 years. These works

also included an analysis of the way Hungary had gradually joined the German-Italian alliance. Prime Minister Gyula Gömbös appreciated Mussolini's ideas on the organization of society during the first half of the thirties. The country went into war against the USSR on the side of Germany, nevertheless the Wehrmacht occupied its territory on 19 March 1944. In October of the same year the Regent and his close followers attempted to sign an armistice, however the German army prevented the coup. Hitler appointed Ferenc Szálasi the leader of the Hungarian fascist party, the Arrow-Cross Party, to be Prime Minister. Szálasi, however, could not rule the country for long since the Red Army expelled the Germans by mid-April 1945. Standard interpretations called attention to the fact that after a short democratic period the communist party took over in 1948. Its First Secretary was Mátyás Rákosi, a well-known figure of the international communist movement who had been also a commissar in 1919. He returned from the Soviet Union together with other Hungarian communists in exile like Imre Nagy, later Prime Minister during the revolution in 1956. Other communists remained in the country and organized the party illegally during the war. Their leading personalities were – among others – János Kádár who became General Secretary after 1956 and László Rajk who was the most well-known victim of the purges in 1949.¹

The history of 1919 became the crucial and decisive factor in transforming the anti-Stalinist insurrection in October 1956 into a genuine counter-revolution in communist terms. For communists the most shocking occurrence of 1956 was the siege of the Budapest party headquarters in Republic square where the insurgents mercilessly massacred the captured defenders. Communist interpreters found the essence of the event in this violence: for them the real purpose of the revolutionaries was to persecute

¹ There is only one recent comprehensive volume on the years of 1918-1929: Konrád Salamon, *Nemzeti önpusztítás 1918-1920* (Budapest, 2001). The book – in a somewhat apocalyptic manner – condemns contemporary politicians for not being able to found the democratic Hungarian republic. The history of the First Hungarian Soviet Republic appears an ephemeral episode, a futile, but bloody dictatorship that was supported incomprehensibly by leftist groups, but not the peasantry and the working class. There are numerous studies concerning these periods of modern Hungarian history. Primarily, I would call the attention to a recent book by a distinguished Hungarian historian: Ignác Romsics, *Hungary in the 20th Century* (Budapest, 1999). In English other readings in modern Hungarian history may be Rudolf L. Tökés, *Béla Kun and The Hungarian Soviet Republic* (New York – Washington – London, 1967) György Borsányi, *The Life of A Communist Revolutionary: Béla Kun* (Boulder – New Jersey, 1993) György Péteri, *The Effects of World War I: War Communism in Hungary* (New York, 1984) Thomas Sakmyster, *Hungary's Admiral On Horseback: Miklós Horthy, 1918-1944* (Boulder, 1994) Ignác Romsics, *Bethlen: A Great Conservative Statesman of Hungary, 1874-1946* (Boulder, 1995) *The Hungarian Revolution of 1956: Reform, Revolt and Repression 1953-1963*, ed.: György Litván (London – New York, 1996). Generally, the series of War and Society in Eastern Europe by Brooklyn College Press orientates the reader well in the history of these turbulent years.

and eliminate all the communists. For them the day of the siege, 30 October, stripped off the mask and showed the real face of counterrevolution: party leaders discovered that the radical right wing had directed the occurrences. Communists realized that these radicals had been present from the very beginning of the rebellion, in fact they had organized the movement and after the occupation of the party headquarters they openly called for the restoration of capitalist dictatorship and the extermination of the defenders of the communist regime.² The conclusion that the massacre of communists had to be interpreted as a sign of counterrevolution was confirmed by the fall of the First Hungarian Soviet Republic. Officers' commandoes who called themselves counter-revolutionaries and aimed at the restoration of the pre-1914 social and political system, persecuted, tortured and executed communists, leftist persons and Jews. For party leaders the two events were strikingly similar. In the communist perspective the revolution in 1956 was none other than but the second edition of the white terror in 1919, and October 1956 experienced the second coming of the counterrevolutionaries of 1919.

At least to the same extent as it could provide legitimacy for the communist rule, this historical construction aimed at the destruction of the party's adversaries: the participants and heirs of the revolution. The purpose of this particular narrative was to destroy the self-esteem and identity of the revolutionaries by proving that in reality they were not fighting for freedom, democracy, national pride or social justice, but only for the restoration of capitalist or fascist oppression and for killing communists and other decent people. Through this interpretation it was pronounced that the revolution was not the legacy of social democrats, liberals or national democrats, but exclusively that of the white terror. The practice of communist historians thereby adjusted itself to the long tradition of a peculiar historical genre: counterhistory writing. This mode of constructing histories has only one definite aim: to deprive the target group of its self-identity. The example of the ancient Egyptian author, Manetho elucidates well the practice. Manetho wrote the history of the Jewish people based upon its authentic source the Bible. Nonetheless, the author precisely inverted the statements of the Old Testament in order

² The basic book of this representation is Ervin Hollós – Vera Lajtai, *Köztársaság tér 1956* (Budapest, 1974) A standard communist interpretation of 1956 is János Berecz, *Ellenforradalom tollal es fegyverrel. 1956* (Budapest, 1969), although this book provides a somewhat different perspective and presents the revolution of 1956 as the manoeuvre of Western imperialism. English translation is *1956 Counter-Revolution in Hungary: Words and Weapons* (Budapest, 1986)

to prove that the Jews were not an ancient people with venerable institutions, but simply a herd of lepers who copied the institutions of Egypt.³

In these regards, the communist revision of 1956 was very similar to the practice that is called historical 'revisionism'. These 'revisionists' intend to re-interpret the history of the Nazi genocide and claim the discovery that there was no extermination at all. Their arguments are regularly based upon two ways of denial. Firstly, that the extermination would have been senseless to carry out since no one could have obtained material profit from the executions. Secondly, since there are no witnesses who experienced the gas chambers from the inside (as all of them died), evidence is doubtful. Therefore, these authors deny the fact of the genocide and the existence of gas chambers. They claim that the final solution meant only the expulsion of Jews from the east, that death happened in 'natural' ways in the camps and that the genocide was only the invention of Allied propaganda. These statements are definitely capable of the deprivation of a community of its memory. All these rhetorical and narrative strategies are directed to destroy the identity of Holocaust survivors: of Jews, Roma and all the other groups who were the victims of Nazi murderous practice.⁴

Nonetheless, there is a crucial difference between Holocaust deniers and communist attempts to describe the occurrences of October 1956. The publications of 'revisionists' are not based on any mode of factual re-writing: they are, in fact, a clear case of lie. These narratives lost all connection with reality or the real. '<Revisionism> represents no historical school, no type of historical discourse, but instead the pure and simple suppression of the historical object under study.'⁵ In contrast, communist interpreters of history put tremendous effort on building their representations upon the real remnants of the past.⁶ These narratives were born during the attempt to understand

³ Amos Funkenstein, 'History, Counterhistory, and Narrative' in *Probing the Limits of Representation*, ed.: Saul Friedlander (Cambridge, MA – London, 1992), pp. 66-81.

⁴ Pierre Vidal-Naquet, *Assassins of Memory* (New York, 1992) See also the following printout: Pierre Vidal-Naquet – Limor Yagil, *Holocaust Denial in France* (Tel Aviv, 1996) The Bar Ilan University published a bibliography of the literature that denies the Holocaust and also of its analyses: Rivkah Knoller, *Denial of the Holocaust* (Ramat Gan, 1992) A recent and profound comprehension of the topic is Deborah Lipstadt, *Denying the Holocaust* (New York, 1993). On the American case see also: Michael Shermer - Alex Grobman, *Denying History: Who Says the Holocaust Never Happened and Why Do They Say It?* (Berkely - Los Angeles - London, 2000) John C. Zimmerman, *Holocaust Denial: Demographics, Testimonies and Ideologies* (Lanham - New York - Oxford, 2000)

⁵ Pierre Vidal-Naquet, 'The Shoah's Challenge to History' in his *The Jews: History, Memory, and the Present* (New York, 1996), p. 146.

⁶ During the 1950s and 1960s communist historical practice was usually described as arbitrary construction based upon the transformation, invention and forging of facts according to the ever changing political aims of the party. Raymond L. Garthoff, 'The Stalinist Revision of History: The Case of Brest-Litovsk' in *World Politics* 5

the traces left behind by history. Whereas deniers of the Nazi genocide aspired to erase the existence of physical sources and, therefore, raised their interpretations over the deep hollowness of non-existence, communist descriptions of the past were constructed over real atrocities and corpses, actual persons and documents. To a certain extent, it is a more perilous way of distorting truth than 'historical revisionism'. Since communist historians in a purely formalistic point of view followed the genuine historical method of the selection of appropriate sources, construction of series of events and relationships among them, it was difficult to see what was going on. It was difficult to realize that the apparently true historical narrative concealed all contradictory sources without openly denying their existence. The party leadership caused the memory of the revolution to be forgotten without the aggressive denial of its happenings. Communist intellectuals could demonstrate the continuing struggle between the eternal forces of Revolution and Counterrevolution, between Communism and Anti-Communism throughout modern Hungarian history through the presentation of physical historical sources: dead bodies, living persons or textual and photographic records.

This is precisely the reason why this particular narrative could be successful. Whereas today nobody believes in the denial of the Holocaust except neo-Nazis and resolute anti-Semites, the presentation of modern history as a constant and exclusive struggle of Communism and anti-Communism is still an influential approach in historical studies. This straightforward unilinear history is still a mainstream form of representation of the history of communist regimes. According to this metanarrative modern history especially was shaped by the conflict between the well-organized conspirator group of the communist movement on the one hand and the organized or spontaneous groups of the society resisting communist oppression on the other hand.⁷ A characteristic although slightly extremist representative of this historiographical

(October 1952), pp. 66-85. Bertram D. Wolfe, 'Operation Rewrite: The Agony of Soviet Historians' in *Foreign Affairs* 31 (Winter 1952/1953), pp. 39-57. Alexander Dallin, 'Recent Soviet Historiography' in *Problems of Communism* 5 (November - December, 1956), pp. 24-30. This particular vision of communist history writing was born in the Cold War analyses of Stalinist practices, however the interpretive framework sustained itself until 1989. See Vladimir Petrov, 'The Nazi-Soviet Pact: A Missing Page in Soviet Historiography' in *Problems of Communism* 17 (January - February 1968), pp. 42-50. George M. Enteen, 'Problems of CPSU Historiography' in *Problems of Communism* 38 (September - October, 1989), pp. 72-80.

⁷ '... in practice, the only enemies are the vast majority of peoples of Eastern Europe and the men in the Kremlin who have the ultimate power over the survival of the Communist leaders of these countries.' Stephen Fischer-Galati, 'Introduction' in *The Communist Parties of Eastern-Europe*. ed.: Stephen Fischer-Galati (New York, 1979), p. 1. I owe a dept of gratitude to my friend Tamás Kende for this quotation. See also Willie Thompson, *The Communist Movement since 1945*. (Oxford, 1998) and, as an extreme example, Marcel van Hamersveld and Michiel Klinkhammer, *Messiaïnisme zonder mededogen* (Nieuwegein, 1998)

tendency is the brief volume of the two Dutch authors, van Hamersveld and Klinkhammer that is entitled *Merciless Messianism*. These two historians recognize a coherent continuity of communist aspirations for grabbing power. According to their general conception, they argue that Russian revolutionaries considered the revolt of October 1917 as the first phase in the process of global revolution. Starting from this point the Dutch authors attempt to prove that the Bolsheviks never abandoned the idea of ‘liberating the world’ from here onwards. What is more, the party formed a rigidly ruled conspirator group that on the one hand consciously applied the tools of governance and diplomacy, and on the other hand employed foreign agents to achieve its well-defined goals. Thus, the civil war in Russia is interpreted as that which was prepared by the Bolshevik Party itself and was nothing more than a communist means to eliminate all political adversaries in order to create the one-party tyranny. Similarly, the New Economic Policy is conceived by van Hamersveld and Klinkhammer as part of the communist tactic to rule the population: according to the authors the Bolshevik plan consisted of periods of brutal terrorist oppression and pauses of provisional rest. Subsequently, in the 1920s and 1930s Soviet diplomacy aimed at the destruction of the rapprochement between Germany and the Allied Powers that eventually led to Hitler’s take-over and the new World War, as the two historians state. Firstly, the Soviet Union undermined the conference in Genoa in 1922, then ruined the emerging anti-Nazi alliance of German communists and social democrats that contributed to the smooth victory of the NSDAP. The Dutch scholars regard these operations as the conscious maneuvers for provoking a devastating armed conflict in Europe that was the only pre-condition for disseminating Soviet power in the continent.

2

In the spring of 1969 the five part radio play, the ‘March of Fire’ was broadcasted weekly on the Hungarian radio with the final program on 21 March, the fiftieth anniversary of the proclamation of the First Hungarian Soviet Republic in 1919.⁸ The drama first of all could be read or listened to as a fictitious evolution of morals. The story takes place in a girls’ grammar-school in Budapest, its characters are from one class and the story involves one academic year, 1918/1919. The pupils are in their

penultimate class before the final exams and the story starts a few weeks before the October revolution in 1918. The main character is Ági who derives from a middle-class family and is the best pupil among the girls. The core of the plot is simply the way her inherent honesty is developing into the true belief in the communist ideas through various personal experiences and external influences. In the first part she is simply a warm-hearted and compassionate girl who is longing to assist her classmates in their studies. She is willing to help them to complete various school tests illegally, but it is explained to her socialist teacher that the proper way to help is by teaching them. That is Ági's first lesson. The second one comes through her friendship with Magdi who also originates from a middle-class family, but her family legacy is radical, enlightened and modern thinking. This girl is a fan of Endre Ady, the great radical progressive poet of fin-de-siècle Hungary. The next stage in Ági's moral development arrives when she starts to teach Olgi, daughter of a working-class family. Ági does not understand why her parents object to the workers and heatedly takes the side of their friendship, 'If they were educated they would not become rabble'. The turning point in Ági's moral development is her confrontation with the double morality of her bourgeois family. The young girl has a furious quarrel with her mother when she feels that the woman judges the same personal failure according to two scales. Her mother despises the caretaker for his occasional drunkenness, but overlooks the same behavior by the son of a neighboring gentry family. Then Ági breaks out in tears, 'It is awful, this injustice! Yesterday a small boy...he was twelve years old...committed suicide because he was sent home from school...since he could not pay his tuition.' Ági's inherent and honest desire to help her fellow human beings logically leads her in the drama towards social sensitivity and solidarity with the poor. The victory of the October 1918 revolution permits the young schoolgirl to learn about socialism: the regime created political democracy, hence Ági can attend the meetings of young workers where she gets acquainted with a smart communist youngster, János. The situation in the grammar school sharpens: Ági's more and more improved morality gets into fiercer and fiercer conflict with the still unjust administrative system. She is even threatened by serious sanctions. According to the inner logic of the play the sole resolution of this tense situation can only be the victory of morality: in this case the proclamation of the Soviet Republic. Ági is exempted from punishment and can identify herself wholeheartedly

⁸ The verbal transcript of the text of the play is situated in MRA.

with the new regime, 'There will be no more hungry children and hungry men!' Ági's identification with the communist ideal ends with love for János, the young communist worker. However this occurs only at the very moment when the boy announces that he is going to the battlefield to defend the power of the workers.

On the first level the play intended to persuade the reader or listener that the full realization of morality could only be accomplished in communism and the road of all decent people eventually had to lead necessarily towards faith in communist ideas. However, in my contention, there is a subtext in the drama as well, and this is about historical continuity. As Ági reaches the communist faith through the experiences of the revolution in 1918 so the October republic prepares the fulfillment of the Soviet Republic in the next March. The main character develops according to the theory of the stages of revolution and achieves her full personality within the communist regime.

The drama ends with a scene on the fall of the dictatorship. The play describes the end of the dictatorship of the proletariat and the devastation of all morality and honest intentions. Teachers playing a positive role in the drama are fired; sympathetic characters among the schoolgirls are afraid of commencing the final class and in the background news is coming about the merciless white terror. The first light breaks through this dense gloomy fog when news comes from János telling that he is in Vienna and is preparing to return home. Ági gets enthusiastic and is willing to get involved in the illegal movement immediately. However she is unable: she cannot leave their home and her mother keeps her under constant surveillance. The communist youngster who carried the news ends the discussion, 'But...you have to rescue yourself from here! It is a prison!' Ági replies, 'I will. As soon as János comes home!' Without too much symbolic interpretation it is still obvious that János is the communist in exile, whereas Ági is Progress in prison. From the perspective of 1969 the 'return of communists' meant 1945 when the party began its open activity again and within four years re-shaped Hungary into a socialist country. Thereby the final words of the play connected the Soviet Republic in 1919 to the post World War II communist regime. By the means of these parallel constructions of continuity the drama conveyed a full-scope interpretation of modern Hungarian history which is motivated by the efforts of communists to change the social and political system and the obstruction of those who cannot or do not want to understand their purpose. This specific historical continuity divides society into two

counterconcepts, those of communism and anti-Communism, and thereby forms a rigid monophonic interpretation that is based on a strictly defined dichotomy.

On the one hand, since it indicated the trajectory of history back and forth, the story of the First Hungarian Soviet Republic obtained a special significance and occupied a central position in communist historical consciousness. On the other hand, the importance of the first Hungarian Soviet regime for the construction of historical continuity lifted the democratic regime of October 1918 into the communist course of modern Hungarian history. It was considered a preparatory phase or a pre-history of the genuine realization of the revolution. The widow of the Prime Minister of the Hungarian democratic government, count Mihály Károlyi visited the country with the agreement of the communist leadership in the beginning of 1961.⁹ Mrs. Károlyi's intention was also to begin negotiations with the communist authorities upon a possible re-burial of her husband who was buried in the United Kingdom. At the end of November the British officials granted permission to exhume and transport the ashes of the late Prime Minister.¹⁰ The remains were reburied in Budapest on 18 March 1962. In the preceding half year, however, Károlyi's figure went through an odd metamorphosis: the first justifications for his reburial stressed the honesty of the 'radical democrat politician', while just before the ceremony the newspapers spoke about the 'faithful son of socialist Hungary'.¹¹ The communist state thus rehabilitated Károlyi. Their intention was not, however, to pay respect to his democratic ideals, but rather to testify to the continuity of revolution which determined the communist historical consciousness in Hungary after 1956. The plan for celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of both the revolution in 1918 and the soviet system in 1919 that was written in September 1967 spoke already about the revolutions of 1918-19 and called for the celebration of the events as one single unity. Communist leaders regarded them as one single historical process or occurrence that began on 30 October 1918 and culminated on 21 March 1919.¹² Later on these were ordinarily mentioned as the revolutions of 1918-19 and the historical accounts dealing with the First Hungarian Soviet Republic started with the story of the 'bourgeois democratic revolution'.

⁹ MOL 288/7/98

¹⁰ MOL 288/5/252

¹¹ Balázs Varga, 'Károlyi Mihály újratemetése' in *Sic Itur Ad Astra* 4 (Vol. 2-4 1993), pp. 43-56.

¹² MOL 288/41/83

According to its outstanding position the memory of 1919 was tangibly present in the Hungarian society of the 1960s and 1970s. In 1969 a gigantic monument commemorating the first communist state was erected in the boulevard that received the huge mass rallies of the regime on 1 May and sometimes other outstanding occasions. The favorite walking site of Budapest's inhabitants, the Margaret Island (*Margitsziget*) was inseparable from the story and image of its opening for the proletarian children in 1919. The island previously had been a private property of Archduke Joseph Hapsburg (*József főherceg*). The children's pioneer camps around Lake Balaton and the summer holidays in that resort in general evoked also the state funded camps of proletarian children in 1919. Most of the Hungarians knew the story of the glorious battle of the Red Army around Miskolc and Kassa-Kosice. Armored trains that were the glorified weapons of the Hungarian Red Army stood at railway-stations in various cities like Miskolc or Püspökladány. The author of this work himself was a Red Guard on 21 March once in a school celebration. It is often presumed, based on memories like these, that the Soviet Republic was celebrated in the same manner during the whole period of communist rule. 'Elevating, glorious one hundred and thirty-three days - we learnt this in school for forty years.',¹³ as a journalist put it in 1990 in one of Hungary's leading newspapers. Another one supposed the homogeneity of commemoration when it concluded that popular memory was reluctant to preserve the Soviet Republic in spite of 'remembering the free entrance to Margaret Island, the proletarian children's summer holiday at Lake Balaton. Or even <the patriotic battle of Kassa and Miskolc>'.¹⁴

It is important to notice that the extraordinary central position of the 1919 communist system in historical continuity was predominantly a phenomenon of the period after 1956. In fact, the event of the First Hungarian Soviet Republic did not play any significant role in the construction of the historical process that was crystallized around the connection of 1848, the democratic revolution, and 1948, the foundation of the people's democracy. Although the thirtieth and thirty-fifth anniversary of its proclamation in 1949 and 1954, respectively, were commemorated, these celebrations were rather remained inner festivities of the communist party in contrast with the national scope prevailed later. Although in retrospection the number of articles seems to be high, in the contemporary context these appear to short notes lost in the overall

¹³ György Pilhál, 'Ha' (If), *Magyar Hírlap* (21 March, 1990), p. 3.

content of newspapers. In this perspective the high respect of the first proletarian system seems rather a new development after 1956. Narrative representation of the history of the First Hungarian Soviet Republic took very different ways before and after the revolution in 1956 within the two slightly dissimilar communist regimes. Whereas between 1957 and 1962 twenty-four monographs and collective volumes were issued on various aspects of the dictatorship of the proletariat in 1919, in the two years longer period between 1949 and 1956 only eight volumes appeared within this field. Nevertheless virtually none of them could be regarded a proper overall historical narrative based on laborious archival research. Two of the publications were simply printed versions of public lectures by party leaders, one of them was an illustrated album, four books were devoted only to particular details of the first communist regime, while the last one contained studies grounded mainly on personal memories of the authors. In comparison with the pre-1956 years a genuine scholarly boom occurred around the First Hungarian Soviet Republic after 1956. Apart from the twenty-four professional publications, first of all a few memoirs and novels concerning the history of 1919 were re-published. These works were printed previously in exile, but some of them never in Hungary. Then the publication of documents, which always inevitably signifies the increasing professional interest in a certain segment of the past, was begun. Eleven compilations consisted of original records were issued. The research on local history also livened up and different articles and studies concerning various minor or major details of the dictatorship of the proletariat flooded the professional journals. In 1964 communist historiography was already capable to summarize the results of these research works and to collect a bibliography to foster further scholarship.¹⁵ Communists interpreted this fact as the sign of the improvement of the regime: they claimed that after de-Stalinization and getting rid of the nefarious personality cult previous obstructions that stood in front of disclosing the truth were averted. This interpretation, that survived the collapse of communist systems in 1989, remained on the level of direct political and party interest and, thereby, claimed that Béla Kun's death during the Stalinist purges in the Comintern had prevented the construction of an overall profound representation on the dictatorship of the proletariat. In spite of the fact, that the silence on Kun and the

¹⁴ László N. Sándor, 'Nincs ünnep Magyarországon' (There Is No Celebration in Hungary), *Magyar Hírlap* (21 March, 1991)

¹⁵ András Siklós, *Az 1918-1919. évi magyarországi forradalmak* (The revolutions in Hungary in the years 1918-1919) (Budapest, 1964). All my bibliographical details come from this volume pp. 177-90.

related Soviet expectations hindered a consistent interpretation of the history of the First Soviet Republic as part of the continuity of national history, his re-assessment, which happened in February 1956, did not result in the revision of his former communist regime.¹⁶

The memory of the First Hungarian Soviet Republic before 1956 was adjusted to a structure of historical time different from the dominant modern temporal conceptions. The first chapter demonstrates that in the representation of the first Hungarian commune those aspects came to the fore that amplified the presence of recurrent elements in history. 1919 was considered the pre-figuration or prelude of the latter communist regime rather than its origin. Whereas the accounts born after 1956 took the shape of a serial story: its various parts were linked together by the continuous succession of endings that immediately constructed the beginning of the next chapter in advance. In contrast, the relationship among the earlier narratives was constructed in a way similar to those series in which very different adventures occur with the same agents, but apart from that they have no other connection. The classic propaganda movie titled the Day of the Hungarian People's Army that was shot for screening for the army in 1951 reflected the mode of looking for analogies in the past. This film was only partly connected to the memory of the First Hungarian Soviet Republic. The occasion of its production was when 29 September, the anniversary of the day when the Hungarian army had won its first battle during the revolution of 1848, became the official festivity day of the communist army. The directors first of all capitalized on this connection to construct a historical succession. The movie starts with a picture showing a soldier of the new communist army in the foreground whereas in the background, somewhat blurred, a soldier of the army in 1848 was situated. After a scene of the battle that was depicted by contemporary paintings, the proclamation of the First Hungarian Soviet Republic was represented by old documentaries. These pictures were followed by showing the Soviet artillery firing during the siege of Budapest in 1944. The Soviet victory was interpreted as a turning point in Hungarian history: the short representation of modern Hungarian history was finished by a picture with a monument dedicated to the liberating Soviet

¹⁶ See for example Miklós Szabó, 'A fegyverek kritikája', *Beszélő* 4 (March, 1999), pp. 50-54. In addition some comments which I received to my presentation on the commemoration of the First Hungarian Soviet Republic in communist Hungary concerned whether I knew that Béla Kun's death had caused problems for interpreting the first proletarian state. (My paper was prepared for the annual conference of the István Hajnal Circle. The section was devoted to the concept of collective memory. The conference was held in Miskolc, 27-28 August, 1999.)

army meanwhile the narrator explained that this event provided the Hungarian nation with the opportunity to realize the best aspirations of the Hungarian past. The following scenes rendered it obvious what should have been understood under this term: while the narrator was speaking about the party and its First Secretary constructing socialism, pictures could be seen on the reconstruction of the railway symbolized by a pioneer railwayboy, on the building of factories and housing estates, on harvest, on children in a playground or in the fun-fair. In spite of the prompting of historical origins, it was stated clearly that the purpose of the evocation of the scenes from the past was not to demonstrate that the present is simply a successor of traditions in a way. Representing the past acquired its significance from the fact that it contributed to execute the appropriate actions in the present. The present that saw clearly its duties used the past in order to cope with them. The scene that followed the picture of children showed the First Secretary who stated that the moment of the eventual liberation meant the time to go back to traditions. Then passing out of army officers could be seen together with the narrator pronouncing that 29 September was deserved the right to inspire for the defense of socialism. The next scene depicted soldiers constructing a road. The accompanied statement instructed the audience that 29 September was a source for everyday struggles in the present. The scene then shifted and a speaker could be seen who called the audience for simultaneously learning about the past and understand the duties of the present. He appreciated memory since it obliges to stand ground like Petőfi (the poet of the revolution in 1848) and to feel a burning hatred against the enemies of the people like the army in 1848.¹⁷

The study does not understand continuity as the exclusive means to connect the past to the present. In my perspective, it rather forms a special relationship of origin between two or more phenomena in time: past and present. Continuity is not used merely to denote connections between past and present, but it is applied in a more rigid manner. The concept refers only to those relationships of past and present where the present is conceived to be the direct consequence, thus successor of the past. Linearity and repetitiveness are both constant aspects of the perception of historical time, albeit from the Enlightenment the notion of lineage began to rule descriptions of the past.¹⁸ Friedrich Schiller might provide a classical definition of human history according to the

¹⁷ HL 105

¹⁸ Reinhart Koselleck, 'Zeitschichten' in his *Zeitschichten: Studien zur Historik* (Frankfurt a M, 2000), pp. 1-20.

general views of the eighteenth century in his address in Jena in 1789. The philosopher pronounced that historiography had to be universal in order to reveal those significant occurrences that had contributed to human progress. Schiller, thereby, demanded to formulate one single narrative from the diverse events of the past.¹⁹ His claim meant that history was understood as a continuous process from a certain point of time towards another one. A relation of lineage and origin connected the different historical phenomena to each other. This particular concept of history was derived from the demand of Enlightenment historians to figure out the meaning in history: Authors from Voltaire to Condorcet constantly criticized the enumeration of pure meaningless data and preferred to describe only those that appropriately reflected the essence of historical process. Regularly, they found it in Providence or the Laws of Nature. By the end of the eighteenth century the theory of progress became dominant and kept its primacy throughout the nineteenth century.²⁰

The purpose of the theses is to map out the genesis of the representation of this specific historical continuity. The forthcoming chapters analyze the genesis of the connection of 1919 and 1956 and the transformations of the depiction of the First Hungarian Soviet Republic according to this relationship. The work demonstrates that the coming into existence of this particular historical construction was embedded in an attempt to appraise the traces what the past had left behind. The focal question of these constructions of continuity was distance.²¹ The problem of history producers was how to bring abstract historical interpretations closer to the audience. Their concern was how to make these narratives tangible, authentic and convincing enough to persuade the observer to give up his or her critical distance. The work identifies four possible techniques of closing the distance: through claiming the physical identity of abstract ideas, by presenting real individual lives, by the organization of corpses and, as the historical method proper, through the selection and ordering of historical sources.

Thus, the second chapter investigates the emerging historical connection between the ‘counterrevolutions’ of 1919 and 1956 and its relationship with the effort to

¹⁹ Odo Marquard, ‘Universalgeschichte und Multiversalgeschichte’ in his *Apologie des Zufälligen* (Stuttgart, 1986), p. 56.

²⁰ A good comprehensive volume on Enlightenment historical writing is Olga Penke, *Filozofikus világtörténetek és történetfilozófiák* (Budapest, 2000), pp. 98-107.

²¹ On the social consequences of distance see Carlo Ginzburg, ‘Killing a Chines Mandarin: The Moral Implications of Distance’ in *Critical Inquiry* 21 (Autumn 1994), pp. 46-60. See also his ‘Making it Strange: The Pre-History of a Literary Device’ in his *Wooden Eye: Nine Reflections on Distance* (London - New York, 2002),

understand physical violence. It examines the attempts of the party historians to probe authenticating their historical abstraction through various historical, mostly visual, records: photography, exhibition or personal presence in the courtroom. During this venture communist historians established a thorough-going continuity of the counterrevolution from its alleged genesis in 1919-1920, proved its constant existence by evoking the Arrow Cross terror in 1944 and linked these historical events to the revolt in 1956. In this way, Kádár's propaganda historians renewed the thesis on the continuity of the counterrevolution between 1919 and 1944, which they could try to render credible and factual-like by evoking the historical records of the postwar trials of former war criminals. The third chapter, thus, is a flashback to point out this important aspect of the genesis of the analyzed historical continuity. These legal procedures staged real persons whose actual lives demonstrated the continuity of counterrevolution from 1919 until 1944, the German occupation and the takeover of the Hungarian fascist movement. The fourth section provides an analysis of the most monumental commemorative construction of the communist era, that of the Pantheon of the Labor Movement. The memorial itself constructed a peculiar representation of history similar to the medieval notion of the mystical body that played a crucial role in the self-construction of the party. Thereby the comprehension of historical continuity was crystallized around concrete material corpses. The Pantheon, which was inaugurated on 21 March 1959, on the 40th anniversary of the First Hungarian Soviet Republic, revealed an overall, so far hidden, connection among the tombs of the cemetery for the communist observers. The party leaders recognized the existence of the continuity of the struggle between revolution and counterrevolution throughout modern Hungarian history, between the end of the 18th century and the middle of the 20th. Hence, 1959 meant the culmination of this peculiar process of re-interpreting contemporary history. The final chapter closes the investigation with a profound examination of the characteristics of communist historiography in order to establish its generic tradition as well as its foundation upon and relationship with real records. Historical writings in general – proper scholarship, fiction and documentary fiction – produced during the following years, between 1959 and roughly 1965, remained deeply embedded in the tradition that had been already shaped by the 40th anniversary.

Subsequent transformation started to take place after 1966, the 10th anniversary of the counterrevolution, boosted by the 50th anniversary of the First Hungarian Soviet Republic in 1969 and culminated in the birth of the Revolutionary Youth Days (*Forradalmi Ifjúsági Napok, FIN*). The crucial aspect of these changes was related to the virtual disappearance of the memory of 1956 from Hungarian society in general and the party's disinterest in keeping its presence visible in public discourse. The First Hungarian Soviet Republic, thus, functioned as a replacement of the discourse on the 'counterrevolution' and a means of the mutual forgetting of 1956. Its story, however, remains outside the scope of this study that seeks to understand the history of the elevation of the First Hungarian Soviet Republic that occurred between 1949 and 1959.

3

The production of historical knowledge was closely related to contemporary constellation of political power. Apparently, both communist systems intended to institutionalize historical production to the extent that it would generate interpretations appropriate for the purposes of power. The re-arrangement of the structure of historical education and scholarship began in the autumn of 1948 after the foundation of the new party monolith: the Hungarian Workers' Party in June. Formerly, the years after 1945 experienced a plurality of historical approaches from German influenced *Geistesgeschichte* through social history until the recently appeared Marxist thoughts at universities. Beginning in 1948, however, the communist party aspired to control and centralize the field of science. The purpose of the new power centre was to form a system of dependence based on well organized lines of clients and patrons. Its first measure was the re-arrangement of the highest management of science. The old Academy of Science that was an autonomous institution could not be simply appropriated for party purposes since formally Hungary was governed by a party-coalition. Therefore, communist leaders decided to found a new organ, the Hungarian Council of Science that was designed to conduct all aspects of scholarship in the country. The Council practically acted like a formal ministry of science. The new institution had a direct communist control: an organ of the party executed administrative issues. The Council of Science began to re-organize the structure of historical discipline from spring 1949. First of all, a lot of formerly established professors lost their positions

or were forced to retire. The leadership of the Historical Society was replaced in March 1949. The new president became one of the main Stalinist hard-liners who dominated the discipline until 1956. The membership of the Society was selected to form a decisive communist majority. Although non-Marxist historians of the older generations were also included, it was completed by many young, though talented Marxist scholars. The crucial leading positions, nevertheless, were occupied by ideologically oriented party bureaucrats. The Academy of Sciences maintained the membership of 102 persons of the altogether 260 old members. From 1949 onwards higher education became part of the centralized planning, as well. All aspects of university and college life were directed by the ministry of education – although under various names. The competent party centers determined goals and means for these institutions. In 1950 special Departments of Marxism-Leninism were formed at all universities, whereas 175 new textbooks were published which were partly translations of Soviet works. Higher education was extensively formalized: standard requirements were set up which had to be examined in all institutions and by all professors.²² Although after 1956 the institutional system did not change significantly, several crucial figures of the previous regime were fired and new ones closer to the current leadership were appointed. For instance, the director of the Institute for Party History, who had a crucial role in the construction of the history of the First Hungarian Soviet Republic among others in the 1950s, was criticized and subsequently replaced. Apart from that, the faculties of certain universities were slightly changed because of their involvement in the October revolution.²³

The initiation of politics into the world of academia was not a unique feature of communist power. The realization of the relationship between politics and historiography is almost contemporaneous with the formation of historical profession itself. Leopold von Ranke himself had already expressed his disappointment in 1836 about that historical knowledge had not contributed to a better understanding and

²² Tibor Huszár, *A hatalom rejtett dimenziói* (Budapest, 1995), esp. pp. 38-44., 50-6., 85-93., 294-5. Romsics, *Hungary in the 20th Century*, p. 360., Ferenc Glatz, 'Hajnal István történetírása' in István Hajnal, *Technika, művelődés* (Budapest, 1993), p. XVIII. On the Academy of Science see also János Pótó, 'Harmadik nekifutásra', *Történelmi Szemle* 36 (Spring – Summer, 1994), pp. 79-110. and György Péteri, 'Születésnap ajándék Sztálinnak', *Századvég* 1 (1989), pp. 18-35. On the replacement of scientific elite Judit Bíró – Mária Székelyi, 'A tudomány újjáépítése, 1945-1950', *Szociológiai Szemle* (Autumn – Winter, 1996), pp. 81-104. The details of the following book are also useful, although it was written from a late socialist perspective. Andor Ladányi, *Felsőoktatási politika 1949-1958* (Budapest, 1986), pp. 18-163.

²³ Ladányi, *Felsőoktatási politika*, pp. 164-217.

management of political power.²⁴ Later on German imperial politics continually aspired to employ those scholars in academic positions who would not threaten political consensus. Appointments to the University of Berlin were strongly dependent of the approval of the Prussian Ministry of Education throughout the second half of the nineteenth century. It required first of all loyalty to the House of Hohenzollern and, secondly, acceptable political standpoint. Although it was relatively broad, it was not limitless: membership in certain parties like Socialist or Catholic Centre was not accepted. According to this informal demand Berlin historians at the end of the nineteenth century ordinarily did not engage themselves directly with political parties. The selection of the faculty occasionally could be influenced by higher political figures, as well. Since the Berlin University was counted as one of the most prestigious academic institutions in unified Germany, appointed professors were frequently willing to make concessions in their scholarly work in return for a post.²⁵ Similarly, in the French Third Republic very close relationship was built among the elites of historians and politicians. The republicans recognized the use of historical knowledge in their fight against conservatives and sought for weakening the bondage of the scholarship to conservative institutions. Therefore, the state founded numerous professorships throughout the country that were supervised by the government. The doctoral defense also served as a mean to prove the superiority of the republic: the public ceremony ordinarily demonstrated the high quality of 'objective' and 'independent' scholarship in contrast with the inferior achievements of clerical candidates, first of all. This dependence of republican historical research on the republican state, however, paradoxically contributed to the independence of the discipline and not only in financial terms. In order to secure the benevolence of the professors the government had to respect their demand for professional independence. This fact resulted in the starting moment of the professionalization of French historical discipline.²⁶

The phenomenon of the coincidence of politics and history was attempted to interpret in various ways. Historical research ordinarily considered the relationship of historiography and politics on the level of personal interest and career. The collective volume *Historians in Politics* that was published in 1974, for instance, examined the

²⁴ *Historians in Politics*, eds.: Walter Laqueur and George L. Mosse (London – Beverly Hills, 1974), p. 1.

²⁵ Charles E. McClelland, 'Berlin Historians and German Politics' in *Historians in Politics*, pp. 191-7.

²⁶ Gérard Noiriel, *A történelem „válságáról”* (Budapest, 2001), pp. 241-6, 274-7. Original French edition: *Sur la „crise” de l’histoire* (Paris, 1996)

role of professionals in everyday political struggles, their ideas and commitments when entering the complicated world of governance. In this book the fields of history and politics was represented separately, though not in isolation, and those were in contact with each other exclusively through the coincidence of personal interest.²⁷

The German originated philosopher of politics, Hannah Arendt, elaborated a remarkably dissimilar approach. The German scholar believed in the fundamental relationship of modern historical science and political thought. In her contention modern history expounds political ideas, which is an unfortunate blurring of the two discursive modes and must be diminished. Arendt expressed her deep uneasiness because of the full absorption of political theories into historical consciousness that, according to her, led to the condition of that 'pure political thinking' which permitted the pragmatic conception of human social affairs ceased to exist. The German political scientist argued for that from the middle of the nineteenth century onwards problems of human co-existence, re-structuring of society and politics or coping with unfair industrial and social organization could have been considered in terms of history. Contrary to the ancient Greeks, who perceived issues of the *polis* counter to that of nature and thereby were able to form independent political thought, modernity projected general questions of politics into the process of history which should have contributed to a desirable or anxious re-formation of human society. Consequently, as Arendt called attention to that, political opinions had taken shape in the convictions of the direction of human history. Hannah Arendt, thus, experienced the politicization of historical consciousness as one of the principal losses of modernity.²⁸

Hayden White, on the contrary, perceives the coincidence of political values and historical research rather an achievement. Although he agrees with Arendt in that history and politics deeply permeated each other during the nineteenth century, the philosopher of history argues that this phenomenon was the unavoidable precondition of the transformation of historiography into a professional discipline. The American scholar explains the process of professionalization in historical studies in the second half of the nineteenth century. White argues that before that epistemological moment multiply theories or philosophies of history existed and competed with each other. During the institutionalization of historical knowledge those variants that were considered utopian

²⁷ *Historians in Politics* in general

²⁸ Hannah Arendt, 'The Concept of History' in her *Between Past and Future* (New York, 1968), pp. 41-90.

were excluded from the professional workshops of history like universities and research organizations. According to White it meant nothing more but the elevation of one specific variant of historical thought onto the level of realism. A realist historical interpretation began to be regarded a text in where the historian occupied a position beyond his or her writing and above the events concerned. The historian observed the world from a peaceful Olympian status and could discover Beauty in each aspect of the past to a certain degree. Nevertheless, this was the result of a genuine political conflict, says White. Since visionary politics was driven out from mainstream European intellectual tendencies utopian interpretations of the past obtained unrealistic status. History that described the world as meaningfully structured, namely beautiful, confirmed the position of the politics of Reason as ultimately realistic. Hayden White concludes that the politicization of history was an inevitable requirement for constructing genuine interpretations of the past. In the American scholar's contention, interpretative activity in general builds a strong connection towards political authority. This statement does not refer to the possibility of direct invitation of politicians or parties to decide or confirm certain scientific achievements. It reflects the practice or temptation to employ power and authority to establish the status of a given interpretation. According to White, scholars occasionally turn towards political authority to solve the debates of interpretation. Albeit, usually scientists suppress or sublime the urge for using power directly, there might be situations when techniques of 'pure' interpretation cannot cope with a scientific discussion.²⁹

²⁹ Hayden White, 'The Politics of Historical Interpretation: Discipline and De-Sublimation' in his *The Content of the Form* (Baltimore, 1987), pp. 58-83.

According to White, Robert Braun examined the famous Bitburg-case as the example of dissolving conflicts of interpretation by the help of political authority. Bitburg is a small town in former West Germany that has a military cemetery including not solely German regulars, but also members of the Waffen-SS. In spite of this fact and public protests, U. S. President Ronald Reagan and German Chancellor Helmut Kohl visited the site officially together on 5 May 1985. The Hungarian historian calls the attention to the fact that the commemorative ceremony provided a perfect mean for the politicians to apply authority in order to opt for a well-defined interpretation. The 1980s in Germany experienced the rupture between official historical representation that focused on reparation instead of punishment and collective memory that, on the contrary, asked for the acts of predecessor generations, writes Braun. The two leading politicians conceived the ritual an opportunity for decreasing the distance between the two and for creating a new interpretation based upon the putatively common shared democratic values of the Western world. The commemorative ceremony aimed at the clear separation of Wehrmacht soldiers from their Waffen-SS counterparts in order to pronounce that whereas the SS committed the Nazi crimes, the ordinary German soldier was the victim of Hitler's regime to the same extent as the American G. I. Thereby, the rite intended to rescue the younger generation from the burden of the past and to bind the present of Germany to that of the Western democratic world. Róbert Braun, *Holocaust, elbeszélés, történelem* (Budapest, 1995), pp. 55-113. A summary in English: Robert Braun, 'The Holocaust and Problems of Historical Representation' in *History & Theory* 33 (May 1994), pp. 172-194.

However, the transformation of the image of history cannot be followed satisfactorily through a mere and strict examination of professional historiography and its connection to the political center. The conception of modern Hungarian history was formed often by other kind of public activity like construction of memorials, commemoration festivals and other types of representation like historical movies and documentary images. These were both affected by and had an impact on professional historical constructions.³⁰ This fact calls the attention to that it was more on stake than the intervention of the political center to foster appropriate interpretative narrative genres. The practices of history-making aimed at the creation of publicly available political identities. Classical communist systems desired the constant active construction of socialism that required the mobilization of the population. History, therefore, was divided into distinct and terminated episodes that were capitalized on only as examples for action in the present. On the contrary, the narrative of continuity encompassing the totality of human society, which was created by the active co-operation of the party's highest officials after 1956, limited the set of accessible identities basically into two options: Fascism-counterrevolution and Communism-revolution. This condition resulted in that the refusal of the one almost automatically meant a drifting into the other camp. On the one hand, those who objected Fascism tended to support communism as the only accessible anti-Fascist reference, whereas the regime itself classified 'non-communist, but decent people' as taking sides with itself. On the other hand, even the slightest refusal of socialism as a system was immediately criminalized. The Kádárist slogan 'Who is not against us, is with us!', thus, referred to the change in the structure of practicing power instead of the mitigation of oppression or the opening of the system towards non-communist citizens. Post-1956 communist regime ruled the population through the identification of the people according to the two accessible counter-categories. The classification occurred through framing the subjects into the appropriate history of revolution or counterrevolution.

Italian fascism capitalized on the abilities of narrative representation in a similar way. Simonetta Falasca-Zamponi, who is the author of a book about the cultural aspects, namely the aesthetization of politics in Italian fascism, argues that fascism generated its

³⁰ At this point this approach to the history of representations leads to a research method, namely the accumulation of many different forms of the same represented object and their analysis of each others' context, that is similar to what Antoine de Baecque calls non-quantitative serial history. See his 'The Allegorical Image of France, 1750-1800: A Political Crisis of Representation' in *Representations* 47 (Summer 1994), pp. 114-7.

own happening through narratives. Falasca-Zamponi discusses the fascinating story of the construction of the March on Rome, the fascist revolution. The author explains that albeit in reality Mussolini's take-over was the result of peaceful negotiations with the king, fascists insisted on calling the event a genuine revolution. The legend of the *Marcia su Roma* corresponded with the self-image of the fascist movement that claimed itself a regenerator of society through a violent purification. Nevertheless, the myth did not only justify fascist statements retroactively, but also generated patterns of further action. Through this representation fascism created fascist revolutionary identities or subjects who eventually would act the way represented. If the fascist movement wanted to preserve the coherency of its self-image, it would have to act according to it later on. The narrative, thereby, simultaneously created expectations towards members and had the capacity to exclude those who could not or were not willing to meet the requirements. In this way representation produced subjects who were objects of power.³¹

Ways of obtaining knowledge, thereby, was not simply the issue of political authority, but were powerfully linked to the structure of the exercise of power. Regarding this the transformation of the modes of the evocation of 1919 forms a part of that history, which was told us by Michel Foucault on the correlation of techniques of power and the foundation of various disciplines. One of Foucault's main ideas is that the creation of the different fields of modern scientific investigation is inseparable from the invention or discovery of 'Man' (human being) as such. Social sciences of modernity aimed at accumulating positive knowledge on 'Man' to the extent as he or she lived, talked and produced. According to this tri-partial division, biology was formed in order to understand the evolution and functioning of human organic structure and the biological foundation and history of human beings, language indicated the territories of linguistics-literature, the conception and relation towards the past, namely history, and the structure of communication, that is to say sociology, while the questions of production re-arranged the area of economics.³² Nevertheless, the creation of 'Man' as the subject of his/her or others' actions was the result of the re-organization of power that had begun in early modern times. The radical and abrupt demographic increase during the 18th century required new techniques of controlling the population. The French philosopher argues that emphasis was shifted from subsequent punishment to

³¹ Simonetta Falasca-Zamponi, *Fascist Spectacle: The Aesthetics of Power in Mussolini's Italy* (Berkeley - Los Angeles - London, 1997), pp. 1-2.

preceding discipline, education and normalization of people. This aim was realized through institutions like the prison, mental hospitals, the army or the school that could fulfill their mission by an extreme individualized observation of their 'clients' that contributed to the subjectivization of human beings. Thereby, men and women became subjects of certain operations and enigmatic objects worthy of detection.³³

³² Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things* (New York, 1971)

³³ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* (London, 1977)

Prefiguration

1

On 21 March 1949 the Hungarian Federation of Freedom Fighters (a communist partisan organization) organized a bicycle and motorbike race around blocks of flats in Budapest. The competition was part of the ceremonies commemorating the proclamation of the First Hungarian Soviet Republic on 21 March 1919. The director of the Institute for Party History, László Réti gave grounds for its appropriateness as it follows, ‘We have to take care of and improve the spirit of freedom fights, a spirit the representatives of which construct with one hand, while with the other hand — if they must — they defend even by weapons what they constructed. The best examples of fostering this spirit of freedom fight are provided by the heroes who were fighting for the Hungarian Soviet Republic.’³⁴ A bicycle race that fosters the spirit of freedom fights commemorating the first Hungarian dictatorship of the proletariat: that was most probably the most curious festival of the 30th anniversary. The following chapter explains why exactly this apparently weird form proved to be pertinent in remembering 1919 in 1949. First, it reveals the reasons of the relative insignificance of the event by placing its evocation in the contemporary political-ideological context. Then it argues that the aim of the sequence of festivals organized for the 30th anniversary was not only to represent the relative insignificance of the past, but also to articulate a particular relationship towards history that was appropriate for the communist mode of exercising power: the mobilization of society. In this respect, Hungarian communists could borrow from the political and cultural practice of their Soviet counterparts.³⁵ Finally, the chapter claims that it was the ritual order of the ceremonies that provided tangibility of the abstract historical concept, thus historical authenticity was ascribed to historical festivals.³⁶

³⁴ *Szabad Nép* (hereafter: SZN) (21 March, 1949)

³⁵ In this regard, the chapter can be read as a case study in the sovietization of East-Central European historiographies. The process of sovietization recently has regenerated scholarly interest. See, for instance, the collective volume Balázs Apor, Péter Apor and Arfon Rees (eds.), *The Sovietization of Eastern Europe: New Perspectives on the Postwar Period* (Washington, 2008), esp. pp. 235-83.

³⁶ The goal of those commemorative ceremonies that are grounded upon the conception of history formed according to Enlightenment ideas is to make the past present again and to eliminate the distance in time in order to create a consciousness of continuity. Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge, 1989), pp. 41-71. The application of this concept of continuity onto the communist cults of commemoration produced an entire

In between the end of the war and the thirtieth anniversary Hungarian society barely met the memory of the dictatorship of the proletariat. Its anniversaries were not celebrated, its actors were not commemorated and no historical study was born. The First Hungarian Soviet Republic meant no tradition to be continued for the new regime that defined itself a democratic republic, whereas the radical left-wing that also presented itself a part and supporter of this republic distanced itself from the political goals of the dictatorship of the proletariat as well as from the promoters of its resurrection. The anniversary articles in the social democrat daily, *Népszava* (People's Voice) regarded only the example of the previous workers' unity to be followed.³⁷ The communist daily, *Szabad Nép* (Free People), however, warned against the continuation of the then subsisted soviet regime.³⁸ The theoretical reasoning for this statement was provided by József Révai, chief communist ideologue, who pronounced that whereas in 1919 it had been correct due to the revolutionary situation to create the dictatorship of the proletariat against the bourgeois republic, it would prove itself an error in 1945 since the democratic republic did not provide shelter for the bourgeois reaction, but rather it was based upon the democratic alliance of workers and peasants.³⁹ Consequently, whereas the democratic republic of 1918 was an independent topic of party seminars, the First Hungarian Soviet Republic was referred only in a vague political-historical context and was not on the agenda as an individual question.⁴⁰ The Secretariat of the

historiographic tradition. Zdzislaw Mach, 'Continuity and Change in Political Ritual' in *Revitalizing European Rituals*. ed.: Jeremy Boissevain (London – New York, 1992), pp. 59-60. Izabella Main, 'Nemzetek Krisztusa: a lengyel nemzeti ünnepek állami és egyházi manipulációja 1944 és 1966 között', *Regio* (2001), pp. 69-88.

³⁷ *Népszava* (21 March 1945), (21 March 1946)

³⁸ *SZN* (21 March 1946), (21 March 1947)

³⁹ József Révai, 'Miért harcol a kommunista párt a független, szabad, demokratikus Magyarországért?' (Why is the communist party fighting for the independent, free, democratic Hungary?) Hungarian Communist Party seminar leaflet 1 (Budapest, 1945)

⁴⁰ László Réti, 'Pártunk harca a fasizmus és a reakció ellen' (The Fight of Our Party against Fascism and Reaction), (Budapest, 1945) Erzsébet Andics, 'Az 1918-as magyar polgári demokratikus forradalom' (The Hungarian Bourgeois Democratic Revolution in 1918) Lecture in the Central Party School. Manuscript (30 June 1945) 'A Magyar Kommunista Párt negyesházados harca a fasizmus és a reakció ellen' (The 25 Years Struggle of the Hungarian Communist Party against Fascism and Reaction), Lecture for Beginner Courses. Guide, (Budapest, 1946) Mátyás Rákosi, 'A magyar munkásmozgalom és a Kommunista Párt története 1914-től 1935-ig' (The History of the Hungarian Labour Movement and the Communist Party from 1914 until 1935) Lecture in the Central Party School. Manuscript (22 May 1946) András Siklós, *Az 1918-1919. évi magyarországi forradalmak* (The Revolutions in Hungary in the years 1918 and 1919) (Budapest, 1964), pp. 173-7. provides relatively useful bibliographic data on the period in question.

Hungarian Communist Party decided on 17 January 1946 not to allow Erzsébet Andics, a leading historian of the party, writing a brochure on the dictatorship of the proletariat for the Anonymus publishing house.⁴¹ There was no context for the recollection of the First Hungarian Soviet Republic in Hungary until 1949.

In 1949, however, for the 30th anniversary of the proclamation of the First Hungarian Soviet Republic the history work-group of the Hungarian Workers' Party published a paper on the history of the dictatorship of the proletariat. In the introductory paragraph it was stated that, 'The bourgeois and social-democrat historiography that was in the service of capitalism abused the glorious memory of the first take-over of the Hungarian working class, the Hungarian workers, namely the Hungarian Soviet Republic during a quarter of a century...It is time to present the history of the Hungarian Commune in its true light according to its real historical significance.'⁴² Remembering the First Hungarian Soviet Republic was an important concern for the Rákosi-regime. The party considered a major duty to reassess the memory of the Hungarian Commune after a period of long negative remembering, as they put it, during the Horthy-regency.

From an ideological point of view, for the Eastern European communist parties, including the Hungarian one, the major issue of the post-war transformation was the definition of the concept of the people's democracy. Communists usually understood the people's democracies as transitory state formations on the long road towards the final goal of socialism. However, the exact duration of this transition remained unclear until the beginning of the Cold War. Party leaders and ideologists debated if it had to be interpreted a state of workers and peasants pursuing the tasks of democratic transformation or a means of slow and peaceful development to socialism or simply a transitory phase, the form of various 'national roads' to socialism. However, the politics of East-Central European communist parties were fundamentally transformed after their meeting in Poland on 22 September 1947 when they decided to found the Cominform. The new organ was basically a means of Soviet control in East-Central European communist politics and was required by the growing tension among the anti-Fascist powers and the beginnings of the Cold War. The Soviet leadership decided to urge its allies to increase their dominance over home politics and to radicalize their demand for power. That meant the end of the various people's fronts and coalition governments.

⁴¹ Politikatörténeti Intézet Levéltára (Archives of the Institute for Political History) 274/4/110

⁴² László Réti, *A Magyar Tanácsköztársaság* (The First Hungarian Soviet Republic) (Budapest, 1949), p. 3.

The Soviet leaders clarified for their east-central European counterparts that their former policy of co-operation with different peasant parties had failed and they misunderstood the role of people's democracies. For these, according to Stalin himself, ceased to serve the purpose of communist participation in the various governments, but had the functions of genuine dictatorships of the proletariat. The ideological instruction, obviously, conveyed very practical political message: it was the time to transform coalitions into one-party dictatorships.⁴³

It was very important for the Hungarian party leaders to demonstrate their faithfulness to these principles. In the meeting of party cadres, in January 1948, János Kádár, secretary of the Budapest party committee and deputy of the general secretary, already claimed that Hungary followed the road of socialism as a solid people's democracy. In June, the unification congress of the communist and social democratic parties accepted a declaration that clearly stated that the people's democracy equaled the power of the working class.⁴⁴ Nevertheless, the difficulties of the Hungarian communist leadership did not fade away as the Cominform condemned the politics of the Yugoslav Communist Party a nationalist deviation on 29 June 1948. This fact soon led to the general criticism of ideas about 'national roads to communism'. The Polish Workers' Party denied the particular 'Polish way' already in September, followed by the Hungarian secretary general who claimed that there was no 'Hungarian way' in November. However, when in mid-December the congress of the Polish and Bulgarian communist parties declared that the people's democracy was equal to the dictatorship of the proletariat, which was apparently confirmed by Stalin himself, the Hungarian communists began to loose their self-confidence. The second person in the leadership, chief economic politician Ernő Gerő, who took part in the Polish congress, sent a letter to his comrades immediately from the party meeting demanding to follow the Polish example. Gerő argued that the people's democracy was a particular type of the dictatorship of the proletariat, which, although did not have a soviet form, came to

⁴³ Joseph Rothschild, *Return to Diversity: a Political History of East Central Europe since World War II* (New York, 1989), pp. 125-32. Richard J. Crampton, *Eastern Europe in the Twentieth Century* (London, 1994), pp. 255-60. George Schöpflin, *Politics in Eastern Europe, 1945-1992* (Oxford, 1993), pp. 57-74. On Hungary: Ignác Romsics, *Hungary in the 20th Century* (Budapest, 1999), pp. 235-7. Lajos Izsák, *Polgári pártok és programjaik Magyarországon 1944-1956* (Pécs, 1994), pp. 115-6.

⁴⁴ The ideological discussion on the concept of the people's democracy, although it provided an apology for late Kádárism, was summed up accurately by Bálint Szabó, *Az „ötvenes évek”. Elmélet és politika a szocialista építés első időszakában Magyarországon 1948-1957* (Budapest, 1986), pp. 10-2. On Kádár's role see Tibor Huszár, *Kádár János politikai életrajza. 1912-1956*. Vol. 1. pp. 123-5.

existence by the support of the already existing Soviet system. Albeit, there were debates concerning the precise ideological formulation, the Hungarian party leadership agreed to follow Stalin's definition.⁴⁵ The new concept was introduced into the Hungarian political discourse by Mátyás Rákosi's editorial published in the party's daily on 16 January 1949.⁴⁶ In March, the meeting of the Central Leadership (Committee) argued for the improving of the dictatorship in order to bring the structure of the state and political order closer to the Soviet type.⁴⁷

Albeit the party's daily declared openly the First Hungarian Soviet Republic a dictatorship of the proletariat firstly in 1948,⁴⁸ the 30th anniversary of the first Hungarian dictatorship of the proletariat meant the real opportunity for Hungarian communists to testify that their own system equaled the criteria set by the Soviets, as well. The comparison of the two periods made it possible to argue on the basis of empirical evidence that the Hungarian people's democracy exercised the function of the dictatorship of the proletariat. Remembering the First Hungarian Soviet Republic was possible and necessary in regards of that, 'we pursue the same fight we began then and our people's democracy basically has the same function what the Hungarian Soviet Republic had: the function of the dictatorship of the proletariat constructing socialism.'⁴⁹ The anniversary of the Hungarian Soviet Republic meant an opportunity to prove that the Hungarian regime was close to the archetype of Bolshevism: the USSR. The communist party's daily called the First Hungarian Soviet Republic the great tradition of Soviet-Hungarian friendship. The author apparently referred to the context of the Cold War when stating that the USSR was a natural ally against imperialists. According to the article the Soviet Union was the centre of the international revolution, therefore the Hungarian communist regime aspired to establish a common border with it also in 1919. The statement was a clear reference to the new Hungarian-Soviet border that was formed after the annexation of the Carpathian Ukraine from Czechoslovakia to the USSR after WWII. Diplomatic relations were established due to a heroic flight of a communist leader from Budapest to Moscow in 1919. The two communist systems

⁴⁵ Szabó, *Az „ötvenes évek”*, pp. 21-32.

⁴⁶ Mátyás Rákosi, 'A népi demokrácia néhány problémájáról' (On Certain Problems of the People's Democracy), *SZN* (16 January, 1949)

⁴⁷ Szabó, *Az „ötvenes évek”*, p. 34.

⁴⁸ 'A magyar kommün emlékére', *SZN* (21 March, 1948)

⁴⁹ *SZN* (22 March, 1949)

supported each other even by means of arms, stated the article: captives of both sides took part in each other's fights.⁵⁰

Historiography primarily intended to demonstrate that the First Hungarian Soviet Republic had been the first follower of the Russian socialist revolution. The abundantly decorated publication for the thirtieth anniversary, for example, began with Mátyás Rákosi's large portrait that depicted the Secretary General as people's commissar of the first proletarian state. His picture was accompanied by the leaders of the Russian Bolsheviks: Lenin and Stalin, respectively. The first chapter of the book was titled as 'Lenin and Stalin show the way'. The album contained an article by a leading Hungarian communist historian who cited Lenin while claimed that Hungary stood the closest to the Soviet-Union. Apart from Rákosi's figure the ceremonial publication evoked Tibor Szamuely who had been the leader of the Hungarian red terror and referred to the fabulous adventure of the revolutionary hero when he had flown from Budapest to Moscow to meet Lenin and establish close personal connections with the two soviet republics.⁵¹ The collective volume that was published for the thirty-fifth anniversary stated frequently that the Hungarian revolution had been influenced to a large extent by the Russian October turn and called the First Hungarian Soviet Republic 'the child of October'.⁵²

The First Hungarian Soviet Republic, that was evoked to demonstrate the actual socialist character of the new communist regime, became a means of shedding light and understanding important issues of the 'socialist state' like the concept of the 'people's democracy' and the 'dictatorship of the proletariat'. This, however, resulted in that communist historians and ideologists looked for those features of the First Hungarian Soviet Republic that were commensurable to those of the newer communist regime. All the features attributed to the Soviet regime by the newspaper articles could be easily compared to current political issues. For instance, evoking the unification of the Party of Communists and the Social Democratic Party in 1919 referred clearly to the recently accomplished union of the Communist and Social Democratic Parties in summer 1948. The newspapers warned party leaders to avoid the superficial and not genuine unity of

⁵⁰ 'A magyar Tanácsköztársaság kikiáltásának évfordulójára' (For the Anniversary of the Proclamation of the First Hungarian Soviet Republic), *SZN* (21 March, 1955)

⁵¹ *A Magyar Tanácsköztársaság 1919* (The First Hungarian Soviet Republic 1919) (Budapest, 1949)

⁵² *A Magyar Tanácsköztársaság hősi küzdelmeiről* (On The Heroic Fights of The First Hungarian Soviet Republic) (Budapest, 1954)

the party, which was considered the main inherent reason of the downfall in 1919. One of the articles even pronounced that right-wing social democrats had capitalized on the unity for keeping the workers under right-wing influence and, hence, their tactic resulted in the actual liquidation of the communist party.⁵³ This pattern determined the way the First Hungarian Soviet Republic was evoked following the 30th anniversary, throughout the 1950s. The fact of the entente intervention in 1919 was compared with the current hostile relation between the two blocks, the Cold War. An article which was published in the newspaper of the Federation of the Working Youth revealed a subtle plan of the American imperialism that had aimed to overthrow the Hungarian Soviet Republic in 1919. According to the author the USA prepared a military intervention by the help of those right-wing social democrats who served American spying agencies. US leaders incited the armies of smaller imperialist states to war. The actual offensive which was launched by Czechoslovak and Romanian military forces advised by French and Italian officers was connected also to the USA, 'On 16 April the armed intervention against the Hungarian workers and peasants organized and directed by Western imperialist powers, and primarily by American billionaires began.'⁵⁴ The article attributed to the US leaders also Clemenceau's promise to withdraw Romanian troops from Eastern Hungary and invite representatives of the Soviet Republic for the peace negotiations in return for evacuating Upper Hungary by the Red Army. Obviously, the author concluded that American imperialism had already aspired to overthrow communism in 1919 as it did the same in the 1950s. Another context for evoking the First Hungarian Soviet Republic was the deep conflict between Tito's Yugoslavia and other countries of the Soviet block. Articles called the attention to the fact that in 1919 the armed intervention had been directed from Belgrade and the authors were not reluctant to conclude, 'Like in 1919 at Franchet d'Esperay's (French general, commander-in-chief of entente forces in the Balkans) headquarters they are hatching their murderous plot against us in Belgrade

⁵³ Erzsébet Andics, 'A jobboldali szociáldemokraták szerepe az 1919-es proletárforradalomban' (The right-wing socialdemocrats' role in the proletar revolution of 1919), *SZN* (13 March, 1949) The Marxist historian Aladár Mód made similar points in the relevant chapter of his comprehensive book on Hungarian history: *400 év küzdelem az önálló Magyarországért* (400 Years Struggle for the Independent Hungary) (Budapest, 1951), pp. 391-9.

⁵⁴ 'Az amerikai imperialisták - a Tanácsköztársaság hóhéra' (American Imperialists - Executioners of the Hungarian Soviet Republic), *Szabad Ifjúság* (17 October, 1953)

now. Their agents who are ready for every outrage are lurking like hungry wolves by our borders and are called Tito and his gang.’⁵⁵

Evoking the First Hungarian Soviet Republic remained an important means to understand ‘socialism’ during the crisis of communism in the mid-1950s. Stalin’s death in 1953 led to increasing indeterminacy among the East-Central European parties. Although Khrushchev, Stalin’s successor as secretary general began to claim that Stalinist policy was a failure and devoted itself to correct it and urged also communist leaders of the block to make anti-Stalinist measures, the admiration of Stalinist policy was not discredited at once within the Soviet leadership. However, basic elements of the postwar communist doctrine like the use of violence, the primacy of industrialization or the style of leadership were questioned and communist orthodoxy, in general, was challenged by revisionist attempts stressing socialist democracy, the democratization of the party and social consumption. This led to the rise of reformist communist politicians, like, for instance, in Hungary to Imre Nagy’s nomination as Prime Minister for a short period. Tensions, however, remained as the gap between the Hungarian Workers’ Party and Hungarian society became more apparent by 1956 partly due to Rákosi’s reluctance towards de-Stalinisation.⁵⁶ In this context commemoration called the attention to the fact that the communist party was able to reconsider its policy and regenerate its dynamism. Commemorative articles stressed that because communists drew the conclusions from the errors of the First Hungarian Soviet Republic, they did not make them again after 1945, the liberation. The newspapers reminded that also the Hungarian Workers’ Party adopted a resolution to correct mistakes.⁵⁷

The increase of the significance of the memory of the First Soviet Republic, however, proved to be relative even in this time as well. In spite of the fact that the ceremonies in 1949 included a commemoration held in the Parliament, the installation of an exhibition in the National Museum, the publication of an album and the broadcasting of a radio drama the anniversary regarded rather a celebration for the communist party. A lecture was given at the ceremonial meeting of party workers, a

⁵⁵ ‘A Tanácsköztársaság 34. évfordulóján’ (On the 34th Anniversary of the First Hungarian Soviet Republic), *Népszava* (21 March, 1953)

⁵⁶ On de-stalinisation and the conflict of orthodoxy and reformism in Hungary see János M. Rainer, *Nagy Imre. Politikai életrajz. 1953-1958*. Vol. 2. (Budapest, 1999), pp. 9-233. On the trajectories of reformer thought between 1953-56 see János M. Rainer, *Az író helye. Viték a magyar irodalmi sajtóban 1953-1956* (Budapest, 1990)

party day was organized, the army celebrated in each barracks, a special issue of the party's theoretical journal, the Review of Society was published as well as the lecture of the First Secretary, Mátyás Rákosi and the history of the Soviet Republic was treated at party schools.⁵⁸ The directives that were written for the 35th anniversary in 1954 made it even more apparent that the remembering community was basically the communist party. Notwithstanding the proposed fifteen or twenty minutes long commemorations at schools the celebrations concerned exclusively the party. Lectures were held in every important city, however only for party workers. The main newspapers of the party, the daily Free People, the Review of Society and the Propagandist published articles for the anniversary.⁵⁹

The First Hungarian Soviet Republic remained a fragmentarily and partially described event of party history. The history of the Hungarian Bolshevik system could not be employed or only partially to present the contemporarily dominant communist historical narrative, the history of national wars of independence. Whereas, the memory of the dictatorship of the proletariat was unattractive for large segments of the Hungarian society, communists tried to integrate their party into the history of the nation by describing the communist takeover the fulfillment of the democratic revolution and war for independence in 1848-49. The course of Hungarian history was interpreted a continuous fight for freedom and independence of German imperial aspirations, which culminated in the revolution of 1848. In official historiography, Aladár Mád's book, the *400 Years of Struggle for the Independent Hungary*, remained a decisive factor in public discussions of the past. Mád connected 16th century anti-Habsburg Protestantism, the participation of 17th century transsylvanian protestant princes and armies in the wars of religion, the early 18th century anti-Habsburg revolt of prince Ferenc Rákóczi and the war of independence in 1848-49 into once continuous thread that allegedly determined the course of Hungarian history. In Mád's reasoning, this history was featured by a constant tension between the popular classes, who remained the resolute forces of national independence and democratic transformation, and the ruling classes, who regularly were ready to make the compromise and abandon the national and popular cause in exchange of satisfying particular class interests. Nonetheless, with the rise of

⁵⁷ Miklós Gárdos, 'A Magyar Tanácsköztársaság emlékére' (In Memoriam the First Hungarian Soviet Republic), *Magyar Nemzet* (21 March, 1956)

⁵⁸ MOL 276/54/28

⁵⁹ MOL 276/89/21

communists, as the historian stated, the goals of democratic transformation and national independence were inherently bound together and were eventually fulfilled in 1945, due to the advance of the Soviet Red Army that finally crushed the forces of German reactionary classes.⁶⁰ This historical interpretation was spectacularly represented during the centennial ceremonies in 1948, which was already orchestrated by the communist leadership.⁶¹ In this context, although 1919 was represented an important step in the course of struggling for national independence, the link between 1848 and 1948, the glorious, but suppressed fight unifying the democratic and national cause and its fulfillment, shadowed the connection between 1919, the failure of socialist transformation and 1949, its successful realization.

In addition, it was extremely difficult to describe accurately and assess appropriately the significance of the First Hungarian Soviet Republic since many of the leaders of the dictatorship of the proletariat, especially Béla Kun, the most important person in its government, the Revolutionary Governing Council, who perished in the USSR during the Stalinist purges, virtually could not be mentioned. The first Hungarian commune, whose actual leaders were non-persons or, at best, failed in revolutionary Marxist theory and practice, could not be appropriated as the pertinent antecedent, forerunner or origins of the glorious and successful communist takeover.⁶²

Historical representation of this type was interested in identifying and enumerating specific features that can be compared to each other, thus, historical interpretation took the form of a kind of analysis of particular characteristics. In general, the way of presenting the Hungarian Commune was established by the proposal produced for the 30th anniversary by the Department for Propaganda together with the Institution for the History of the Workers Movement. The first part of the document contained the ‘political aspects’ of the celebrations. Those emphasized the significance of the alliance between Western imperialists, Hungarian counterrevolutionaries and right wing social democrats. It also stated that due to the omission of Marxism-Leninism serious mistakes had been made like the unification of the workers’ parties without

⁶⁰ Mód, *400 év küzdelem az önálló Magyarorszáért*

⁶¹ András Gerő, *Az államosított forradalom* (Budapest, 1998), pp. 9-19. György Gyarmati, *Március hatalma – a hatalom márciusa* (Budapest, 1998), pp. 96-114. Balázs Apor, ‘Hatalom és történelem’, *Budapesti Jelenlét* 26-27 (Vols. 2-3 2000), pp. 59-70. Róbert Szabó, ‘Politikai propaganda és történelmi ünnep’, *Történelmi Szemle* 40 (Autumn – Winter 1998), pp. 215-27. Szabó, ‘Pártok, politikai propaganda, történelmi ünnepek Magyarországon 1945-1948’, *Sic itur ad astra* (Vols. 2-4 1993), pp. 261-72.

⁶² See for example Miklós Szabó, ‘A fegyverek kritikája’, *Beszélő* 4 (March, 1999), pp. 50-54.

principles, the neglecting of distribution of land for the peasantry, the keeping of the old bourgeois bureaucracy and the unsatisfactory suppression of counterrevolution. The downfall was explained by the above stated reasons: the attack of the outer enemy, the mistakes that were made and the activity of inner traitors.⁶³ During the subsequent years, it was stated that although the people and the intellectuals had supported the regime, Trockists and right-wing social democrats had overthrown it. According to the commemoration articles the major external aspect of the defeat of the Soviet Republic was the entente attack which was completed by the absence of a 'socialist camp'. Therefore the Hungarian Soviet regime had to face with overpowered hostile and imperialistic countries. The internal and external enemies of the proletariat were accompanied by the system's own failures, primarily those concerned with agriculture. The Hungarian Soviet Republic nationalized rapidly the land and, hence, lost the support of the peasantry.⁶⁴

The history of the Hungarian Soviet Republic was analyzed in order to understand the reasons of its defeat. All characteristics of the first soviet regime were presented as failures of a kind. Right-wing social democrats could betray the proletariat because communists did not pay attention to purge the Social Democratic Party. Social democrats kept their influence on workers because communists let the trade unions remain independent. Class struggle was carried out within the party due to the presence of right-wing 'petit-bourgeois' social democrats. Communist compliance resulted in that old capitalists could stay in leading positions of their once nationalized factories.⁶⁵ Even the possibility of the entente attack was attributed to the lack of a communist block of countries.

This analytical interpretation was realized in two narrative forms: the first one told the story first then used it as a basis of learning a lesson; whereas the second one connected the narrative representation directly to the political conclusions. László Réti produced the first mode of interpretation. He published his views in the form of a study for the party schools and a shorter version that served the purpose of historical introduction in a pamphlet composed for the 30th anniversary of 1919.⁶⁶ Mátyás Rákosi,

⁶³ MOL 276/54/28

⁶⁴ 'Harminckét évvel ezelőtt' (32 Years Before), *SZN* (21 March, 1951)

⁶⁵ *SZN* (13 March, 1949)

⁶⁶ Réti, *A Magyar Tanácsköztársaság...* and *A Tanácsköztársaság 30. évfordulója* (The 30th Anniversary of the Soviet Republic) (Budapest, 1949)

the First Secretary himself created the second type in his historical account on the First Hungarian Soviet Republic in 1948 which eventually determined the structure of representing the event henceforth. Beginning with an account on the unification of the workers' parties he immediately stated that the way of unification had been a serious mistake the communists had made. The second measure of the Soviet Government was the organization of a state apparatus. Here the First Secretary claimed that by mistake the Soviet Republic had not destroyed the old bureaucracy. Then he enumerated all the steps of the proletarian regime in order to call the attention to the wrong decisions. For instance, the introduction of new revolutionary lawcourts was connected to the fact that old judges could keep their position and influence. A similar mistake was revealed in the re-organization of the industry. Rákosi pronounced that although the Soviet Republic had nationalized the production the bourgeoisie could have stayed in office as a state employee. He did not forget to mention the wrong re-arrangement of the agriculture. Finally, after telling the story of military success and retreat, the First Secretary described the causes of defeat. He considered two main reasons: the numerical superiority of the outside enemy and the treason of the social democrats. He concluded, however, that 'the experiences and the defeat, the successes and the failures of the First Hungarian Soviet Republic provided lessons for the revolutionary workers' movement in all over the world.'⁶⁷

Communists believed that a proper understanding of historical examples could contribute to present success. The political instructions for the 30th anniversary valued the importance of the revolutionary tradition as it follows, 'Learned from the mistakes made in the past the Hungarian Workers' Party secures the leading position of the Marxist-Leninist party, it based the unity of the working class upon principles, it laid the foundations of the stable alliance of the workers and peasants by distributing the land of the big estates for the working peasantry and with the old ruling classes and the agents of Western imperialism.'⁶⁸ Events of the First Hungarian Soviet Republic, thus, were important as 'the revolutionary experience of 1919 plays an exceptionally great role in the immense results of today.'⁶⁹ Failures, hence, were examined in order to avoid or

⁶⁷ Mátyás Rákosi, *A Kommunista Magyarországi Pártjának megalakulása és harca a proletárforradalom győzelméért. A Magyar Tanácsköztársaság* (The Formation of the Communist Party of Hungary and Its Struggle for the Victory of the Proletarian Revolution. The First Hungarian Soviet Republic) (Budapest, 1948), p. 59.

⁶⁸ MOL 276/54/28

⁶⁹ SZN (22 March, 1949)

correct them, 'We inherited invaluable political lessons valid still today from this revolution, from which we are going to take for our present victorious fights in the future as we did it in the past. Thus the temporarily failed first proletarian revolution becomes a living and constituent part of the once and for all victorious Hungarian people's democracy building socialism.'⁷⁰ 'The crucial reason of the downfall of the Soviet Republic was the imperialist intervention which attacked our country. Our people draws important conclusions from this fact which concern also the present.'⁷¹ Evoking the past fulfilled a special function during the 1950s. The present turned towards the past only to draw examples for coping with current tasks. The past was interesting only if it could help the present directly. History conceived a teacher of present life, that is to say history was treated in the sense of the classical proverb: *historia magistra vitae*.⁷²

Accordingly, communists considered the task of historiography to draw appropriate lessons and, thus, to contribute to the establishment of appropriate political action. László Réti wrote in a study published in 1954 for the 35th anniversary of the First Soviet Republic,

The existence, glorious fights, wonderful successes, but also the failures and defeat of the First Hungarian Soviet Republic mean the abundant treasury of lessons for our present work, for our present activity constructing socialism. It is necessary to point out several of them, those which are perhaps the most significant in the point of view of our present work and can contribute most to the clarification and solution of the tasks we are about to face with. The great historical experiences of the First Hungarian Soviet Republic can be found every time and everywhere in our work we have done since the Liberation; we managed to achieve our wonderful successes because we have learnt from the past. It is enough to refer, for instance, to the formation of the unified party of the working class. It is obvious that in 1948 we succeeded in realizing the final and indissoluble unity of the working class based on the right principles, implementing the instructions of Marxism-Leninism concerning the party; because we have learnt among others from the history of the First Hungarian Soviet Republic and corrected those mistakes which we had made then.⁷³

⁷⁰ László Réti, 'A Magyar Tanácsköztársaság dicső példája' (The Glorious Example of the Hungarian Soviet Republic), *SZN* (21 March, 1953)

⁷¹ 'Történelmi vizsga' (An Exam in History), *SZN* (21 March, 1954)

⁷² History, according to the great ancient orator, Cicero, could be capitalized on as a collection of examples that might instruct the speaker as well as the audience. Although Christian religious philosophy imagined history a linear process it maintained the relevance of considering the past as exemplary. According to Church authors like Isidor of Seville, Bede the Venerable or Melancthon accepted the potential of both biblical and heathen histories to be instructive for believers. In the eighteenth century one can still encounter formulations like this. For instance, Frederick the Great believed too that history was a school for rulers.

Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past* (Cambridge MA - London, 1985), esp. pp. 3-27., 96-104., 202-12., 267-88.

Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things* (New York, 1971), pp. 17-30., 50-58., 217-221. Ernst H. Gombrich, 'in his *Ideals and Idols: Essays on Values In History and Art* (Oxford, 1994), pp.

⁷³ László Réti, 'Az első magyar proletárdiktatúra' (The First Dictatorship of the Proletariat in Hungary), *Társadalmi Szemle* 9 (March, 1954), pp. 8-9.

In the following paragraphs the author analyzed the reasons of the defeat. All the conclusions he made were succeeded by a description of how the post-1945 communist regime managed to avoid the pitfalls. Firstly, Réti stated that the Soviet Republic had fought alone against the enemies of communism. The neighboring countries were hostile towards Hungary and the Soviet Union could not provide military assistance since she herself had to face with interventions. Nevertheless, as he put it, the second World War altered fundamentally the conditions. Hungary became a member of a mighty socialist camp led by the most powerful country in the world. He concluded that, ‘Thus the first lesson drawn from the experiences of the First Hungarian Soviet Republic is to take care of, foster and fortify our indissoluble brotherly community with the other peoples of the socialist camp; since this is the guarantee of our further progress and victory, the secure basis of our socialist construction.’⁷⁴ Secondly, Réti argued that the rapid collectivization prevented the formation of a stable alliance of workers and peasants in 1919. After 1945, however, communists managed not to alienate the peasantry by an immediate distribution of land, ‘After the Liberation our party learned from past mistakes and based the alliance of workers and peasants on stable grounds by the revolutionary land-reform in 1945.’⁷⁵ The same principles motivated the edition of school textbooks, as well. These all finished their narratives with the enumeration of the reasons of the downfall and by learning the appropriate lessons.⁷⁶

Narratives of the Soviet Republic made it apparent that the first dictatorship of the proletariat had gone by once and for all and the present did not derive from the past in any way. In the concluding parts the history of the First Hungarian Soviet Republic was usually defined by terms like chapter which implies isolation or prelude which prompts that the real appearance of something would come only in the future. Mátyás Rákosi for example stated that, ‘The First Hungarian Soviet Republic forms one of the most important chapters in the nation’s history...In spite of its defeat it was a preparation for, a precursor and a dress rehearsal of the current victories of our people...’⁷⁷ That is to say, the present was not considered to be caused by the past. The Soviet Republic of

⁷⁴ Ibid. p. 10.

⁷⁵ Ibid. p. 12.

⁷⁶ Gusztáv Heckenast, Béla Karácsony, Klára Feuer and László Zsigmond, *Történelem VIII* (for primary schools) (Budapest, 1948), pp. 181-91. (a revised second edition was published in 1950) and Endre Kovács, Gyula Simon and Béla Bellér, *Történelem IV* (for secondary schools) (Budapest, 1950), pp. 3-25.

⁷⁷ Rákosi, *A Kommunizmus Magyarországi Pártjának*, p. 60.

1919 was not connected to the Rákosi regime by continuity. Historical continuity implies a relation of origin between two phenomena: that is to say the temporally subsequent one is a result of the previous epoch. Nothing like this was demonstrated in the relationship of the Rákosi regime and the First Soviet Republic. This becomes very obvious after reading the textbooks for schools, which by nature had to organize their material into distinct episodes or units. All of them concluded their narrative accounts on the dictatorship of the proletariat with a description of its defeat. There was no indication pointing out that the current communist regime was a result of the first Soviet Republic. The chapters followed the history of the proletarian state discussed the 'counterrevolutionary epoch' and the second World War. The textbook issued for the secondary schools even continued with a narrative on European history between the world wars and returned to post 1919 Hungarian history after finishing an examination of European events in 1939.⁷⁸

Communists did not want to demonstrate that their regime was originated from the First Hungarian Soviet Republic. On the contrary, they sought to manifest the glory of their present. On the one hand the previous leaders of the Soviet Republic of 1919 who was honored in 1949 filled no significant - if any - positions in the Rákosi regime. They were presented rather as, though respected, relics of a past era. On the other hand leading figures of the Hungarian Workers' Party in reality played minor role during the revolution in 1919. They formed the younger second rank of communists at that time. Nevertheless, they were honored very highly on the occasion of the anniversary of the First Hungarian Soviet Republic. The fact that these persons represented rather the Rákosi regime than the proletarian regime of 1919 rendered it apparent that the ceremony did not glorified the past but the present. This intention was reinforced by the fact that on the honors list a prominent communist economist, Jenő Varga who was commissar of economy in the first Hungarian Soviet government was replaced by Ernő Gerő who was responsible for issues of economy in the Hungarian Workers Party after 1945.⁷⁹

In the subsequent years, contemporary leaders were respected also by describing their old commitment to communist goals. Attention was called to the fact that the current secretary general of the party, Mátyás Rákosi devoted himself to the cause of

⁷⁸ *Történelem VIII*, pp. 190-1 and *Történelem IV*, pp. 23-5, 62.

⁷⁹ MOL 276/54/34

revolution from his youth. Articles gave accounts on how he had organized the military campaign against bourgeois armies. The fact that he had been condemned by the interwar regime for illegal organizing activity was interpreted that the government had wanted to eliminate the prominent fighter of the First Soviet Republic.⁸⁰ The same conclusion could be drawn from the publication titled *The Trial of Rákosi* which was published in 1950. The book contained extensive material on Rákosi's second trial in 1935 when he was accused of committing horrible crimes as a commissar of the First Hungarian Soviet Republic. Although the representation of the trial provided a good chance for evoking the first dictatorship of the proletariat in Hungary the volume demonstrated exclusively Rákosi's activity both as a commissar and a revolutionary hero in court. It cited in length Rákosi's speeches and set the trial in the context of the international campaign for his release. The occasion of the publication was not the remembering of the Soviet State, but the making the current Secretary General a hero. The glorification, however, was not conceived to have an end in itself. Instead, the foreword claimed that, 'The Institute for the History of the Workers' Movement publishes this book from the conviction that it will strengthen and inspire hundred thousands people for work and struggle and the shining example of comrade Rákosi will promote the readers to accomplish their tasks better and the construction of socialist Hungary.'⁸¹

An image in the secondary school textbook demonstrates well the party's way of reading history. The picture is entitled 'Mátyás Rákosi heading the Red Army'. The photo *actually* depicts the-would-be First Secretary in the *foreground* walking *by the side of* a marching Red Army unit (fig. 1.). The wording, however, implied that Rákosi had been the *leader* of the Red Army. Hereby, a tension between the representation of the image and the caption was created. A first interpretation could be that the communist party capitalized on the picture to falsify history in order to foster the cult of its leader. Nonetheless, a second reading is possible. On the one hand, the concerted representation of the image and text did not state unambiguously that Rákosi had been

⁸⁰ *SZN* (21 March, 1951)

⁸¹ *A Rákosi-per* (The Trial of Rákosi) (Budapest, 1950), p. 11. The cult of the communist leaders could be interpreted as a mean to mobilize the population. A general survey on Rákosi's cult: Balázs Apor, 'A Rákosi-kultusz kialakulása és megnyilvánulásai 1945 után', *Sic Itur Ad Astra* 11 (Vol. 1 1999), pp. 97-128. Similar patterns could be detected in the Lenin cult during the 1920s. The figure of Lenin was evoked to help inspire children to learn more or workers to labor more productively. See Nina Tumarkin, *Lenin Lives!* (Cambridge, MA – London, 1983)

the commander-in-chief of the army. On the other it represented an actual event: the First Secretary headed Red Army troops in reality as a commissar. The tension between the photo and the caption here rather referred to a *probability* of events: Rákosi could have been the leader of the army regarding his personal characteristics. The image called the attention to the present: pointing out the outstanding abilities of the current leader it emphasized the significance of the current state of affairs.

According to their self-perception the communist system after 1945 came into existence independently of the first proletarian state. The foundation of the second communist regime was claimed to be a result of their own struggles either as anti-fascist resistance fighters or clever and resolute revolutionary politicians during the democratic period between 1945 and 1948. The main cause of the foundation of the People's Democracy of Hungary, however, was considered to be the victory of the USSR in the war, '...Lenin's prophecy was fulfilled in 1945, when we started successfully to realize the great initiative of 1919: the construction of socialism in our country.'⁸² In their self-perception, communists began a new start in 1945 even if the initiative had predecessors. This was the only connection between the two epochs, between 1919 and 1945 as László Réti put it in 1949, 'This demonstrates the close relation between 21 March 1919 and 4 April 1945. In 1919 the Hungarian proletariat departed for the first time on the way that leads towards our liberation, the liquidation of class society and exploitation and towards socialism. In 1945 the glorious Red Army of the Soviet Union liberated our country and made us possible to depart again on this road and by this time to go along.'⁸³

4

The form of representing the history of the First Hungarian Soviet Republic was typologic. Historical typology does not connect the events of the past according to causality, but compares those based upon their re-current, repeated characteristics.⁸⁴ In 1949, for Hungarian communist interpreters of the past a form of hierarchical historical representation that sought for analogies in the past in order to provide examples of

⁸² Réti, *A Magyar Tanácsköztársaság*, p. 27.

⁸³ Réti, *A Magyar Tanácsköztársaság*, p. 27.

⁸⁴ See Rudolf Bultmann, 'Ursprung und Sinn der Typologie als hermeneutischer Methode', *Theologische Literaturzeitung* (Vols. 4-5 1950), pp. 206-12.

action in the present was available in the characteristic genre of contemporary Soviet descriptions and displays of history. Typological historical representation was a dominant form of archaic communist historiography until the mid-1950s.⁸⁵ In the first years following the Bolshevik revolution the depiction of the past occurred outside of the historical profession to a decisive extent. Its principal reason was the lack of human and material resources available for research and scholarship, at the same time, however, the historical festivals and celebrations that replaced the historians' interpretations secured an appropriate form for the new mode of turning towards the past. The structure of historical dramas that was based on popular culture was shaped by a sequence of independent episodes that reminded to each other. Performances showed voluntarily selected scenes of the revolutionary past.⁸⁶ Parallel to it the role of historical science that was controlled more and more strictly by the party changed as well. The leadership of the party expected historical writing to provide direct assistance for accomplishing the political tasks. Historical interpretation, thus, was restricted to project certain idealtypical social formations that were constructed according to political considerations.⁸⁷ From the middle of the 1930s the politics of the party turned towards the amplification of patriotic emotions, whereas historical research focused on a few primordial patriotic topic like the early Russian state formations or the reign of Ivan the Terrible and Peter the Great. These subjects attracted the interest of science organization and policy as in them the imperfect, but characteristic attempts of the centralized Russian state organization were recognized. These past phenomena were described the typoi of Stalinist Soviet centralized state. Historical writing characterized the reign of Ivan IV with the expansion of the Russian empire, the penetration into the Baltics, the creation of the secret police and the resolute elimination of rivals. Peter I was represented an organizer of the state who improved industry, army and fleet and generated modern bureaucracy.⁸⁸ Events and figures of the past became the typoi of anti-

⁸⁵ Bernd Uhlenbruch, 'The Annexation of History: Eisenstein and the Ivan Grozny Cult of the 1940s' in *The Culture of the Stalin Period*, ed.: Hans Günther (London, 1990), pp. 266-87. John Barber, *Soviet Historians in Crisis, 1928-1932* (New York, 1981), p. vii.

⁸⁶ James von Geldern, *Bolshevik Festivals, 1917-1920* (Berkeley – Los Angeles – London, 1993), pp. 112-3., 162-3. The participants of the February revolution as well as the members of the Kerenskii-cabinet interpreted their acts the re-enactment of the Great French revolution. See Orlando Figes – Boris Kolonitskii, *Interpreting the Russian Revolution: The Language and Symbols of 1917* (New Haven – London, 1999), pp. 30-31.

⁸⁷ On the first five decades of Soviet historiography the basic work still today is Konstantin F. Shteppa, *Russian Historians and the Soviet State* (New Brunswick, 1962) On early Soviet historical scholarship Barber's quoted work provides a comprehensive survey.

⁸⁸ David Brandenberger, *National Bolshevism: Stalinist Mass Culture and the Formation of Modern Russian*

German struggle and its leader, Stalin. The Secretary General himself established this connection in a radio speech on 7 November 1941, when he said, „May you be inspired in this war by the courageous figures of our great ancestors.”⁸⁹ Then the Soviet leader enumerated Nevskiy who won the battle against the Teutonic Order of Knights, Donskoy who beat the Tatars, Suvorov, the famous general of Catherine the great, and Kutuzov, Napoleon’s victorious adversary.

Classical communism — approximately 1949-1956 in East-Central Europe — exercised power by the constant assignments of tasks and the mobilization the population to solve them. The power of the centralized system was based on a constant intervention. The party intended to be present at every sphere of life, it represented itself an institution that knew all the problems, all their solutions and the duty of every citizen to reach the goals. Communist parties implemented the proper technique of mobilization in this context: the campaign. Campaigns were the form of mobilization that implied the close direction and observance of the centralized power.⁹⁰ The planned economy itself fulfilled this function. The ‘mobilization economy’ was considered a struggle against backwardness and the enemy. The construction of socialism was claimed to be a long military campaign.⁹¹ Quantities were defined to be reached and campaigns were introduced to raise enthusiasm. Communist parties launched ‘productivity competitions’ to increase industrial as well as agricultural production. The communist party capitalized on the ardent longing for activity also of women who had had limited opportunity to engage in public life before the war. The Democratic Federation of Hungarian Women (MNDSZ) which was instructed by the communist party headquarters organized women to deal with the most urgent everyday issues like rubble clearance or taking care of babies. Later the MNDSZ launched campaigns for subsidized holidays for children or for distributing Christmas gifts to those who lived in want. The federation also organized demonstrations on behalf of the prisoners of war. Women

National Identity, 1931-1956 (Cambridge, MA – London, 2002), pp. 29-58. Maureen Perry, *The Cult of Ivan the Terrible in Stalin’s Russia* (London – New York, 2001), pp. 85-105. Nicholas V. Riasanovsky, *The Image of Peter the Great in Russian History and Thought* (New York – Oxford, 1985), pp. 255-90.

⁸⁹ Nina Tumarkin, *The Living and the Dead* (New York, 1994), p. 63. See also Matthew P. Gallagher, *The Soviet History of World War II: Myths, Memories, and Realities* (Westport, 1976), pp. 52-7. Similar patterns evoked by propaganda when it described the defense of Sevastopol in 1941. Karl D. Qualls, ‘Accommodation and Agitation in Sevastopol: Redefining Socialist Space in the Postwar ‘City of Glory’ in *Socialist Spaces: Sites of Everyday Life in the Eastern Bloc*, eds.: David Crowley – Susan E. Reid (Oxford – New York, 2002), p. 27.

⁹⁰ István Rév, *Uncertainty as a Technique of the Exercise of Power* (manuscript, 1989), p. 10.

⁹¹ János Kornai, *The Communist System* (Princeton, 1992), p. 59.

were taken into the street in order to fight inflation and the black-market, too.⁹² In this way society was forced to live in a permanent activity which was focused on and directed towards the present.

In this socio-political order, 'culture and cultural work has to be conceived a major field and task of battle.', as a young communist functionary of the Ministry for People's Education clarified it on 27 January 1950, at the National Meeting for People's Education. Culture was seen neither a means of leisure nor self-training, but a weapon for the party in the struggle for communism, 'For us neither the dance movement, nor the choir movement, nor the theater movement, nor the puppet theaters are goals in themselves, for us all these movements – including all the means of cultural work from lectures to the eliminating of analphabetism – are weapons in our struggle for realizing and supporting the politics of our Party.'⁹³ In accordance with these principles the second congress of the Hungarian Workers' Party pronounced, 'It is a requirement that our writers and historians revive the glorious fights of the Hungarian people for instructing new generations how to live, work and fight for the independence of the Hungarian people.'⁹⁴ According to this decision the doyen of Hungarian Marxist historiography, Erik Molnár defined the purpose of the new Hungarian historical research as it follows, 'Finally, it has to be kept constantly in view that when we re-write Hungarian history according to the aforementioned principles, our task is not only to finally reconstruct the Hungarian past faithfully, but also and primarily is to support by the means of historiography the Hungarian present to prepare the Hungarian future, namely to construct socialism.'⁹⁵ On 6 June of the next year the scholar addressed the Hungarian congress of historians and spoke about the essence of science in socialism, 'It is a weapon in the struggle against enemies within and without and a force of education that teaches our people for true patriotism, proletarian internationalism and for a right application of lessons of the past. Hungarian Marxist historiography is an important ideological means of forming the socialist future.'⁹⁶ The same point was made in the

⁹² Andrea Pető, *Nőhistóriák. A politizáló magyar nők történetéből, 1945-1951* (Budapest, 1998), pp. 89., 107., 108.

⁹³ Géza Losonczy's address at the National Meeting for People's Education, 27 January 1950. György Kövér, *Losonczy Géza, 1917-1957* (Budapest, 1998), pp. 189-90.

⁹⁴ *Magyar Nemzet* (29 February, 1952), p. 5.

⁹⁵ Erik Molnár, 'A magyar történetírás a felszabadulás óta; eredményei, hiányosságai és legsürgősebb feladatai' (The State of The Art: The Achievements, Failures and Most Urgent Tasks of Hungarian Historiography after The Liberation) in *Társadalmi Szemle* 8 (January 1952), p. 55.

⁹⁶ *SZN* (7 June, 1953)

introduction of the first publication of a group that contained young historians, ‘The aim of all of their scholarly work is to contribute to the construction of socialism in our country.’⁹⁷

For communists, who considered their takeover the fulfillment of history, to demonstrate the continuity of communism in order to forecast the outcome of the historical process was not so important as to identify the pre-figurations of their system in the past.⁹⁸ For communism that focused on coping with current issues the purpose of the evocation of history was not merely a justification of its current measures, but rather a mobilization of the society. However, in order to point to a certain historical phenomenon as an example for the present the past had to be divided into clearly separated episodes which made it possible to identify similarities. Propaganda movies based on historical comparison became the characteristic genre of this mode of representation like the one called *I Defend the Homeland of Our People* (1955) The film adjusted the new people’s army to a constructed national tradition of wars for independence. The final scenes, however, did not depict the soldier of the People’s Army as simply a successor of the previous Hungarian freedom fighters. Emphasis was laid rather on how he could act similarly to his historical counterparts, that is to say, how he could serve the interest of the people in the present. Apart from images of military training the movie, therefore, demonstrated how the army helped the population during flood, how it participated in construction works or in harvest.⁹⁹ Communists

⁹⁷ Endre Gaál, *A szegedi munkásság harca a Tanácsköztársaságért, 1917-1919* (Budapest, 1956), p. 7. The conceived purpose of historical scholarship was well defined during the Molnár debate in 1950. Erik Molnár was a distinguished communist historian who composed an innovative interpretation of medieval Hungarian history based on the Marxian principles of historical laws of the productive forces. His work was strongly criticized by party officers that it did not serve the current fights of the party. József Litkei, *Borrowed Cloth*, MA Theses, Central European University (Budapest, 1999), pp. 52-5. See also *SZN* (7 November, 1951) and (6 June, 1953)

⁹⁸ Rudolf Bultmann, *History and Eschatology* (Edinburgh, 1975), pp. 38-73. In Marxist historical thinking studying the process of the past played a prophetic role of prediction. For as from the study of history the general laws of social development can be learned, the direction of the future can be safely and securely foreseen, as well. Karl Popper defined and, thereby, also rejected this view of human societies as historicist. Karl R. Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies* (London, 1966), esp. vol. 2 pp. 81-211. and *The Poverty of Historicism* (London – New York, 1986) Cf. Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (San Diego – New York - London, 1968), pp. 461-8. Albert Camus, *The Rebel* (New York, 1956), pp. 193-201. Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition* (Manchester, 1984) On Marx’s thinking on history see also Hayden White, *Metahistory* (Baltimore - London, 1973), pp. 281-330. The end of a linear history, similarly to how communists understood the process, was predicted by Francis Fukuyama for the last time. Albeit his work was born in different context, it reflects well the dialectic tradition that regards history to be directed to its final purpose. Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York – London, 1992)

⁹⁹ HL 5460-5461 The establishing new communist regimes of East-Central Europe could build their propaganda practice upon the features of Soviet films. The propaganda movie was a characteristic genre of classical communist systems, whereas their aim was to persuade the population to participate in the social and political efforts of the present government. The Bolshevik regime was among the first modern states to capitalize on the

represented the past not as a straightforward road leading to the present, but as a series of distinct and terminated episodes. This does not mean that history did not take the shape of narrative. The history of the First Soviet Republic was arranged into an easily recognizable narrative structure that was prescribed by ideological constraints.¹⁰⁰ Nevertheless, regarding their genre these narratives were Aesopian fables. An Aesopian fable is a distinct episode with a limited number of actors which is completed with a moral or practical lesson telling the reader what to do or what not to do. Although different stories could be written with the same set of actors they are the solely connection among these forms of narration. They can not be continued: no continuation derives from an ending that concludes with an axiom like, ‘It is better to gather food during the whole summer like an ant, than to waste your time with worthless pastime like a cricket.’

5

The ceremonies of the 30th anniversary made it possible to tangibly perceive and emotionally experience the image of the past and the demarcation of past and present. The celebrations lasted for two days. On 20 March cultural events were organized. At 10

vast opportunities of the new technology. Stalinist historical movies were born within this particular tradition. Historical films carried easily identifiable political messages like the anti-German sentiments in the Second World War product *Alexander Nevsky*. Peter Kenez, *Cinema and Soviet Society, 1917-1953* (Cambridge, 1992) Richard Taylor, *The Politics of the Soviet Cinema 1917-1929* (Cambridge, 1979) Albeit there is no comprehensive study on the interrelations of the genres of historical and propaganda films the following article provides some insights: Richard Taylor, ‘Red Stars, Positive Heroes and Personality Cults’ in *Stalinism and Soviet Cinema*, eds.: Richard Taylor and Derek Spring (London - New York, 1993), pp. 88. See also Graham Roberts, *Forward Soviet! History and Non-fiction Film in the USSR* (London - New York, 1999). Political regimes based upon the conception of the end of history tend to use historical films in this way. Richard Taylor, *Film Propaganda: Soviet Russia and Nazi Germany* (London - New York, 1998)

¹⁰⁰ It regularly began with the description of the influence of the Russian revolution in 1917 and the defeat in the war. According to the texts these hardships were completed with the deprivation of the workers’ rights, the despotism of the public administration and the general privation. All these aspects revolutionized the masses: peace demonstrations were held, the organization of the workers was increased and even workers’ councils (soviets) were formed. The authors generally stated that although the social democrats restrained the revolution the masses themselves attained their goal. A bourgeois revolutionary government, as it was put, was formed led by count Mihály Károlyi. The workers, however, wanted a socialist government and continued the demonstrations. The social democrat-bourgeois regime therefore arrested the communist leaders. This measure did not prevent the increase in support for the communists by the people. It became impossible to govern the country therefore the social democrats eventually agreed with the communist party on proclaiming the dictatorship of the proletariat. In the following sections the works generally described the measures taken by the Soviet Republic and the subsequent military operations. The fall of the regime was attributed to the numerical superiority of the enemy, however the contribution of the social democrats was never forgot to mention. The same narrative structure could be detected in history textbooks written for both primary and secondary schools. See Rákosi, *A Kommunizták Magyarországi Pártjának...*, Réti, *A Magyar Tanácsköztársaság* and *A Tanácsköztársaság 30. Évfordulója* and the textbooks: *Történelem VIII* and *Történelem IV*.

o'clock in the morning Árpád Szakasits, president of the republic inaugurated the memorial exhibition of the First Hungarian Soviet Republic, subsequently at noon the memorial table of Jenő Landler (commander in chief of the Hungarian Red Army) was unveiled on the occasion of the re-naming of a street. The primary aim of these two events was to familiarize the audience with the historical past, to make the knowledge obtained on the past public. Szakasits emphasized in his inaugural speech that the organizers had gathered the documents and mementos of the Hungarian Soviet Republic and the Communist Party of Hungary then urged, 'Let hundreds of thousand people visit this exhibition!'¹⁰¹ The audience of the inauguration of the memorial table, then, could learn about Jenő Landler, 'the brave, self-denying leader of the Hungarian working class' who 'played great role in the victories of the Hungarian Red Army and in the re-organization of the communist movement after the defeat of the Soviet Republic.'¹⁰² In contrast to these, on the day after on 21 March political ceremonies were carried out in which the leaders of the community manifested their relationship to the evoked event of the past. In the morning the Parliament, the highest representative organ of the nation pronounced definitely that it considered the First Hungarian Soviet Republic one of the most important occurrences of national history, 'The representatives of the parties organized themselves into the People's Front presented themselves in great number in the Monday meeting of the Parliament. The majority of the representatives took their seats in dark clothes and ceremonial mood.' After the commemorative words, 'The representatives of the parties of the People's Front celebrated on foot and with long applause the Soviet Republic and its proletarian heroes.'¹⁰³

The days of the ceremonies drew clear border between two kinds of commemorative acts. Whereas the program of the first day was able to establish knowledge on the past, the events of the second day manifested the will of the present to remember. The exhibition on 20 March and the inauguration of the memorial table were rituals that could describe, by the help of the representation of 'objective knowledge', the historical event as the object of scholarly investigation, which, therefore, belonged to the past and ceased to be an issue influencing political discussion, that is to say an issue of the present. The exhibition hall displays documents and photographs, that is to say facts, in rigidly arranged order, whereas the inauguration of the memorial table is the act

¹⁰¹ *SZN* (20 March, 1949)

¹⁰² *SZN* (22 March, 1949)

of presenting the past to the public after obtaining knowledge about it. Consequently, the border between the two days of events indicated also the border of past and present. The past was clearly separated from the present and the history of the First Hungarian Soviet Republic was represented as belonging to the definitely ended past. This did not mean, however, that the connection between past and present diminished. The president of the republic pointed out in his opening speech that, 'what began 30 years before is pursuing itself in complete glory now.'¹⁰⁴ Nonetheless, through the separation of the Soviet Republic as past and the will to remember of the present, the fact that their relationship was restored or created by the will of the present became to be able to emphasize. The representation of the past occurred on the less significant day, the day before the anniversary, in contrast with the manifestation of the intention of the present that happened on the peak of the celebrations, on 21 March. Thereby the real importance of events and deeds of the past came from the present.

Although the meeting of the Parliament in the morning 21 March was the first political manifestation that paid respect to the past, the ceremonial speech did not create any definite connection between history and the remembering community. Imre Nagy's address pointed at the heroism of the struggle for the working class and progress. He emphasized the grandness of the self-sacrificing fight against the numerical superiority, but he did not elaborate the relationship of this struggle with the present of the remembering community.¹⁰⁵ The ceremony in the morning was followed by the ritual that honored the martyrs of the Soviet Republic. Minister of Interior János Kádár inaugurated the sepulcher for the heroes of the dictatorship of the proletariat. The ceremony was orchestrated as a proper burial where posterity pays homage to its predecessors. The ceremonial meeting in the Parliament, which declared the first commune a glorious and self-sacrificial struggle, provided the context for the burial rite by clarifying that the successors finally could recognize the true significance of the past. The funeral ceremony, which places the dead in their appropriate context, closes the social and cultural process of death by marking an unambiguous border of living and dead. Fighters of the First Hungarian Soviet Republic were declared heroes, but also dead souls who eventually occupied their well-deserved places among the ancestors, 'Multitude of red flags were waving in the wind of early spring over the graves the

¹⁰³ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ *SZN* (20 March, 1949)

dumb dwellers of which testified their firm belief and faithfulness to the cause of the liberation of the workers when the red flags of revolution sank to the mud and the cruel white terror, the murderous counterrevolution raid over Hungary.’¹⁰⁶

The spatial and temporal order of the ceremony made a relationship that lacked the elements of descent between the postwar communist system and the first dictatorship of the proletariat a tangible experience. The first Hungarian commune did not appear as the cause or antecedents of the party-state born from the people’s democracy. The narrative of the ritual did not reveal the continuous story of historical origins and unraveling. During the anniversary festival the first Soviet regime was represented the *praefiguratio* of the communist state that was experienced as fulfillment, in which the characteristics of communism had already appeared, however only in premature and underdeveloped form and in no sense in a fulfilled way. Thus, the First Hungarian Soviet Republic, ‘in its brief existence acted according to the function and vocation of the dictatorship of the proletariat and according to what our people’s democracy having the function of the dictatorship of the proletariat creates in incommensurable inner and outer conditions, by the direction of incommensurably more developed and mature communist party, by the leadership of incommensurably more experienced communists.’¹⁰⁷

László Réti, director of the Institute for Party History had already summarized the views on the First Hungarian Soviet Republic in a study published in 1949. The historian’s conclusions represented the First Soviet Republic the pre-figuration of the currently reigning communist system,

The Soviet Republic, which was the Third Hungarian Republic, held the Russian Soviet State up as its model. Our people’s democracy, which is the Fourth Hungarian Republic, thanks not only its existence to the Soviet Union, but the secure basis and support of its independence and peace is the great Soviet Union and its wise leader, Stalin.

The Red Army of the Soviet Republic fought with weapons against the imperialism of the entente. The army of our people’s democracy guards in arms our independence and freedom and it is the guarantee of our peaceful construction work.

The Soviet Republic appropriated the land, the factories and the banks. Our people’s democracy proceeds surely towards the entire liquidation of exploitation and the creation of the socialist society by the realization of land-reform and the

¹⁰⁵ SZN (22 March, 1949) On Nagy’s speech see Rainer, *Imre Nagy*, vol. 1., p. 376.

¹⁰⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ Réti, *A Magyar Tanácsköztársaság*, p. 27.

development of the farmers' co-operative movement, and by the nationalization of the banks and factories.

The Soviet Republic took care of raising the level of welfare of the workers. Our people's democracy regularly raises the standard of living of the workers and guarantees their cultural improvement by re-building the ruined country, by the creation of good currency, by the execution of the three years plan of country building and by the realization of the new five years plan of the national economy.¹⁰⁸

The problem of postwar communists with their origins was very similar to the trouble of early Christianity: how to distance the new faith from its predecessors without denying the connection. The crucial question for early Church fathers of Christianity was to prove the historical uniqueness of their new faith. In order to accomplish this, the first task was to tear apart from the origins of the new religion, Judaism. The uniqueness and superiority of Christianity was demonstrated basically by that their apostles clarified that it had been born exclusively due to Jesus Christ's deeds in this world and it had derived in no ways from its Old Testament past. Although this past was worthy of being venerated and commemorated, but between that and the present there existed a fundamental rupture, and the old times were merely pre-figurations of the historically unique events of today. For Christian theological thinking the inclusion of the Old Testament into the Scripture, that documented the Jewish tradition before the birth of Jesus, was justified by the fact that it provided a pre-figuration and precedent for the one and only story of Redemption. Events and prophecies included in the Old Testament foreshadowed on a lower level and in an imperfect shape the fulfillment of the Divine Plan embodied in the story of Jesus Christ. Events and institutions originated from the time of the Old Testament were interpreted the archaic patterns of the comparable occurrences of the New Testament that end on a higher level in the life of Jesus.¹⁰⁹ Apostle Paul stated it clearly in one of his letters where he claimed that the forty days wandering of the Jews in the desert had foreshadowed the challenges waited for early Christian communities. Early Church fathers interpreted the story of Jonah in a similar way as the praefiguratio of the sufferings of the Messiah. In this sense, the three days that the prophet of the Old Testament spent in the stomach of the whale foreshadowed and copied the three days wandering of Christ in Hell between the Crucifixion and

¹⁰⁸ Réti, *A Magyar Tanácsköztársaság*, p. 25.

¹⁰⁹ See Amos Funkenstein, 'Collective Memory and Historical Consciousness', *History and Memory* 2 (Summer, 1989), p. 14. On the historical consciousness in the Bible see also: Karl Löwith, *Meaning in History* (Chicago, 1949), pp.

Resurrection.¹¹⁰ The true message of the Bible is the New Testament, the real significance of which becomes visible through the *praefiguratio* appeared in the Old Testament. From the Christian point of view, the stories of the Jews are important only because these forecasted and prepared – *preparatio evangelica* – the fundamental plan of God to redeem humankind.¹¹¹ According to the tradition of biblical exegesis the New Testament is the key for the Old Testament or, in other words, in the Old Testament there is the New hidden and in the New Testament the Old reveals itself.¹¹² The essential element of typologic comparison is not the synchronic co-ordinate relation. The connection of typos and antitypos is temporal: it is based upon the juxtaposition of beginning and end that leads to hierarchical relation¹¹³ which, in turn, depicts historical pre-figurations. The *praefiguratio* as a historiographical figure generates a picture of the past that has a peculiar impact on the present: this mode of depiction represents the state of the present perfect, desirable and final.

In these conditions the only justified way of remembering the past was if it could contribute to carry out the appropriate acts in the context of the present, ‘The glorious, never-ending memory of the Hungarian Soviet Republic, the first Hungarian dictatorship of the proletariat unceasingly inspire us for further strengthening the second, invincible power of the proletariat, the People’s Republic of Hungary, for building socialism, for defending our peace and fatherland.’¹¹⁴ The aim of remembering was well reflected in the slogans issued for the 30th anniversary. A few of them referred back to history and connected it to current tasks, ‘In the glorious spirit of the Soviet Republic and led by the working class we construct the socialist Hungary!’ or ‘Following the revolutionary traditions of the glorious Hungarian Red Army we strengthen our people’s army which is the guard of the power of the workers and of the independence of our nation!’ and ‘We have learnt from 1919: traitors, agents of the enemy have no place in the party of the working class! We keep the worker-peasant alliance as the apple of our eye!’ Others emphasized the agenda of the present occasionally even without a vague reference to the Soviet Republic, ‘Forward for the

¹¹⁰ Michael André Bernstein, *Foregone Conclusions: Against Apocalyptic History* (Berkeley – Los Angeles – London, 1994), p. 3.

¹¹¹ Bultmann, *History and Eschatology*. On the problem see also Carlo Ginzburg, ‘Distance and Perspective: Two Metaphors’ in his *Wooden Eyes* (New York, 2001), pp. 143-8.

¹¹² Northop Frye, *The Great Code: The Bible and Literature* (London, 1982)

¹¹³ Gerhard von Rad, ‘Typological Interpretation of the Old Testament’ in *Essays in Old Testament Hermeneutics*, ed.: C. Westermann (Richmond, 1963), pp. 17-39.

victory of socialism under Lenin's and Stalin's flag!' or 'Long live the Hungarian Workers' Party and its leader: the hero commissar of the Soviet Republic, Mátyás Rákosi!'¹¹⁵ The political instructions in the proposal for the 30th anniversary capitalized on the occasion to enumerate the tasks the party and the people's democracy were facing to after stating that the regime followed the way of the First Hungarian Soviet Republic, 'The people's democracy is proceeding surely on the way of constructing socialism by healing the wounds caused by the war and fascism, by mercilessly oppressing the enemies of the people, by raising the productivity of work to a level unreachable in capitalism, by a gradual realization of the social production in the agriculture that is a precondition of constructing socialism, by unifying the whole working people in the New Front of Independence for peaceful construction and for bellicose defense of the homeland.' As a final conclusion, however, it was stated that, 'The guarantee of further advance in the way of socialism is our party that was reinforced powerfully by the latest revision in the membership and leads the Hungarian working people under Lenin's and Stalin's flag headed by Mátyás Rákosi, the hero commissar of the First Soviet Republic.'¹¹⁶

These slogans were bound to concrete experiences, when minister of interior, János Kádár proclaimed in the mourning ceremony of the executed leaders of the First Hungarian Soviet Republic in the Kerepesi cemetery, 'We have to remain faithful to the working people, to the working class as they were. We have to be courageous and act without hesitation as they did. We have to be relentless towards the enemies of the working class in the way the bourgeoisie was towards them.' Imperatives of action were articulated also on the occasion of inaugurating the memorial tablet of Jenő Landler, commander-in-chief of the Red Army in 1919. The speaker stated that, 'We honor Jenő Landler's bellicose revolutionary memory in the best way by further strengthening our party, increasing the power and readiness for struggle of the people.'¹¹⁷

The commemorations of the 30th anniversary culminated with no doubt at the last event, the ceremonial meeting of party activists of Greater Budapest. Mátyás Rákosi's personal presence who was counted obviously the first leader of the country at that time definitely indicated this. The formal participation of the secretary general was

¹¹⁴ *SZN* (21 March, 1953)

¹¹⁵ MOL 276/54/34

¹¹⁶ MOL 276/54/28

¹¹⁷ *SZN* (22 March, 1949)

confined only to this event. Meanwhile the relationship with the past was becoming more obvious the delay of its declaration increased further the tension of expectation. 'The benches of the Hall of Sports have already filled at around half past four, half an hour before the beginning of the ceremonial meeting of the party workers organized by the Party Committee of Greater Budapest of the HWP. Everybody knows each other, everybody knows the songs: the crowd is singing constantly until five o'clock. The huge hall decorated with images of comrades Lenin, Stalin, Rákosi, Landler, Szamuely, Togliatti, Mao-Tse-Tung, Thorez sounds the marches of the Hungarian Soviet Republic'¹¹⁸ Tension came to its peak soon, 'At five o'clock comrade Rákosi, Szakasits, the Central Committee, the communist members of the government, the fighters of the Soviet Republic, the leaders of the Party Committee of Greater Budapest enter the hall. Comrade György Marosán deputy of the secretary general opens the ceremonial meeting that greets comrade Rákosi and then members of the Politbüro and leaders of the Soviet Republic with György Nyisztor people's commissar of agriculture of the Soviet Republic who was sitting next to comrade Rákosi respectively with rhythmic applause.' First speaker Marosán who turned to communist from social-democrat party member made one step towards the definition of the relationship when he pointed at that, 'we do not only celebrate the First Hungarian Soviet Republic, but also consider it a guidance and example.' At the same time, although the answer was getting more taken for granted, he still withheld to explain why the present could turn towards the past for obtaining instruction. The utterance of the long protracted answer eventually waited for László Rudas, old well-known member and important ideologue of the communist movement. The ceremonial meeting of party workers clarified that the crossing of the border between past and present could be executed only by the communist party. 'As what was the First Hungarian Soviet Republic if not the first act of what we are doing today?', the speaker posed the poetic question. Apart from the rhetorical effect the sentence conveyed an important message. Rudas clarified that the ground of turning towards the past was provided by the deeds of the present. In this regard the meeting of party workers was the ritual counterpart of the inauguration of the sepulcher few hours before. Whereas in the Kerepesi cemetery the past, the First Hungarian Soviet Republic was buried, in the Hall of Sports the dictatorship of the proletariat was resurrected and situated into the present by the will of the Hungarian Workers' Party. During this last

¹¹⁸ *SZN* (22 March 1949)

ritual loaded with exceptional emotions the hierarchical relationship of past and present and the primacy of the present became a tangible experience. The image of the First Hungarian Soviet Republic as the pre-figuration of the second, an image of the past that boosts enthusiasm for activism in the present, an enthusiasm that provides identity for party workers was spectacularly lived through. This experience of the tangibility of the past made the historical representation credible and, thereby, authentic.

Resurrection

1

It is very likely that the new communist regime, which succeeded the suppression of the revolution in October 1956, evoked for the first time the events of 1919 in the 21 November issue of the official daily. That day the editors published a letter, which had allegedly been sent to the government by an old worker. The author of this letter first gave an account of his life spent within the labor movement since 1917. The worker wrote about his sufferings and privation during the previous regime then recollected the happy years followed the end of the war. The author of the letter then condemned the pre-1956 communist leadership for distancing itself from the workers and their real life. He concluded that although the behavior of the party elite contributed to the outburst of the rightful discontent in late October 1956, this was very soon appropriated by the 'bloody counterrevolution'. Although, considering the fact that the worker's memories reflected the ideal communist interpretation of history as well as the official depiction of the revolt in 1956 taking shape at that time, it is very probable that the 'old worker' was an editorial invention, 'he' created a remarkable historical parallel when in conclusion 'he' called the attention of 'his' comrades to the peril, 'Remember the bloody and cruel counterrevolution of 1919. Remember how many thousands and thousands of our innocent fellow workers and comrades met their death as martyrs, how many widows and orphans mourned their breadwinners and over long years how madly we were persecuted. Wake up, get on your feet again and defend the socialist power of the workers.'¹¹⁹

The 'worker's' letter was published in the same issue of the party's official daily, the *Népszabadság* (People's Freedom), which also printed an account about the siege of the headquarters of the Greater Budapest Party Committee in Republic square (Köztársaság tér), edited in parallel columns as the 'old man's' warning. On 30 October 1956, various armed groups initiated a common attack against the building located on the Republic square driven dominantly by the belief that the party's office was a centre of the Security Police. Most probably, the insurgents started the assault when shots were first fired at them from the party building. The struggle eventually was decided when an

armored military unit sent from a provincial city to defend the communist headquarters arrived to the square and by fault ruined the party building instead of firing at the attackers. After the occupation of the building, most of the defenders were executed and some of them were lynched.¹²⁰

The event of the siege developed into crucial evidence in the construction of the counterrevolution during the autumn 1956. János Kádár, the president of the Revolutionary Worker-Peasant Government, who returned to Budapest in the dawn of 7 November, provided the example of 'when the headquarters of the Budapest Party Committee in Republic square was shot by cannons' as a crucial evidence supporting his assessment of the beginnings of the 'white terror' in his radio speech transmitted on 11 November.¹²¹ Kádár used the event of the siege to prove the presence of counterrevolution in the resurrection in his radio speech. The first secretary clearly stated at one of the first meetings of the Provisional Executive Committee (21 November) that 30 October had been the start of the counterrevolutionary assault.¹²² During the following days and party meetings (23 and 24 November) the first secretary kept on to claim that after 30 October the uprising had been a pure counterrevolution.¹²³

The reasoning behind the establishment of the Revolutionary Worker-Peasant Government was based on the conviction that in the Fall 1956 the danger of the 'counterrevolution' was significant in Hungary, meanwhile Imre Nagy's government was unable to resist this threat, what is more this resistance was believed impossible unless the Soviet troops would intervene. János Kádár, hence, returned to Budapest with the intention to eliminate the 'counterrevolution'. He was persuaded on the impossibility of avoiding military intervention in Moscow between 2 and 4 November, while his negotiations with the Soviet party leaders convinced him to personally take the presidency of the puppet-government legitimating the step.¹²⁴ Kádár forecasted the following gloomy vision on the future as an alternative of his government in his 11 November radio address, 'following the path of Imre Nagy's government leading to

¹¹⁹ NSZ (21 November, 1956), p. 4.

¹²⁰ As a matter of fact, several of the executed defenders miraculously survived. The best account of the siege is László Eörsi, *Köztársaság tér, 1956* (Budapest, 2006). See also Péter Gosztonyi, 'A Köztársaság téri ostrom és a kazamaták mítosza', *Budapesti Negyed* 5 (Autumn 1994), pp. 48-80.

¹²¹ OSA 300/40/1/1299 Hungarian Monitoring (11 November, 1956), pp. 981-2.

¹²² MSZMP Vol. 1 p. 77.

¹²³ Meeting of the Provisional Executive Committee 23 November, 1956 and the meeting of the Provisional Central Committee 24 November, 1956 MSZMP Vol. 1 p. 96.

¹²⁴ Tibor Huszár, *Kádár János politikai életrajza 1912-1956*. Vol. 1. (Budapest, 2003), pp. 329-348.

collapse, insisting on the withdrawal of Soviet troops, we'll only observe impotently that counterrevolutionary white-terror massacre the active masses of communist workers, peasants, intellectuals, then those sympathize with communists, and finally all democratic patriots in whole Budapest, then in the countryside. Then the counterrevolution will throw Imre Nagy's as well as all other governments based on democratic cooperation away in order to establish a pure counterrevolutionary government.¹²⁵ The new communist leadership was forged together by the common shared conviction of counterrevolutionary danger and the impotency of the Nagy government.

Nonetheless, during the first months following the suppression of the revolution, the new party leadership was featured by uncertainty concerning the actual interpretation of the 'counterrevolution' and, therefore, in this respect, it was far from being homogenous. On the one hand, the spectacle of the masses of people took part in the revolutionary demonstration, whose legitimacy was admitted even by the old and the new party elite, remained an influential experience. For Kádár himself, who participated in the work of the Imre Nagy government until 31 October, his personal encounters with workers who joined the revolt meant a life-long experience. Kádár expounded his related concerns even to his Soviet partners after accepting the military oppression of the revolution, 'I would like to tell one thing: the whole people moved together. The people does not want to eliminate the people's democratic system.'¹²⁶ The first secretary maintained his ambivalent assessment on the revolution up until the meeting of the Provisional Executive Committee on 11 November, 'In the moment of the outbreak of the armed insurrection, it seemed clearly a counterrevolutionary movement. Later, when we saw that, especially in the countryside, huge working masses, workers, miners, etc., moved with such demands, apart from social welfare demands, the withdrawal of the Soviet troops, the elimination of forced agricultural submission, which cannot be called counterrevolutionary demands.'¹²⁷ On the other hand, numerous leaders feared of the repetition of the voluntaristic terror of the Rákosi-regime against communist party members, which many of them – Kádár, György Marosán, György Aczél – had personally witnessed.

The party leadership during these early post-revolutionary months disagreed

¹²⁵ OSA 300/40/1/1299 Hungarian Monitoring (11 November, 1956), p. 983.

¹²⁶ Huszár, *Kádár*. Vol. 1., p. 344.

even on the policy to be carried out. Originally, members of the executive committee, anti-Stalinist but not revisionist communists close to János Kádár – György Aczél, Lajos Fehér, Antal Gyenes, József Kőböl, Sándor Nógrádi -, who inclined to negotiations, represented a majority. Although for Kádár, the possession of actual power was a decisive question since the beginning, consequently the resolute elimination of the positions of the workers' councils and the non-party opposition, in the first half of November he would have not minded if negotiations had made a way for the political solution.¹²⁸ The new communist government appropriated the ability to provide deliverance, but wanted to let the path of forgetting open for 'hoaxed, but otherwise sincere people', too.

The event of the siege of the party headquarters could serve at the same time as an evidence for the alleged 'counterrevolutionary danger' communists recognized in the revolt and an opportunity to maintain that many of the participants were actually 'honest workers' deceived by the counterrevolution. During the description of the happenings the article in the 21 November issue of the official daily generally avoided to use the term 'counterrevolutionaries' or 'counterrevolution'. It called the fighters by the relatively neutral name 'armed men' or simply 'crowd'. The almost one page long report emphasized the preparedness of the attackers. It also stressed the cruelty of the siege: firstly the author called the attention to the fact that the negotiators who had been sent by the defenders had been murdered. Then the article described in details how the mostly unarmed defenders who had been still living had been executed by the attackers. At first they were beaten then a colonel was hanged up side down, petrol was spilled on him and was set on fire. The newspaper did not forget to mention that even the barber of the party headquarters was killed because he was regarded a communist. Although the article was not convinced that the attack consciously aimed at overthrowing the socialist system, it called the attention to the fact that eventually the fight weakened the workers' power. The author concluded that, 'armed white terrorists and misled rebels actually organized a cruel blood-bath against the faithful sons of the labor movement.'¹²⁹ János Kádár represented a two-stage history of the counterrevolution, with the siege in the

¹²⁷ MSZMP 26.

¹²⁸ Melinda Kalmár, *Ennivaló és hozomány* (Budapest, 1998), pp. 20-25. János M. Rainer, *Nagy Imre. Politikai életrajz*. Vol. 2. 1953-1958 (Budapest, 1999), p. 375. In the 11 November meeting of the Provisional Executive Committee the possibility of negotiations even with Imre Nagy was raised. Éva Ständeisky, *Az írók és a hatalom 1956-1963* (Budapest, 1996), p. 114.

¹²⁹ 'Mi történt a Köztársaság téren' (What Happened at the Republic square) NSZ (21 November, 1956), p. 4.

Republic square as a turning point, even on 1 December during his negotiations with Soviet party emissaries, 'The days between 23 and 30 October were characterized by that the counterrevolutionary elements abused for their own purposes the just and instinctual discontent of the working masses. In the second stage – 31 October – 4 November – the reaction already attacks on broad front in the country. The killing of communists, progressive workers, the staff of state defense and the police is openly carried out.'¹³⁰ This interpretation corresponded to the personal story of the first secretary: he stated that his participation in the revolt had lasted until he had believed he had stood rightly by the demands of the workers, while the widespread expansion of the counterrevolution had forced him to leave the Imre Nagy government.

In this context the events of 1919 were evoked to serve as tangible argument and warning for the threat of counterrevolution. The party's official daily printed a report in its 28 November 1956 edition about Western publications concerning the 'counterrevolution' under the heading 'In Hungary the memory of the Horthy-putsch of 1919 is haunting'.¹³¹ The text of the title came from the reportage of the AFP French news agency that according to the communist daily had informed its audience in this way on 31 October 1956. The party's newspaper relied on the report of the British Reuters in summarizing the essence of the uprising, 'The uprising slipped through into a situation when the victory of those elements that are acting for the Horthy-restoration is not at all impossible. Man hunting has been pursued on the streets of Budapest since yesterday. Scenes that remind us the return of the whites in 1919 are happening throughout the entire country.' The article concluded, however, that, 'The Hungarian people is fed up with the 25 years wallowing of the counterrevolution came into power in 1919. It won't swallow that again.'

The interpretive context of the First Hungarian Soviet Republic did not change significantly in the first months followed the oppression of the 1956 revolution. It was evoked to understand crucial issues in the history of socialism, this time particularly the case of the 'counterrevolution'. As an analogy, the memory of 1919 was constantly available for party members of all variants of the communist belief. In the summer of

¹³⁰ Huszár, *Kádár János politikai életrajza 1957. november-1989. június*. Vol. 2. (Budapest, 2003), p. 21.

¹³¹ NSZ (28 November, 1956) See also *Népkarat* (18 December, 1956) I have found statements on the white terror from Western Europe exclusively in the communist press. See e. g. 'Der Weisse Terror in Ungarn', *Volkstimme* (20 November, 1956), 'Die Konterrevolution in Ungarn 1919 und 1956', *Österreichische Volkstimme* (20 November, 1956), '...a virtual White Terror reminiscent of 1919, wiping out the flower of Hungary's working class movement...', *Daily Worker* (7 November, 1956)

1956, discussing the experiences of the debate of the Petőfi Circle on the situation of the press, the anti-Stalinist György Aczél was afraid of the sharpening of the tensions and a 'new '19'.¹³² On 26 October, in the meeting of the Central Leadership, Stalinist secretary and Rákosi's close collaborator, István Kovács attacked the Imre Nagy government by arguing that it would fulfill a role similar to the Peidl government of August 1919, that succeeded the communist regime with the hope of maintaining a social democratic system, but soon overthrown by white forces.¹³³ The evoking of the First Hungarian Soviet Republic occurred in the strict context of the coming to terms with the events of the revolution in 1956. The relationship towards the past was based on the conditions of similarity, whereas history was represented as parallel phenomena. Consequently, the representation of 1919 reflected the interpretations of 1956.

By early December, however, a considerable shift occurred in the interpretation of 1956. At that time, it became clear for the new party leadership and personally to János Kádár, as well, that the repression was unavoidable. First of all, there was nobody to negotiate with: neither the communist reformers gathered around Imre Nagy, nor the non-communist intellectual opposition, nor the workers' council accepted the Kádár government as legitimate and were reluctant to engage in discussions with it. It also became clear that the re-organization of communist power could be based dominantly upon the re-activating former Stalinist party cadres and the Soviet leadership urging the tough repression of the resistance. Kádár eventually let the Soviet pressure to prevail and began to stress the aspects of conscious preparations and conspiracy in the interpretation of 1956.¹³⁴

In December the Provisional Central Committee prepared a decision on the causes and nature of the happenings in October 1956. The proposition that was discussed on the days 2 and 3 December stated that the white terror had appeared openly without masks in the assault against the Budapest party headquarters.¹³⁵ Kádár agreed with the formulation and added that the counterrevolution had always been a hidden possibility in the uprising, however, on 30 October the attack against the party meant a

¹³² Sándor Révész, *Aczél és korunk* (Budapest, 1997), p. 54.

¹³³ Standeisky, *Az írók és a hatalom*, p. 43.

¹³⁴ Rainer, *Nagy Imre*. Vol. 2., pp. 375-7. Huszár, *Kádár*. Vol. 2., pp. 20-5.

¹³⁵ MSZMP Vol. 1 p. 215.

direct evidence for the counterrevolutionary essence of the events.¹³⁶ Thus, the decision that was accepted on 5 December 1956 pronounced that the counterrevolution that had been masked itself before 30 October had organized the massacre openly at the party building. It stated, however, that the counterrevolution had also been present before and basically directed the occurrences.¹³⁷

Thereby the attack lost its unintended character and became the malicious act of well-prepared counterrevolutionary troops. The new communist government published its official interpretation about the revolution in 1956 in so called White Books. The first volume of the total of five booklets was issued in December not a very long time after the events themselves. The publication strongly stated that the uprising had been a counterrevolution, namely a resolute attack directed against the institutions of the People's Democracy. The introduction claimed that the leading force of the people's power was the party of the working class, therefore the persecution against communists evidently proved the reactionary aspirations of the rebels. The white book mentioned the siege of the Budapest party headquarters as the major sign of the counterrevolution.¹³⁸ Communist perceived the siege a genuine anti-Communist attack that was the equivalent of an attempt to destroy the fundamental institutions of the regime.

After the suppression of the armed revolt, the communist government soon started to gather the evidence of the counterrevolution. They accumulated a large number of photographs among the numerous testimonies and articles. A sizable proportion of them were shot by Western photo reporters who stayed in Budapest during the days of the revolution and were published in such important journals as Time, Life, Paris Match or the Spiegel.¹³⁹ The way the communist observers, who compiled the history of the counterrevolution, saw¹⁴⁰ these documentation is eloquently reflected by the first volume of the white books. What dominates the leaflet even at first sight is the terrifying spectacle of physical violence. On the pictures of the volume bodies beaten,

¹³⁶ MSZMP Vol. 1 p. 144.

¹³⁷ MSZMP Vol. 1 p. 239.

¹³⁸ WB Vol. 1 p. 5.

¹³⁹ István Rév, *Retroactive Justice: Prehistory of Post-Communism* (Stanford, 2005), pp. 246-7.

¹⁴⁰ 'Seeing' like reading has its own historicity, it is itself also a socio-cultural product. On the historical methodology of examining 'seeing': Randolph Starn, 'Seeing Culture in a Room for a Renaissance Prince' in Lynn Hunt (ed.), *The New Cultural History* (Berkeley, 1989), pp. 205-32. Reinhart Koselleck, 'Modernity and the Planes of Historicity' in his *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time* (Cambridge MA – London, 1985), pp. 3-20. Carlo Ginzburg, 'Distance and Perspective: Two Metaphors' in his *Wooden Eyes: Nine Reflections on Distance* (New York, 2001), pp. 139-56. A general methodological introduction is provided by Peter Burke, *Eyewitnessing: The Uses of Images as Historical Evidence* (London, 2001)

tortured, executed and dismembered appear one by one. Undoubtedly, the one, which depicts a young soldier with naked chest hanged up-side-down, belongs to the most influential ones. (image) The gaze of the viewer is attracted immediately by the body situated in the vertical axis of the picture, which completely occupies it from up to down. Only the subsequent gaze recognizes the figures standing in the background of the illustration. A few of the people watching the hanged victim, others are talking to each other or paying their attention to a view outside the frame of the picture. The chief element of the story represented by the photography is clearly the tortured and hanged body. The event the picture wanted to narrate is not the active action of the lynching, but rather its frozen result: the dismembered body. Cruelty made impersonal and atemporal this way was transformed into the depiction of barbarity concealed in the depth of human soul, but erupted on the surface this time. The image that was made on corpses of fallen soldiers laid down in a row reached similar effect. (image)

No human figure can be seen besides the dead on the picture, so the cause of death remains hidden. Human activity is not in the centre in this case, only its result. The photography that depicts the corpses of the executed in a perspectival point of view evokes the image of parallels leading to infinity: the viewer may expect the continuation of this spectacle of dead. The photo that represents the impersonal fact of mass devastation is the metaphor of murderous cruelty. The stories told by the images attempted to depict violence in an abstract, allegorical manner: the picture that was made on a group assaulting a woman focused on the lady lying on the ground. (image) The gaze of the viewer is attracted to the center also by the white blouse of the woman, which stands out of the grey-black background. The viewer, thus, first encountered the fact of cruelty: the woman's body is surrounded by legs kicking her and hands torturing her arms. The picture, nonetheless, remains impersonal: neither the woman's nor the attackers' faces are visible. In fact, the members of the group committing the atrocity appear on the depiction merely under the waist as a mass of bodily members directly carrying out the violence. At the same time, the composition is loaded with symbolic meanings related to gender: the woman in white dress evoked concepts of defenseless innocence, whereas the dark dressed male figures surrounding her represented images of wild violence hiding in man. The spectacle of pure cruelty dominated the publication: the thin leaflet printed 27 pictures depicting executions, corpses and atrocities on its 62 pages. Any logic among the photographs besides repetition is hard to detect: individual

illustrations showed newer and newer instances of cruelty. The recurrent images of violence strengthened the impression of arbitrary mercilessness flooding everywhere. Violence let loose without any purpose evoked the notion of uncivilized barbarity. The crowd raging wildly did not put mercy on women and 'dismembered bestially'¹⁴¹ its victims: one of the photographs was shot on a naked upper body without head and arms. (image)

The volume, however, clearly localized these manifestations of human cruelty. Almost half of the pictures published in the white book (12 from the total of 27) were shot by the siege of the headquarters of the Budapest party committee in Republic square. According to that perception the first chapter was devoted to expound the 'counterrevolutionary attack against the headquarters of the Budapest party committee of the Hungarian Workers' Party'. The description began by calling the attention to that the siege on 30 October meant the start of the general charge of the counterrevolution against the communist party which aimed at overthrowing the people's democracy and restoring the capitalist system. It also stated that the attack was a tactical turn: the counterrevolutionaries who masked themselves previously got on the stage openly this time. This was proved by their merciless massacre of the caught communist defenders. The booklet provided detailed description of the execution and torture of the captured persons. The manslaughter began by the shot of the negotiators,

Those leaving the house were received by a volley. Comrade Mező (the secretary of the Budapest party committee and of the negotiators) wanted to persuade the attackers that the attack and further bloodshed was senseless. It could not come to that since all of the three persons were shot. Then the attackers crowding in tortured and murdered with horrific cruelty those who were inside. The persons in uniform, army officers, policemen, regulars doing their active military service in the Security Police most of whom were worker- or peasant-boys around twenty years were hanged on the trees at the Republic square, some of them were beheaded after hanging others' hearts were cut out. Imre Mező, the secretary of the Greater Budapest party committee died this way. The executioners cut out the heart of Colonel János Asztalos, the old, respected fighter of the labor movement here. Colonels Papp and Szabó were killed then. Péter Lakatos, teacher of the party school was shot also here. More than twenty sons of the Hungarian people were victimized by the massacre at the Republic square.¹⁴²

As the assault against the Budapest party building, which was characterized as an extremely brutal event, meant the crucial evidence for the construction of the

¹⁴¹ WB Vol. 1 p. 17., inscription reads: 'A victim whose corpse was bestially dismembered.'

counterrevolution, descriptions of the subsequent occurrences of the revolt also focused on violence. The official publication was convinced that after the fall of the party headquarters the capital became the terrain of uncontrolled violence. It was emphasized that the city was subjected under shameless killers who did not take too much care about who to be executed. The booklet published confessions of witnesses. One of them told that,

I witnessed the following event on 31 October, 1956 standing at the corner of the Lenin boulevard and 7 November square in Budapest: somebody shouted to a man walking on the pavement in opposite to the Művész cinema at Lenin boulevard: 'You're a Security Policeman!'. The crowd charged the person in question who wore khaki coloured trousers and a tracksuit blouse with the color of the Dózsa sports-club (violet) and began to assault him. Taking the advantage of the tumult produced this way somebody put a cable coiled up from wire around the neck of the captured man. By its mean the already unconscious person was hanged on the tree in front of the hardware shop at the corner of the Lenin Boulevard and the Aradi Street. A board was hung on the neck of the murdered person with the following inscription: 'Tóth Security Police captain. That is the fate of every security policemen.'¹⁴³

The book then gave an account on a group that occupied flats in Budapest on 2 and 3 November to carry out executions with poisoned syringe. It also wrote about a commander of the rebels who had always been drunk and ordered to shoot onto any kind of targets. The publication quoted a sixteen-years old boy who got involved within a counterrevolutionary group,

I got to a captain in civil dress and usually went to pay off with Security Policemen and communists to given addresses. Once we went to the third floor of a house near to Hotel Royal to an address. Our captain told us that we went to a Security Policeman. We found him at home together with his wife and six years old daughter. The captain first beat the policeman up then tore his ears off and cut his nose with scissors. Then he let a volley into him. In the meantime the policeman's wife tried to run away, but one of the members of our group brought her down with one shot. Then – though we were thinking on what to do with the small girl – we killed her, too.¹⁴⁴

According to the official interpretation even the countryside got into the hands of the bloody counterrevolution. The book published numerous reports on beatings of party secretaries, leaders of agricultural co-operatives or executions of policemen and old communists. The editors pointed out that the arrest of communist functionaries and the

¹⁴² WB Vol. 1 p. 19.

¹⁴³ WB Vol. 1 p. 25.

¹⁴⁴ WB Vol. 1 pp. 27-8.

preparation of execution lists were general. For instance, the head of the council of Mezőtárkány village was assaulted seriously: the man's lung was severely hurt and two of his ribs fractured. Even his nine years old son was beaten. The booklet contained an account on the happenings in Miskolc, as well. On 3 November five police officers were assaulted and hanged on the Soviet memorial in the industrial city of Miskolc.¹⁴⁵

Terrorist violence remained the fundamental element of the representation of the counterrevolution in the next months. The Budapest Central Police Station began to prosecute 'terrorist actions' committed during the revolt and reported on fifty assaults, robberies and murders on 14 December 1956.¹⁴⁶ The *Népszabadság*, the party's official daily gave an account on the murder of a communist commander, Sándor Sziklai and his father-in-law, 'The old communist was beaten to death. Then Sándor Sziklai's corpse was carried out to the street; his dead body was kicked and abused by the mob. They were shouting and searching the wife of comrade Sziklai. They cried that the woman would go next to her husband. Then the flat was ravaged and robbed. Vandal destruction and walls splashed with blood mark the hands of counterrevolutionary evildoers.'¹⁴⁷ When the *Népakarat* (People's Will) reported on the trial of one of the main leaders of the rebels, József Dudás it emphasized that the defendant had got engaged himself with anti-Communism as a Horthyst spy and agent provocateur. It was also stated that the man had been arrested in 1946 because of counterrevolutionary plot. The article mentioned that Dudás's men had put to the sword three persons in front of a department store among other murders. One of his deputies led a special commando that was charged with searching for communists to arrest them. The report claimed that the arrested then had been tortured and some of them had been executed.¹⁴⁸ On 10 February 1957 the *Népszabadság* published a long report on the lynch law in Miskolc. In the industrial city seven persons were killed. Two of them were hanged on the Soviet war memorial after having been tortured and a third person was thrown out of the balcony of the town hall. In search for a proper attribute to classify the bloody events the journalist evoked a historical comparison. The article stated that, 'A sadist massacre was carried out on 26 and 27 October in Miskolc like what can be done only by fascists.'¹⁴⁹ (Fascists

¹⁴⁵ WB Vol. 1 pp. 37-49.

¹⁴⁶ MOL M-BP-1 1956-57/27

¹⁴⁷ NSZ (5 December, 1956)

¹⁴⁸ *Népakarat* (20 January, 1957)

¹⁴⁹ NSZ (10 February, 1957)

usually meant Hitler's followers in the communist speech.) Nonetheless, the author did not claim that the killers were fascists. The executions of the policemen were perceived so extraordinary by the communist observers that they consider the ordinary language inappropriate to outline the case, 'Deliberate manslaughter! Though this term can be found in the police reports and in the indictments of the public prosecution as it is required by the law, however to describe the outrage of the counterrevolutionaries in Miskolc other words have to be looked for.' Fascist barbarity seemed to be a proper term to coin the massacre of communists for the party's journalist. Another typical case of representing counterrevolutionary bestiality was the trial of Ilona Tóth and her companions. The woman was accused of deliberately killing a man by using a poisoned syringe. According to the accusations, since Tóth failed to finish off the victim with the syringe she stabbed him with a knife to death.¹⁵⁰

The cruelty of the counterrevolution was emphasized by reports describing how the rebels killed innocent and defenseless people. The party's daily, for instance, published an article on 30 March 1957 that wrote about the sad story of a small boy. It began with a hospital scene depicting a seriously injured four years old boy, who could not sleep or speak, but was constantly weeping. The boy was the son of a Security Police officer. The article then emphasized the harmony of the small family who lived quiet and modest life but was friendly towards everyone. The husband had to leave on 22 October 1956 and did not return. The author described expressively the fear of the wife and the attack of the counterrevolutionaries. According to the report the outrageous men were drunk, raped the woman and began to throw the furniture out of the window. At last they threw the body of the woman and also the small boy who watched the horrors in panic. The wife died immediately, however her son survived but lost his ability of speech. The author concluded that his muteness was the strongest accusation against the merciless counterrevolution.¹⁵¹ On 9 April a report about the siege of the Athenaeum Print Shop and the execution of its defenders was printed, as well.¹⁵²

Communist interpreters who experienced an extraordinary violent anti-Communist attack were shocked by the perceived cruelty of the assaults. Thus it was logical for them that the uprising which was originally supported by a considerable

¹⁵⁰ *Népakarat* (9 December, 1956) and (18 January, 1957), NSZ (1 March, 1957)

¹⁵¹ Ferenc Vasvári, 'Vád' (Charge) NSZ (30 March, 1957)

¹⁵² Endre András, 'Hiteles történet az Atheneum Nyomda védőiről' (Authentic Story about the Defenders of the Athenaeum Print Shop) NSZ (9 April, 1957)

proportion of them eventually aspired to destroy the dictatorship of the proletariat through a systematic elimination of the party. In an attempt to comprehend the terrible events those were connected to a more thoroughly understood violence. The horrors of 1956 reminded them to those of 1919: the massacre at the Republic square called 'the counterrevolutionary persecution similar to the white terror of 1919'.¹⁵³ Thereby the mysterious was compared to the familiar in order to render the strange phenomenon that was hard to interpret more close to an understanding. The first volume of the white books did not base its argument solely on this specific historical analogy: 1919 was mentioned only twice on the total of sixty-two pages. However, the appearance of the memory of the white terror seemed to provide a proper opportunity to formulate a meaning of the happenings. Communist observers understood the attack against the people's democracy as an event that had 'happened in an astonishingly same way as the counterrevolutionary attempt against the Soviet Republic in 1919'.¹⁵⁴

In January and February 1957 the Hungarian communist leadership decided to prepare trials against the participants of the uprising. In connection to this, the interpretation of the revolt in 1956 became more close to the hardliner position. The program of the government, which was published on 6 January already mentioned Imre Nagy's treason, 'The treason of the Imre Nagy government opened the way in from of the counterrevolution, which during these days killed mercilessly the faithful sons and daughters of the socialist revolution'.¹⁵⁵ The meeting of the Provisional Executive Committee on 12 February defined the former prime minister and his fellows an anti-Soviet and anti-party group.¹⁵⁶ The Provisional Central Committee accused Imre Nagy of organizing an independent faction and the conscious preparation of the counterrevolution on 26 February.¹⁵⁷ Parallel to this, trials against those authors who took part in the revolution were begun to be prepared with the intention to reveal the role of the Authors' Association 'directing the counterrevolution'.¹⁵⁸ Starting from the end of February, the party laid more stress on the measures against 'national

¹⁵³ WB Vol. 1 p. 22.

¹⁵⁴ WB Vol. 1. p. 3.

¹⁵⁵ *Népakarat* (6 January 1957) *NSZ* (6 January 1957) On the program of the government: Rainer, *Imre Nagy*. Vol. 2., p. 378. Huszár 2. k. 27.

¹⁵⁶ MSZMP IKB Vol. 2., pp. 114-21. Rainer, *Imre Nagy*. Vol. 2. , p. 379. Kalmár, *Ennivaló és hozomány*, p. 29.

¹⁵⁷ MSZMP IKB Vol. 2., pp. 219-21. Huszár, *Kádár*. Vol. 2., p. 32. Rainer, *Imre Nagy*. Vol. 2., p. 379.

¹⁵⁸ Standeisky, *Az írók és a hatalom*, p. 208.

communism' and 'revisionism'.¹⁵⁹ The scientific review of the party, *Társadalmi Szemle* (Social Review) published a systematic critique of György Lukács's philosophy in its first 1958 issue. The study stressed that Lukács's 'revisionism' shared the same anti-Marxist and eventually anti-communist political implications than the practice of Imre Nagy and his group.¹⁶⁰ By March the plan to start the legal prosecution against the Imre Nagy group kept in Romania was ripen, which was followed by their actual arrest on 14 April.¹⁶¹

On 2 February 1957 László Réti the director of the Institute for Party History during the Rákosi regime published an article that was titled 'History teaches: August 1919' in the official daily of the communist party. The aim of the communist historian was to accuse Imre Nagy the also communist Prime Minister of the revolution in 1956 of preparing the 'counterrevolution'. The author stated that after 23 October a second Peidl-government (Gyula Peidl was a trade unionist social democratic leader who presided the government for six days that followed the resign of the soviet government and was forced to leave by counterrevolutionaries) had been formed. The Peidl-government in 1919 deceived the workers by claiming that there existed no counterrevolutionary menace and therefore demanded a 'bourgeois democracy'. Nevertheless, as the historian put it, 'the fascist counterrevolution' came into existence 'on the ruins of the dictatorship of the proletariat'. The article argued that Nagy apparently wanted a 'democracy' as well, but the result of his politics would have been also the restoration of 'counterrevolution' unless the USSR could have intervened.¹⁶² Academician, Gyula Hevesi, former participant in the First Hungarian Soviet Republic highlighted in his ceremonial address on 21 March that, 'our present revolutionary worker-peasant government after the recent unfortunate deviations serves the cause of our people once again following the path of the Hungarian revolutionary labor movement began gloriously by the First Hungarian Soviet Republic. It drew all the conclusions from the achievements as well as the failures of the Soviet Republic. This was already begun when the government recognized clearly and timely that the Imre Nagy government played completely the same role as Gyula Peidl's right wing government in 1919 after the fall of the workers' power and it virtually was driving the

¹⁵⁹ Ständeisky, *Az írók és a hatalom*, pp. 230., 235.

¹⁶⁰ Kalmár, *Ennivaló és hozomány*, pp. 213-5.

¹⁶¹ Rainer, *Nagy Imre*. Vol. 2., pp. 382-3. Huszár, *Kádár*. Vol. 2., pp. 39-46.

¹⁶² László Réti, 'Tanít a történelem 1919 augusztus' (History teaches August 1919), NSZ (2 February, 1957)

country under the yoke of fascism. The it was continued when the government did what we would have also liked to do at that time, in fact, we had even attempted to do, but then it had remained only an unrealized hope: to ask the friendly help of the Soviet people for saving the revolution.’¹⁶³

The memory of the counterrevolution in 1919 meant an easily available descriptive language for the communist interpreters, which could connect familiar concepts with new experiences. Evoking the First Hungarian Soviet Republic at the turn of 1956 and 1957 provided an opportunity, first of all, for the communist leadership to attempt to interpret the meaning of such notions like ‘counterrevolution’, ‘whiteterror’, ‘opportunism’ or ‘the people’s power’, which played a crucial role in the struggle for mastering the memory of 1956. The rethinking of the past meant a tangible help in understanding the present.¹⁶⁴ The discussion on 1919, thereby, contributed to the communist reading of 1956, meanwhile the problems of the present made it possible to summon the past. This condition increased the demand for the historical knowledge related to the First Hungarian Soviet Republic. On 21 March 1957, in its ceremonial article the *Népakarat* put it as the following, ‘And now, as we remember the 38th anniversary of the beginnings of the resolute struggle: the memory of the Hungarian proletariat and those fallen in the fight demand that we finally depict by Marxist methods the true face of the First Hungarian Soviet Republic for our people, purely, in its entire grandeur and sorrowful tragedy. Obviously, this is not the duty of a leading article and its author, but historians coming out of the fog of byzantinism and ideologists tearing apart of dogmatism.’¹⁶⁵

This fact, however, did not entail immediately the elevation of the first Hungarian Soviet Republic, as well. Although, old party members became more and more respected,¹⁶⁶ this happened in connection with the organization of the Workers’ Guard during January and February 1957. As the leadership was looking for reliable membership its attention was turned towards the old party members including partisans,

¹⁶³ *Népakarat* (22 March 1957)

¹⁶⁴ In this period, The fate of 1919 in the Hungarian communist remembrance was similar to that of the siege of Masada in Jewish memory. Barry Schwartz, Yael Zerubavel and Bernice M. Barnett, ‘The Recovery of Masada: A Study in Collective Memory’, *Sociological Quarterly* 27 (Vol. 2, 1986), pp. 147-164. This is how collective memory is constructed according to Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory* (Chicago – London, 1992)

¹⁶⁵ István Pikay, ‘Tündököljék való fényében!’, *Népakarat* (21 March 1957), p. 3.

¹⁶⁶ In 1957, for instance, the Executive Committee of the communist party of Baranya county demanded the honoring of those communists of 1919 who ‘gave proof of honest, party-like and brave behavior during the events of the counterrevolution of 1956.’ MOL 288/21/1957/3

organized workers before 1944 and former Red Army soldiers from 1919. First secretary János Kádár even claimed that those persons meant the party's main force since the younger members had got confused. In spite of that the foundation of the Worker's Guard could have provided opportunity for comparing the regime with 1919, it could not create a historical context for re-appraising it. The Provisional Executive Committee accepted the idea of the Workers' Guard on 29 January, 1957, nonetheless when it decided over the forthcoming Spring political anniversaries on 12 February it did not include the date of the proclamation of the First Hungarian Soviet Republic among the anniversaries of the 1848 revolution (15 March) and that of the end of the war in 1945 (4 April).¹⁶⁷ 21 March 1957 was celebrated only by narrow circles of the party: the Budapest Provisional Executive Committee accompanied by a group of hard-liners and the Institute for Party History gathered in the Central Officers' Building of the People's Army of Hungary to organize a commemorative ceremony. At the same time, the main leaders of the party and the government traveled to Moscow to participate in a formal meeting with the representatives of the Soviet party and state.¹⁶⁸

2

The party's daily reported on 8 March 1957 about the arrest of Mihály Francia Kiss. The seventy years old Francia Kiss was a well-known figure of the white terror commandos which persecuted communists, Jews and left-wing people after the collapse of the First Hungarian Soviet Republic in 1919 and 1920.¹⁶⁹ Francia Kiss was caught in 1957 due to a citizen's denunciation. He was seen being driven on a Pobeda car to the president of the national committee during the 'counterrevolution'. Although this scene was used as an evidence for confirming that the old man played a counterrevolutionary role in October 1956, he was not sentenced for crimes committed in 1956. Instead the judge maintained the statements of the People's Tribunal in 1947, when he had been condemned in absentia for illegal execution and torturing of people. The accusations, however, were completed with others like forgery of identity card (Mihály Francia Kiss

¹⁶⁷ MSZMP Vol. 2 pp. 61-3., 109-10.

¹⁶⁸ *Népakarat* (19 March, 1957), (21 March, 1957), (22 March, 1957)

¹⁶⁹ The role of Francia Kiss's trial in the construction of the counterrevolution was brilliantly analyzed recently by István Rév. 'Counterrevolution' in *Between Past and Future*, eds.: Sorin Antohi and Vladimir Tismaneu (Budapest, 2000), pp. 247-271. The translations from the sentence are taken from here. The records of the trial are preserved in the City Archives of Budapest BFL VII. 5e/20630/I-IV

was hiding himself under the name of József Kovács) or illegal possession of weapons. The court's intention was to prove that the once white terrorist pursued his counterrevolutionary activity and remained an enemy of the people's democracy, 'In addition to the crimes committed by Mihály Francia Kiss in 1919 and 1920, he also committed crimes following the liberation of Hungary in 1945...' ¹⁷⁰ The sentence construed a personality carrying on constant crimes: the court stated that after the liberation the defendant realized the threat of the approaching call for account and tried to escape. He lived under the name of József Kovács, while he managed to achieve a forged identity card in 1954, as well. Apart from these crimes the man hid a Parabellum pistol with him. Communists conceived the trial as a living evidence for the statement on the counterrevolution in 1956 since, as they claimed, the methods of the insurgents in 1956 were the same as those of the counterrevolutionaries in 1919. 'As if we experience the first days of November 1956...the methods of counterrevolution did not change after 37 years.', ¹⁷¹ as the party's daily gave an account of Francia Kiss's arrest.

The December resolution of the party, albeit ranked the 'Horthy-fascist and Hungarian capitalist-landowner counterrevolution' the third place after the Rákosi-clique and the Nagy group as the causes of the 1956 revolt, clearly maintained that the supporters of the previous regime did not give up their intention to restore their rule and had organized themselves illegally since 1945. As a matter of fact, the infamous 'four reasons' represented a history of deceit: first, the people went to the streets led by their just discontent towards the Rákosi-regime, second, their benign intentions were abused by an apparently communist government of the traitor Imre Nagy, while in reality, third, the events had been already directed by the supporters of the Horthy-regime aspiring to restore the rule of capitalist and feudal exploitation. The *continuity* of the 'counterrevolution', thus, formed an unavoidably necessary element in the construction of the 1956 revolt as an *essential* counterrevolution: if the uprising in terms of a higher historical reality had not been carried out by the 'people' who had actually participated in it, but by Horthyst supporters who had actually remained in the background, the only explanation for their capability of preparing the uprising was their constant presence as an *abstract* historical force throughout the recent period. ¹⁷² As a consequence, the

¹⁷⁰ BFL VII. 5e/20630/III

¹⁷¹ NSZ (13 March, 1957)

¹⁷² MSZMP 239. This is the central argument in András Mink, 'The Fiction of the Counterrevolution' that is a part of his PhD Theses at Central European University, 2002.

crucial problem of the Kádárist communist leadership and party elite was to prove the *actual* presence of Horthyst officers in the *actual* reality of the revolt of 1956.¹⁷³ The fact that the purpose of the anti-Communist persecution was the restoration of the Horthy-regime was proved by details on the return of the figures of the pre-war establishment. Communist interpreters of the uprising sought to prove that the principal force within the insurgents was the group of former landowners, capitalists and Horthyst officers whose main purpose was the resurrection of their previous rule over the Hungarian people.

The publication of the government provided numerous examples describing how former Horthyst officers came back to their localities to claim leadership over the uprising. It was stressed that the previous Horthyst administration was commissioned once more by the local revolutionary committees. The booklet supported with plenty of examples the statement that ex-owners of workshops or factories returned and began to command their workers again. At the end of January the party's daily also informed its readers on that during October former Horthyst officers, gendarmes and a rich butcher had formed the workers' council in Esztergom.¹⁷⁴ The third volume of the official publications of the government laid greater stress on proving the presence of supporters of the Horthy-regime in the events of 1956. The publication devoted a chapter to the 'local revolutionary committees' of the revolution in 1956. The section concentrated on to demonstrate that,

'The majority of the membership of the committees and especially the dominant leaders were not consisted of the working peasantry that took the overwhelming majority of the population, but of kulaks, former gendarmes, Horthyst officers and village notaries or mayors who allied with the criminal elements...The working people of the villages was astonished by the fact that its well-known enemies: the kulaks, gendarmes, Horthyst village leaders and notaries are getting power in their hands.'¹⁷⁵

The evidence like this was not intended only to prove that the uprising aimed at a reactionary restoration of the old regime, but also to point at the constant anti-Communist activity of the counterrevolutionaries. As an example the booklet quoted the

¹⁷³ In this respect, the history of the Kádár-era is the history of a constant historiographical project, which focused on the documentation of the counterrevolution and its transformation into an intelligible narrative.

¹⁷⁴ NSZ (30 January, 1957) See also radio broadcasts in February OSA 300/40/1/1299

brief autobiography of the deputy head of the workers' council in the town of Mezõkövesd, 'I am the officer of the Horthy-regime trained in the Ludovika military academy (the elite officer training centre of the pre-war establishment which became the symbol of the old army during the communist period). I was punished many times for anti-party and anti-democratic instigation. I had hid my weapons twelve years before: a lot of guns and a machine-gun. Now I have taken them all.'¹⁷⁶ One of the most instructive paragraphs in these regards is that one which described the members of the National Committee in Monor.

László Szente, the head of the pre-war county administration, who had been condemned for taking part in the anti-state conspiracy of Ferenc Nagy (Nagy had been the small-holder prime minister of Hungary between 1946-1947 who consistently opposed the communist dictatorship and had been forced to leave the country due to the construction of the anti-democratic conspiracy in 1946) became the head of the National Committee in Monor. Ferenc Baranyi former *Horthyst notary* became deputy and secretary, while the committee included Sándor Lengyel *previously estate manager and the brother of a Horthyst general*, Ferenc Lilik, *organizer of the Arrow-Cross party*, Imre Füzi *kulak*, Dr Antal Karbach *arrow-cross lawyer*. János Maróty *Horthyst hussar captain* became the commander of the National Guard, whereas Ferenc Mátyás *former gendarme sergeant* became the leader of its political-criminal section. His employees were József Wallner *former gendarme lieutenant, counterintelligence officer*, Pál Kovács and Sándor Dávid *former gendarme sergeants* and Gábor Bara *former gendarme lieutenant*. The 'National Committee' *gave the Factory of Monor over its former owner*, Ferenc Kovács.¹⁷⁷

On 4 March the Committee for Canvassing and Propaganda received a proposal on installing an exhibition on 'the counterrevolutionary attempt to overthrow the people's democracy'.¹⁷⁸ The exhibition aimed at presenting the official interpretation of the history of the Hungarian October. It would begin with pointing out the achievements claimed by the regime, then several groups of photographs would marshal the causes of the counterrevolution as those were conceived by communists, like bureaucratic

¹⁷⁵ WB Vol. 3 p. 12.

¹⁷⁶ WB Vol. 3 pp. 13-5.

¹⁷⁷ WB Vol. 3 p. 18. italics in the original

¹⁷⁸ MOL 288/22/1957/1

distortions, overburdened economy, violation of law, machinations of imperialistic countries and the preparations of counterrevolutionaries within the country. These phenomena would receive one or two boards and even the crucial day of the uprising would deserve only two of them. On the other hand, the illustration of ‘terror actions (Republic square, attacks against district party headquarters, robberies and pillages. Martyrs)’ would happen on five or six boards in a total of 28. These would include photos, documents and objects like weapons, communication devices, clothes of victims and uniforms of former gendarmes. The exhibition of objects was an attempt to provide tangible evidence for the presence of the supporters of the previous regime in the October 1956 events. ‘The open appearance of counterrevolutionary elements’ received the same number of boards as the representation of terror actions. The Committee discussed the proposal on 15 March and decided that the exhibition would have to be opened on 1 May.

These statements already implied a continuity of the counterrevolution: supporters of the regime established in 1919-1920 after the fall of the First Soviet Republic were allegedly the major delinquents in the counterrevolution of 1956. Communist interpreters believed to touch upon the tangible evidence for this conception in Francia Kiss’s person,

The seeds Mihály Francia Kiss and company sowed in 1919 grew into a terrible harvest in the days of the counterrevolution on 23 October 1956. The orgy of murder and blood roared identically in both periods, and the connection between the two is to be found in Mihály Francia Kiss and his spirit.¹⁷⁹

The fourth volume of the government’s official interpretation that was published probably in September after closing the trial included a photo on the old defendant speaking in the courtroom with the following subtitle, ‘Mihály Francia Kiss, the ill-famed mass murderer of the counterrevolution in 1919 had concealed himself under a pseudonym for 12 years. He saw his time arrived in the days of October to leave his rescue and to take part in actions against communists.’¹⁸⁰

The character of the relationship between 1919 and 1956, thereby, was transformed, most probably largely unrecognized even for the communist observers themselves. The similarity of the violence, which could be connected to one single

¹⁷⁹ BFL VII. 5e/20630/III

individual, acquired a temporal dimension and, hence, suddenly revealed a historical continuity. As a matter of fact, this temporal identity shed light on the chronological sequence of 1919, 1956 and the mass murders committed by the Hungarian fascist Arrow-Cross Party in between in 1944. The Court formulated this reasoning in its sentence for the first instance dated on 13 June 1957,

The detailed and well-established facts of the case are entirely recognizable in the acts of terror and mass murders committed by the Arrow-Cross in 1944 and are also clearly visible in the movements which were committed against the faithful sons of the Hungarian People's Republic during the counterrevolution after 23 October 1956. The sadistic murders, skinning of humans alive, cutting out of sexual organs, and similar acts committed in Orgovány, Izsák and the region of Kecskemét in 1919 were not unknown to those who carried out similar murders in the Arrow-Cross's Party Headquarters in Budapest. The murderers of our executed and mutilated martyrs on Republic Square and those who committed murders in front of the police department in Miskolc used the same methods and carried out their acts with the same sadistic cruelty as Mihály Francia Kiss and his terrorist companions did in 1919.¹⁸¹

Mihály Francia Kiss's case was the first in a series of subsequent arrests, which the communist authorities initiated in order rejuvenate the trials of crimes committed in between the wars, but were not tried due to the political reasons. For that purpose, the people's tribunals that ceased to work in 1950 were restarted and the investigation extended on numerous former gendarme officers. In May 1958 the Minister of Interior, Béla Biszku (a major proponent of hardliner during the Kádár-era) commanded the Department of Investigations of his ministry to prosecute the cases of 385 persons who were suspected of having been participated in the persecution of communists or other left-wing people during WWII or before. Eventually, 94 of them were tried and 36 were executed. Like Francia Kiss, these mostly former gendarme officers were not called for account for deeds committed in 1956. These measures had different goals. On the one hand, the party leadership wanted to render it conspicuous that it used violence in a significantly different way than its predecessor had done: it imprisoned no faithful communists, but their previous persecutors. On the other hand, it wanted to construct evidence for the alleged similarity of killings committed in 1956 and the war-crimes carried out in 1944.¹⁸²

¹⁸⁰ WB Vol. 4

¹⁸¹ BFL VII. 5e/20630/III

¹⁸² One of the main figures in these investigation, that time security officer subsequently turned into propaganda-historian, Ervin Hollós published the results of his former professional work in his *Kik voltak, mit akartak?* (Budapest, 1967), pp. 301-9. in a typical chapter titled 'The Reserve' (*A tartalék*). See also the report on the

The detailed descriptions of the violence and the shockingly horrible images added to them were not mere illustrations of the interpretation in these trials. The purpose of evoking terrible events was not only to condemn them as the consequence of cruel, violent and destructive movements. The bloody, materialistic and extremely naturalistic details of the violence occupy an essential and focal position in the narrative on the counterrevolution: these revealed the true characteristic of the happenings. The representation of the violence was as shocking as it was extraordinary and unexpected. The outstanding cruelty of the executioners was barbarous and atavistic: nobody expected merciless like these in twentieth century Europe. The extraordinary nature of the violence provided the mean to connect 1919, 1944 and 1956. The judge hereby linked 1919 to 1944, the war catastrophe and then pursued the process to reach 1956, the counterrevolution. Thus, according to the judge, the similar characteristics of the three events were not only established a relationship between them. Those proved that there had existed a constant threatening force throughout modern Hungarian history. Thereby, an understanding of modern Hungarian history as a constant struggle between revolution and counterrevolution established. In order to achieve this conception the chronological distance between Horthy's coming into power in 1919 and Szálasi's take-over in 1944 was eliminated based on their accompanying violence. The two regimes were understood as different historical manifestations of the rule of a same and continuous force. The communist court believed that the counterrevolution in 1956 was also part of this continuous identity. The major problem of this abstract historical conception was the chronological gap between 1945, when according to official historiography the people's democracy successfully suppressed the remnants of the counterrevolutionary regime and 1956, when it was allegedly still capable of striking back.

The party's daily, the *People's Freedom* reported on 14 March 1957 that a man called Béla Francia was arrested. The man was condemned because of committing robbery however he was rehabilitated in 1963 as he could disprove the accusations.¹⁸³ Béla Francia's fate was determined only by the similarity of his surname to Mihály Francia Kiss who had been arrested a week before. The article that reported on Béla

second half of 1959 of the Military High Prosecution registry no. 0027/1960. Four of these cases are described in detail in Attila Szakolczai, 'Háborús bűnösök elítélése az 1956-os forradalom után' in *Évkönyv. Magyarország a jelenkorban, 1956-os Intézet* 13 (2004), pp. 29-52.

¹⁸³ NSZ (14 March, 1957)

Francia's arrest printed with bold letters that, 'the offspring of Mihály Francia Kiss was captured.' Since accurate family relationships could not be detected the press used the vague and archaic term 'offspring'. Another article definitely stated that, 'Mihály Franczia Kiss's offspring was one of the leaders of the October counterrevolution'.¹⁸⁴ Albeit the story seems to be simply a weird chapter of the post-1956 repression, it contains a crucial element of the statements made on the counterrevolution. Family relations had already played a role in constructing the continuity of agents between the elite of the Horthy-regime and the participants in 1956 before Francia Kiss's trial. Probably the best depiction of the official representation was the case of the village of Csorna. The first volume of the white books called the attention to that the National Committee of the village had been led by a former Arrow-Cross administrator whose father had been a prominent figure of the white terror in 1920. The man's younger brother had his own role: he began to re-organize the Gendarmerie in the settlement. The clan directed the local counterrevolution: they appointed the head of the National Committee an old Horthyst officer and started to raise white terror commandos.¹⁸⁵ Although these descriptions did not state it definitely, they already prompted that the same forces and persons who created the Horthy-regime in 1919 wanted to overthrow the communist system in 1956.

What is fascinating in this perception is that communist interpreters realized remarkably important genetic continuity between the actors of 1919 and 1956. Blood relationships convinced the communist observers that a genuine physical and corporeal identity connected the participants of 1956 with those of 1919. The first volume of the white books had already called the attention in its introduction to the fact that, 'the government commissioned Béla Király, former Horthyst officer of the general commandment, the relative of Gyula Gömbös (Prime Minister of Hungary 1933-1936), the ill-famed Fascist leader as commander-in-chief of the armed forces.'¹⁸⁶ It is remarkable that the authors avoided to indicate precisely the relationship and used the

¹⁸⁴ NSZ (14 March, 1957)

¹⁸⁵ WB Vol. 1 p. 46.

¹⁸⁶ WB Vol. 1 p. 6. Béla Király indeed had a remarkable life course. He started his military career in the 1930s, during the war became an officer in the general staff, then volunteered to defend the border-town by Austria against the Soviet troops. Subsequently, he decided to surrender to the Red Army and even joined the Hungarian Communist Party in 1945. Király became a high ranking military officer in the communist army until his arrest in 1952 with untrue accusations. He was released only in September 1956. In the revolution, he became the commander of the revolutionary armed forces, the National Guard. Following the Soviet intervention he fled to Austria. In the sixties he obtained a PhD in history in the USA and grew into a respected historian.

vague term 'relative' instead. The communist editors of the third volume of the government's white books which was issued probably in May soon after the arrest of the old white terrorist considered meaningful to publish a long quotation from Béla Király's autobiography who had been the commander-in-chief of the National Guard in 1956. The official publication began its citation when Király evoked that his father had been the organizer of the governing party of the Horthy-regime. Then the author remembered his school years in the Ludovika Military Academy and service in the Soviet front. The white book considered a remarkable detail concerning the relationship of the author with the would-be Arrow-Cross minister of defense. The booklet quoted in length the description of his duties and administrative activity in the ministry.¹⁸⁷

Physical identity makes the notion of temporal continuity tangible and, thus, comprehensible in Western culture. The dogma of resurrection, which is the core aspect of raising the issue of (personal) temporal identity in Christian thinking, was strongly connected to the recognizable and reproduceable body in the second half of the 13th century. The Church condemned the propositions of clerical scholars concerning pure spiritual continuity in 1277 in Paris. The great scholastics of the late thirteenth century - Albert the Great, Thomas Aquinas and Giles of Rome - denied that the body would equal the person. They rather argued that the person formed a psychosomatic whole in which the soul played the crucial role. In fact, the soul alone could secure identity as it conveyed all the characteristics of the person which the body only expressed materially without. The soul was able to subsist alone and even had the potency to create its own particular body again. Therefore, these theologians understood resurrection as a second birth in a sense that was preceded by an interruption of material continuity. According to them, by the hour of death the body of the soul dissolved and the cadaver had nothing to do with it. By the Last Judgment God could create another body which was identical with the previous one in terms of qualities but not of matter, since God might use very different material to construct it. Thus, continuity of the self was spiritual and not material. Although this argument could solve the problem of identity in a consistent way, all the authors and especially Aquinas claimed that the perfection of the soul required the body. Thereby, the scholastics, who generally resisted the idea of bodily resurrection, retreated at this point. The clerical elite pronounced that the earthly body must return and thus opted for clear material continuity. Very likely, they were forced to

¹⁸⁷ WB Vol. 3 p. 66.

do this by contemporary religious and pious practice. The thesis on spiritual identity implied that cadavers in the tomb and relics in reliquaries would not resurrect and thereby it would have undermined the cult of the martyrs, as well. The years around 1300 experienced an increased devotion to the body. Scientific interest was raised in examining and opening the body to learn the cause of the death, and bodies were partitioned enthusiastically after death. In spite of the varied nature of burial customs and practices, all these agreed that what happened to the cadaver was an expression of the person. Bodily parts of saints and martyrs were treated as carriers of the whole personality and this habit influenced even the burial of laymen. The corpse was either embalmed to preserve the integrity of the person or dismembered since every particle could express the wholeness of the self and the belief in bodily resurrection guaranteed that no individual member would be lost. The body was conceived as integral to the person and mainstream theology at the end of the thirteenth century defined resurrection as a re-union of the risen body and the soul.¹⁸⁸

Although death means an end of earthly life, the body hides itself underground where it can preserve or develop that core of material identity that makes it possible to resurrect the same form of life. The original metaphor of rebirth derived from the apostle Paul himself who argued that the corpse was a sort of seed from which the new life would grow. By insisting on that the new comes from the old Paul claimed for the identity of the person before and after death. The shift that occurred around the end of the second century did not change the idea of material continuity. Then Christian thinkers abandoned the idea of natural growth and opted for the metaphor of reassemblage. Most of them considered resurrection as a gathering of the original bits and particles of the original body by the power of God in order to recreate the individual.¹⁸⁹

The genetic identity of the perpetrators in 1919 and 1956 made it possible for the communist interpreters to claim the historical continuity of white terror, Arrow Cross

¹⁸⁸ Caroline Walker Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity, 200-1336* (New York, 1995), esp. pp. 256-78., 320-9.

The body became a fundamental carrier of the self in Western culture. Modern novels and movies regularly approached the problem of identity through images of bodily sameness. The story of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde generated a genre that elucidates the conception of the self by cases of disappearance, alteration, or exchanging of personal bodies. Dilemmas over the modern scientific practice of organ transplantation also reflect the concerns on bodily continuity. Generally, in Western thinking there was and still is a fundamental agreement that there is no survival of identity without material continuity. Bynum, 'Material Continuity, Personal Survival and the Resurrection of the Body' in her *Fragmentation and Redemption* (New York, 1992), pp. 239-97.

and counterrevolution despite any temporal ruptures. Communist interpreters began to conceive the uprising in 1956 as a resurrection or revival of the white terror in 1919. The fourth volume contained a short chapter also about the white terror that concluded that, 'The counterrevolutionary terror and formation of terror-groups prove that the old Hungarian Gestapo of the Horthy-Szálasi era was under construction and it was preparing to a bloody persecution of the supporters of the Hungarian people's power, communists and non-communists, functionaries and ten thousands of simple workers and peasants. The bloody white terror of Horthy in 1919 began to gain new life. In certain places the true character of the 'freedom fight' was attempted to cover, while in other sites they appeared openly in the same form as in 1919 (officers' commandos).'¹⁹⁰ Communist historical interpreters argued that a tangible physical identity prevailed throughout the abstract historical continuity of 1919, 1944 and 1956. Thereby, the three distinct historical events did not simply form a continuous chain, but became the individual manifestations of the one and the same, temporally identical historical force. Counterrevolution that rested underground between the communist takeover and the uprising, resurrected in October 1956. The physical identity embodied in the personalities of the interwar administrative or military crew was used to provide authenticity for the abstract statement on historical resurrection. As the judge argued in Mihály Francia Kiss's trial, 'With no doubt Mihály Francia Kiss was and remains up to this day an individual with Fascist sympathies.'¹⁹¹ Then it drew the conclusion,

His crimes point the way down a lasting trail leading to the next horrors and were a cradle to the deformity which was later called Fascism. His behavior laid its stamp on the quarter of a century of rule by Horthy Fascism; it was to be found throughout the underground organization of the counterrevolutionary movement, throughout the period of the building of Socialism; and this same spirit eventually exploded with elementary power in the horrible days of the rebirth of the counterrevolution on 23 October 1956.¹⁹²

The court's historical interpretation did not argue simply for continuity meaning subsequent casual links and relationships of historical origin and genesis. The

¹⁸⁹ Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body*, pp. 21-58.

¹⁹⁰ WB Vol. 4 p. 84.

¹⁹¹ BFL VII. 5e/20630/III

continuity and likeness of action was explained through a representation of the actors as agents of the constantly identical historical force of Fascism. The third volume of the government's white books stated that the rebels had started as Hitler by attacking communists and that they had had the same counterrevolutionary program as the Horthy-fascists had in 1919.¹⁹³ The same perception of physical continuity drove the founders of the Federation of Communist Youth to formally establish the organization on 21 March 1957, 'Our Federation is a direct heir and successor of the Federation of Young Communist Workers founded in 1919 and was forced to illegality in between the two world wars and the years of World War II.'¹⁹⁴

3

By the first anniversary of the siege of the Budapest party headquarters the uprising in 1956 became the 'second coming' or 'second edition' of the white terror or counterrevolution in 1919.

October 30 1956 was the open re-appearance of the saddest and most tragic period of Hungarian history: the Horthyst reaction was the political concept of killing communists that was called <the maintenance of the nation>. At the Republic square *the counterrevolution stopped masking itself*. It attempted to do the same as it had done once before in the white August of 1919: it wanted a white October and a white November as well as after the destruction of the first workers' power, in the bloody days of Siófok, Izsák and Orgovány.

The anti-Communist atrocities at the Republic square turned into signs of a complex historical process. For communists the siege provided an access to the meaning of history, 'Our predecessors have been facing with the predecessors of the guns at Republic square since the beginning of the century: the volley of the gendarmes which had been fired onto demonstrating workers by the Kaiser und König and later by Horthy's armed force *was the close relative of the thundering guns by the siege of the*

¹⁹² BFL VII. 5e/20630/III

¹⁹³ WB Vol. 3 p. 4., p. 10.

¹⁹⁴ *Népakarat* (22 March, 1957)

*party headquarters.*¹⁹⁵ History was seen as a continuing struggle between the rebellious people and its oppressors,

Four hundred years ago the lords burnt György Dózsa (leader of the greatest peasant revolt in medieval Hungary in 1514) on a fiery throne and impaled his fellows. The ruling classes took revenge on every movement of the peasantry later on with similar ruthlessness. In 1919 after the fall of the First Hungarian Soviet Republic the capitalists and landlords paid with cruelty never seen before for the few months of loss of their power. The lords' same fury raged in October 1956, as well...¹⁹⁶

The historical context evoked through the First Soviet Republic of 1919 became the fundamental means to describe the events of 1956. The temporalization of the relationship of 1919 and 1956 that was based on the white terror was gaining ground in the historical common knowledge to the extent that it became an obvious, almost obligatory reference of the representation of 1956. The proclamation of the Hungarian authors against the report of the committee of five of the UNO on the 1956 revolution, which was prepared and manipulated through the writers by the party leadership in early September 1957, contained a condemnation of the uprising as it follows, 'every trash of fascism came to the surface: and produced conditions for a few days reminiscent to the white terror in 1920.'¹⁹⁷ The publication of the book in December 1957 that described the history of 1956 in Miskolc where the only truly cruel anti-Communist atrocities happened apart from the capital demonstrates remarkably how the comprehension of 1956 mobilized local memories of 1919. The booklet that was edited by communists in the county of Borsod and was issued by the publishing firm of the county party newspaper laid a great stress on demonstrating the cruelty and the dedicated anti-communism of the 'counterrevolutionary terror groups' and, more importantly, their inherent connection to historical predecessors. The chapter describing the activity of the 'terror organization' concluded, 'They were worthy successors of the Miskolc executioners of the Horthy white terror in 1920: the beasts of the <Szim-sanatorium> (nickname of the prison in Miskolc in 1919-1920).'¹⁹⁸

The roof of the party headquarters at Republic square, thus, gained particular

¹⁹⁵ *Népakarat* (30 October, 1957) See also *Magyar Nemzet* (31 October, 1957) and *NSZ* (30 October, 1957)

¹⁹⁶ *Magyar Nemzet* (30 October, 1957)

¹⁹⁷ Standeisky, *Az írók és a hatalom*, pp. 275-86. Révész, *Aczél*, p. 84.

significance: it became an altitude from where the direction and the starting point of history were perceived. From there it could be recognized that the beginning of the history of Fascism and Communism was 1919. This view reduced the complexity of history to one straight thread which was regarded to determine the trajectory of the past from its very beginning and, thus, precluded all other alternatives of history. The beginning of apocalyptic histories, however, could be detected only from these special points of view: without the privileged status of the observer of the fulfillment the starting point of the process does not exist. The formation of these peculiar narratives requires a point that seems to be the end of the historical process and from where the meaning of the entire sequence of events can be justified. From the prophetic point of view all visible and knowable events appear to run towards the position of the observer. From the point of view of Mount Sinai which was the alliance between the Lord and the Jewish people all previous happenings could be seen as directly leading towards the fulfillment. From the point of view of the Golgotha which was the site of Christ's death on the crucifix all former events were perceived as preparation of the only meaningful occurrence.¹⁹⁹ A similar great narrative structure signified the position of 1919 in history. It was interesting as the starting point of a long-lasting fight and historical process ended in 1956. This concept of history determined the true significance of 1919: in order to establish the perception of the historical struggle between revolution and counterrevolution the history of 1919 was required to create their genesis.

The first scholarly attempt to re-appraise the history of the Soviet Republic was meant to reach primarily the communist audience. The book that was issued for the first post-1956 academic year in August or September 1957 was a collective work of the Institute for Party History and was written as a textbook for the course in the history of the Hungarian labor movement. The publication covered the years between 1917 and 1919 and intended for the first time to provide an official interpretation of the First Soviet Republic after 1956.²⁰⁰ Communist historians sought to find answers for the question of the origins of both the Hungarian revolution and counterrevolution in

¹⁹⁸ *Ez történt Borsodban* (These Happened in Borsod County) (Miskolc, 1957), p. 107.

¹⁹⁹ György Tatár, 'Történetírás és történetiség' in his *Pompeji és a Titanic* (Budapest, 1993), pp. 129-39. The author here develops the metaphor of orienting heights from where the meaning and beginning of histories could be detected. On apocalyptic history writing see Michael André Bernstein: *Foregone Conclusions: Against Apocalyptic History* (Berkeley – Los Angeles – London, 1994), p. 28.

²⁰⁰ *A magyarországi munkásmozgalom 1917-1919. A Magyar Tanácsköztársaság* (The Labor Movement in Hungary 1917-1919. The First Hungarian Soviet Republic) (Budapest, 1957)

general through a research of the formative year of 1919. It was indicated also by the fact that more than half of the book was devoted to the pre-history of the first communist regime and only forty pages of the total 108 concerned its history proper. The collective of historians considered the primary reason and initiator of Hungarian communism the effects of the Russian revolution in October 1917. The authors argued that Hungary was ready to accept the ideas of the Russian revolt since the general discontent of its people. The book stated that whereas ordinary Hungarians like peasants and workers lived in want and privation due to the war destruction, the members of the ruling classes were getting rich due to the increasing exploitation. The burden of armed and bureaucratic oppression became heavier, as well. Therefore the working class turned towards leftist ideas and two groups began to organize itself: one among the old social democratic party as a party opposition, while the other one remained an independent company of revolutionary socialists. The textbook emphasized that the Hungarian workers demanded already in November 1917 the following of the Russian example and pointed out the growing discontent of the workers up till next February. Revolutionary activity increased among the war prisoners in Russia as well as within the ranks of the Hungarian troops. The communist historians considered the first significant result of the revolutionary wave the fall of the war cabinet and their replacement with a democratic government led by count Mihály Károlyi. As the king objected the commission of the new Prime Minister the people of Budapest consisted of workers, soldiers and bourgeois occupied the strategic points of the capital and forced the acceptance of their demands by the deputy of the king on 31 October 1918.²⁰¹

According to the communist interpreters the victory of the October revolution did not mean the final success of revolution in general. It provided a basis for carrying on progress, but at the same time it also increased the tension between the counter-forces of revolution and counterrevolution. The historical argument implied that the sharpening conflict situation resulted in the true manifestations of these general ideas: first of all in the foundation of the Communist Party of Hungary and secondly in the creation of reactionary organizations. The party textbook argued that the foundation of the party was necessary to drive forward the revolution. The authors called the attention to the fact that though the principal carriers of the October revolt were the workers, the new government was still a bourgeois one that was basically disinterested in improving

²⁰¹ *ibid.* pp. 3-27.

their living conditions. Consequently, the revolution had to be pushed forward and the workers started to found their own institutions: the soviets. The book then described the formation of the Communist Party of Hungary from the two leftist groups and the returning communist prisoners of war. The authors did not forget to mark the significance of this event and emphasized that the new party was the only truly revolutionary organ. It was reflected also by a transformation in the quality of the revolutionary movements: the demands were shifted from mere economic towards more political ones and the workers began to require socialist republic instead of wage increase.²⁰²

The textbook outlined the centers of counterrevolutionary movement. According to it re-action concentrated itself in the Transdanubia where landlords and clerics played the major role. In Budapest the organization was taken into the hands of professional officers who founded the *Ébredő Magyarok Egyesülete* (Association of Awakening Hungarians) and the *Magyar Országos Véderő Egylet* (National Association of Defense of Hungary). The communist historians described the atrocities committed by officers' commandos and gendarmes against proletarians and communists. The government also turned towards reactionary terror and ordered to arrest the major communist leaders in January 1919.²⁰³

The exclamation of the First Hungarian Soviet Republic on 21 March 1919 was interpreted as a consequence of the tense struggle between the agents of revolution and counterrevolution. The communist authors considered the creation of the dictatorship of the proletariat as the decisive victory of revolution over re-action. The organization of the two opposing counter-forces sharpened the tension and the revolutionary crises. The communist authors called the attention to that from the end of February onwards the workers began to demonstrate for the release of the arrested communist leaders. The Workers' Council of Budapest accepted the idea of the social production and the power of the soviets. According to the textbook on 20 March the masses were under complete communist influence and were ready to overthrow the government. Consequently, when the cabinet met a major crisis in its foreign relations on the same day it decided to resign

²⁰² *ibid.* pp. 28-55. Simultaneously, the genesis of the party became more and more significant: a year later on 20 November 1958 the old people's home of the party was named 21 March (the date of the exclamation of the Soviet Republic in 1919) and it was reported with great pride that, 'Currently it is inhabited by 17 comrades who feel themselves well: almost rejuvenated.' (MOL 288/7/71)

²⁰³ *ibid.* p. 55.

and the formation of a pure social democratic government. The authors emphasized that the social democrats, however, could not gain the support of the workers without an agreement with the communists. The chapter concluded that as the communist leaders insisted on the exclamation of the dictatorship of the proletariat and a lot of social democrats were affected by the general euphoria the First Hungarian Soviet Republic was born on 21 March.²⁰⁴

Meanwhile the party history textbook endeavored to find the beginnings of the historical process it virtually represented 1919 as a projection of the interpretation of the conflict in 1956. Although the group of historians undoubtedly regarded the Soviet Republic as a great glory of the labor movement, - the book definitely stated that, 'In the history of our country power was taken by the people for the first time.'²⁰⁵ - they were also aware of the fact that its history was an unceasing fight against counterrevolutionary aspirations,

The counterrevolutionary conspiracy began already in the first days of the revolution. They sabotaged and obstructed the work of the proletarian state. They tried to get their own men involved in the soviets in several villages and even in some towns at the elections in April successfully in a few of them. They attempted to outbreak armed rebellion in a few towns and villages already in April and May. Counterrevolutionary governments were formed in territories occupied by entente troops (in Arad, later in Szeged). The counterrevolutionaries fled to Vienna created the Anti-Bolshevistic Committee (ABC). These organizations and the different agents of the entente built their own connections also in the territory of the Soviet Republic fostered counterrevolutionary conspiracy and espionage. They succeed in recruiting certain old officers who filled important positions in the Red Army. They aspired to demoralize the masses also in the hinterland with their propaganda capitalizing on the economic hardships. On 1 June two days after the beginning of the attack against the Czechoslovak army they organized a railway strike in the Transdanubia. Rich peasants attempted to revolt against the proletarian power in certain localities. Where the enemy troops marched into communist workers and members of the leadership were persecuted and denounced by them.²⁰⁶

While communists were always resolute, the right-wing social democrats very frequently represented the interests of the counterrevolution. 'This double nature of the leadership leaves its mark on the history of the First Hungarian Soviet Republic.'²⁰⁷ The authors of the textbook pointed out that this ambiguity determined the entire history of the dictatorship of the proletariat. They pronounced that although the soviets were the

²⁰⁴ *ibid.* pp. 57-67.

²⁰⁵ *ibid.* p. 68.

²⁰⁶ *ibid.* p. 98.

true institutions of the people's rule, 'In many village councils the middle peasants and petite bourgeois formed majority.'²⁰⁸, and this contributed to a compliance towards reaction. The book mentioned the case of the police apart from the above-described examples where the proletarian government maintained its former membership. The most difficult challenge, however, was obviously the attack of the Czechoslovak and Romanian armies. The textbook stated that although the Red Army managed to resist these assaults, eventually it was defeated due to treason. The historians called the attention to the fact that precisely when the Soviet Republic got into a major military crisis the greatest and most well-prepared counterrevolutionary revolt was broke out in Budapest on 24 June 1919. Officers occupied the battleship of the Danube fleet and other strategically important sites of the capital. The counterrevolutionaries attempted to gain support from the workers, nonetheless they failed and the uprising was suppressed very fast. The communist interpreters considered it as an evidence of the wide popular support of the workers. In spite of it the numerical superiority of the enemy troops could make a decisive strike on the Soviet Republic due to the treason within the ranks of the military leadership. The collective of party historians concluded that the fall of the First Hungarian Soviet Republic meant the victory of counterrevolution: although it was destructed by foreign troops its defeat was followed by the construction of a counterrevolutionary regime led by Hungarian landlords and capitalists.²⁰⁹

The First Hungarian Soviet Republic was begun to be conceived as the starting point of this story: the story of the continuous counterrevolution. This fact required the re-assessment – the rehabilitation – of the Hungarian commune also in scholarly terms. In the beginning of the next year, 1958, the leadership of the party started to arrange appropriate conditions for researching and writing on actually important topics from a relevant communist point of view. The central organs of the party considered a primary task to raise an institution that would have the potential to direct all the workshops of historical research. The leaders were convinced that a proper re-organization of the already existing Institute for Party History would fulfill this function. Therefore the Institute was required to produce a report on its situation. The report was written on 8 January 1958 and stated that the institute had attained considerable achievements and formulated a basically correct view on the history of the revolutionary labor movement.

²⁰⁷ *A magyarországi munkásmozgalom*, p. 69.

²⁰⁸ *ibid.* p. 70.

The report, however, defined further goals as well, 'it has to depict the history of the Hungarian revolutionary labor movement more authentically than it had been done previously in order to contribute to that the wide working masses will regard the past of the party with the well deserved respect.'²¹⁰ The call for reassessing the revolutionary labor movement, that is to say, the proletarian revolution of 1919 was completed with another major task. The documents of the counterrevolution would have to be collected for preparing a compilation of studies and completing the series of the white books with a publication exposing Imre Nagy. 1919 and 1956 were considered the two founding stones upon which the victorious road of the Hungarian communists could be constructed, 'Our Institution considers its main task to publish as many works as possible as a result of its research which represents the glorious history of our party and the revolutionary Hungarian labor movement on scientific level and with communist partisanship.' A basic textbook on the history of the revolutionary labor movement completed with original documents was promised by 1962.

By the 39th anniversary in 1958, the discussion of the historical event of the 1919 dictatorship of the proletariat in Hungary began to take over the space of public speech on the counterrevolution. The increasing availability and interpretive potential of 1919 made the party leadership capable of talking about the counterrevolution without mentioning the actual uprising of October 1956. In the Spring 1958, the leaders of the Hungarian communist party began to feel uneasy about referring to the 1956 revolt and all its implications and tended to prefer a politics of amnesia and offered the perspective of the future of building socialism in exchange. As Kádár put it, 'it is impossible to repeat all the time that achievement, failure, counterrevolution, etc...We should make this document to start from the current situation and we should deal with the achievements of the past to the extent we have to, and with the failures of the past less than in September or December 1956. It is an outdated position that we take self-stigmatization.'²¹¹

The anniversary of the First Hungarian Soviet Republic in that year put the post-1956 communist government in the context of the alleged history of the struggle between revolution and counterrevolution since 1919. On 21 March 1958 the day of the anniversary the weekly, *Élet és Irodalom* (Life and Literature, then the organ of the

²⁰⁹ *ibid.* pp. 68-108.

²¹⁰ MOL 288/22/1958/7

communist dominated Literary Council) published an interview with Prime Minister Ferenc Münnich on the relevance of the first Hungarian commune. Münnich's person, who became Prime Minister in January that year, was able to render the thesis of the continuity of revolutionary fight against counterrevolution authentic. The communist leader was the 'hero of three revolutions' as his subsequent biographer characterized him. Münnich's official biography emphasized the start of his revolutionary career happened in 1919 as the political commissar of the 6th division of the Hungarian Red Army after the revolutionary man had returned from Soviet-Russia where he had participated in the civil war. After the suppression of the First Hungarian Soviet Republic he lived in exile, mostly in the Soviet Union until he joined the international brigades in the Spanish civil war, where he became one of the most well-known Hungarian internationalist, which later became the most highlighted event in his life. He returned to Hungary after the war, but became a prominent party leader only in 1956 as a major figure in János Kádár's government: minister of the armed forces and supporter of the hardliner position. Münnich in his interview expounded the tenet of the historical continuity of the people's revolution beginning with the early modern peasant leader, György Dózsa, continued by the 18th century anti-Hapsburg prince in revolt, Ferenc Rákóczi and the 19th century modern revolutionary Lajos Kossuth, while culminated in the 1919 dictatorship of the proletariat. In the Prime Minister's view, 1919 meant at the same time the improvement of previous Hungarian freedom fights and the starting period of the struggle for communism.²¹²

On the same day, *Népszava* (People's Voice), the daily of the trade unions quoted a long section from Béla Kun's speech delivered at the meeting of the Hungarian Soviets in June 1919,

We will fight with the counterrevolution. Never to shake, not to shake for even a moment: this principle should lead the discussions of this congress of the Soviet Republic. Hesitation and sabotage are the fatal enemies of the dictatorship, of socialism and communism. As towards socialism and communism the only road leads through the

²¹¹ Kalmár, *Ennivaló és hozomány*, p. 158. See also Standeisky, *Az írók és a hatalom*, p. 390.

²¹² *Élet és Irodalom* (21 March, 1958) Münnich's official biography was written by one of his fellow fighters in 1919, Tibor Hetés with the title 'Hero of Three Revolutions', which could be interpreted as 1917, 1919 and 1945, the liberation of Hungary by the Soviet Red Army or even as 1919, 1945 or 1956, the establishment of Kádár's Revolutionary Worker-Peasant Government. Tibor Hetés, *Három forradalom hőse* (Budapest, 1986), pp. 5-23.

dictatorship, through the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat. We will fight with the counterrevolutions. We will crush the international counterrevolution as well as the national. We will crush them because we are helped by the historical vocation of the proletariat of other countries.²¹³

Then the citation from Kun's text was explained by another quotation, this time from the official speech of a contemporary communist historian,

Hesitation may raise its head among those who joint the communists before, but at the time of fierce struggle they became half-hearted. Their hesitation may drive them on the road of the absolute betrayal of the dictatorship of the proletariat as it led the Kunfis and Böhms together with their Peyers (Zsigmond Kunfi, Vilmos Böhm and Peyer Károly were social democratic leaders who did not support the communists in 1919 although the first two persons joint the socialist government.). It is enough to refer to the experiences of 1956: the revisionism of the communist Imre Nagy and its shameful role in preparing, carrying out and serving the counterrevolution.

The clear reference to Imre Nagy served also the purpose to prepare the sentence in his forthcoming trial. Although the legal procedure was postponed in February 1958 due to the request of the Soviet leadership, which was concerned then with establishing its image in the Western public as the major force of world peace, the Hungarian party leadership and personally János Kádár had virtually already made the decision. After subsequent negotiations with the Soviet party in April, May and June, the Hungarian communist leadership led Nagy's trial to its closure: the final verdict was brought on 15 June.²¹⁴ In the following dawn Nagy and his three companions were hanged. The primary argumentation of the sentence was that the former communist Prime Minister had prepared the outbreak of the open counterrevolution while he had been masking himself a faithful communist. Nagy was accused of attempting to transform the proletarian regime into a restoration of capitalism. The judge condemned him because of diminishing the fundamental institutions of the people's democracy step by step in the days of the uprising and by the beginning of November 1956 he was considered to be

²¹³ *Népszava* (21 March, 1958)

²¹⁴ On the decision see Rainer, *Nagy Imre*. Vol. 2., pp. 385-91.

ready to transmit power to the representatives of the capitalist system.²¹⁵

For understanding Imre Nagy's role in 1956 the interpretation of the historical relation between 1919 and 1956 provided a useful assistance for communist observers. The fifth volume of the official communist white books on 1956 that concerned thoroughly the trial of the former Prime Minister explained Nagy's function as the following,

Hungary experienced a bloody counterrevolution for the second time in 1956. The darkest and most reactionary forces of the country aspired against the lawful power, the free state of the people in Hungary in 1919 by the armed means of Western imperialists, as well. Horthy and his company by the help of foreign arms succeed to suppress and crush with ruthless violence the true revolution of the Hungarian people.

The counterrevolution in 1956 departed also in this way: the way of the terrible white terror in 1919, the service of the imperialists and the restoration of capitalist oppression. The tactic of camouflage was similar to that of 1919, too. Then Peidl's 'trade union government' accepted the role to hand the power over to Fascism in seemingly democratic dress. Imre Nagy and his partners in crime accepted the role of the landlords of Fascism in 1956. In 1919 the Peidl-government attempted to deceive the masses with the slogan of 'socialism without dictatorship' while it opened the gates for the fascist white terrorist dictatorship. Imre Nagy and his fellows followed almost literally their ignominious predecessor when they concealed the dark reactionary character of the attack against the state order of the people's democracy and assisted the gathering and forging ahead of open fascist forces with slogans like 'socialism without Stalinism' and 'democratic socialism'.²¹⁶

After Nagy's trial the history of the counterrevolution in 1919 and that of 1956 started to be forged together inseparably. The fifth volume of the white books, which purpose was to demonstrate Nagy's guiltiness, contained a chapter concerned 'The successors of the terrorists of 1919 in 1956'. It began with the statement that, 'References were made in several places in this book to that what happened in Hungary during the counterrevolution in 1956 could be compared only to the events of the terrible white terror in 1919.'²¹⁷ The communist authors were shocked by the similarity of the two violent events, 'If we compare the deeds and terrorist actions of the bourgeois-fascist counterrevolution that crushed the Soviet Republic in 1919 with the rage, measures and brutal terror of the counterrevolution in October 1956 the astonishing similarity reveals itself even for the first sight.' In order to prove this the booklet published five examples pairing one event from 1919 and the other from 1956.

²¹⁵ WB Vol. 5 pp. 7-16. On Nagy's trial see Rainer, *Nagy Imre*. Vol. 2, pp. 373-431.

²¹⁶ WB Vol. 5 pp. 5-6.

²¹⁷ WB Vol. 5 p. 134.

The first three instances concerned the persecution and execution of communists or supporters of the communist regime. The last two examples emphasized the ruthlessness of counterrevolutionaries by comparing detailed descriptions of tortures and cruel executions.

The shocking images of this violence published in the first volume of the white books came into a peculiar relationship with other, apparently similar, pictures. The written accounts of atrocities were accompanied by a few images in the fifth volume. The first examples were placed on adjoining pages: the first page contained pictures from 1919, while the second from 1956. The photos from 1919 depicted when, ‘one of the leaders from the district of Tab was hanged in the main street of the village after crushing the Soviet Republic in 1919’ and when, ‘White terrorist officers executed a peasant in the outskirts of the village of Köröshegy’. The photos taken in 1956 showed when, ‘The counterrevolutionaries carried off József Stefkó border guard lieutenant who was lying ill in hospital and beat him to death then hanged him up side down’. The pictures taken in 1919 focused on hanged persons placed in the vertical axis of the composition. Framing the images one can see counterrevolutionary officers either posing proudly by their victim or observing with care the result of their activity. Both compositions, thus, emphasize the cold merciless character of the counterrevolutionaries. (image) The picture from 1956, which the communist editors placed next to the earlier ones, creates an easy impression of similarity by the commensurable composition highlighting a hanged person in its vertical axis. The center of the image is likewise juxtaposed by a raging crowd, thereby highlighting the contrast between the defenseless victim and the cruel counterrevolutionaries. (image)

The second examples were printed on one page: the upper one depicted when, ‘Communists of Szekszárd in 1919. Waiting the bullets of Horthy’s white terrorists bringing death with their hands bound behind their back’, whereas the picture below showed when, ‘The counterrevolutionary bandits shot the surrendered soldiers from behind at the Republic square in October 1956.’ Whereas the first picture focuses on the victims of the forthcoming execution, the second one places the executioners in its centre. Nonetheless, the differing compositions have a similar visual effect. The first picture shows the would-be executed persons – depicted as average ordinary people from all classes of the society – in two rows silently and calmly waiting for the shots. These two rows occupy the entire picture, the depicted persons facing the viewer, thus,

making no visible sign of the execution squad. This photo, thereby, manages to emphasize the unarmed, non-violent, defenseless state of the victims implying also an impression of innocence. The second image taken in 1956 places a group of armed insurgents in the right-hand-side half of the composition, while the other side is featured by two figures: a body lying on the ground, apparently dead and a person seemingly trying to move away with his hands holding up and showing his back to the group of insurgents. The gesture of this figure creates the impression that the armed group on the other side shot already surrendered combatants, which, similarly to the previous photo, builds its visual message on the contrast of innocence and mercilessness. (image)

Photos of the white books were no illustrations, that is to say, they were no additions to or the direct representations of events described in the texts. Those were presented independently, in themselves – even for themselves –, their role was to mediate the allegedly purified reality. Photography was endowed with the particular concept of objectivity during the second half of the 19th century. During these years, scientists started to look for methods of observation, which could be made independent of the subjective points of view determined by individual value judgment, faith or conviction and were able to record the phenomena of the world in their pure reality. Mechanical recording of data appeared free of the feebleness of the human subject: machines do not get exhausted, they are able to observe reality constantly without breaks and they do not make moral decisions and aesthetic judgments. Images recorded by photographic machines became the authentic representations of reality free of subjective intervention and independent of human individuality. Photography, hence, is taken as the unquestioned evidence of objective reality: the imprint of truth beyond the human limits of perception.²¹⁸ Photos, thus, are able to reveal those aspects of reality, which sometimes remain hidden for human eyes.²¹⁹ The similarity of the violence revealed something essential about historical continuity for the communist editors, ‘The cruel, bloodthirsty white terror in 1956 was reared by the white terror of Horthy and his

²¹⁸ Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison, ‘The Image of Objectivity’, *Representations* 40 (Fall 1992), pp. 81-128. The myth of images made without the touch of human hands as manifestations of the ultimate truth, however, arguably looks back on a longer tradition, ‘In the Christian tradition this power to produce the visible without any manual technique is attributed to the direct imprint of God on cloth.’ Marie José Mondzain, ‘The Holy Shroud: How Invisible Hands Weave the Undecidable’ In: *Iconoclasm: Beyond the Image Wars in Science, Religion and Art*. Eds.: Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel (Karlsruhe – Cambridge, MA, 2002), p. 324.

²¹⁹ Thus, the photographs shot by Secondo Pia in 1898 on the veil of Turin revealed that the brownish traces on the cloth hardly perceivable by the eyes showed on the photonegative the positive image of a male body. Peter Geimer, ‘Searching for Something: On Photographic Revelations’ In: *Iconoclasm*, pp. 143-5.

company. Fascists allied with criminals, former village leaders, gendarme officers and Horthy-officers, Arrow Cross men attempted an attack against the freedom of the Hungarian people and many brave sons of the Hungarian people. Although they felt in 1956 that they were just at the very beginning, the supporters of the fallen Horthy-regime could not restrain themselves and tried to <imitate> 1919 with the most open white terror.²²⁰ Communist observers, thus, claimed that the images of similar violence revealed an unbroken historical continuity ranging from 1919 to 1956. The impressive photos taken as evidence of reality free of human subjectivity managed to tangibly represent the thesis of the inherent homogeneity of the counterrevolution and, thereby, to blur and diminish its actual historical transformation from the white terror through consolidation, crisis and war to its eventual collapse and the coming to power of the Arrow Cross. This mode of representing homogeneity loaded the historical continuity between 1919 and 1944 that had been elaborated by the postwar People's Tribunal with a rejuvenated significance.

²²⁰ WB Vol. 5 p. 139.

Lives

The basic popular history book of the 1950s on the origins of the counter-revolutionary regime that had ruled Hungary between 1919 and 1944 retrospectively classified the Horthy regency as a fascist system,

The Hungarian ruling class developed the first European fascism by applying old and new means of oppression, thereby showing - for the first time - what fascism, which would wildly ravage Europe two decades later and drive millions of people to war, looked like. One can hardly find a characteristic feature of Hitler's and Mussolini's dictatorships which cannot be immediately found in the Hungarian fascism. The fear of Bolshevism, the ruthless oppression of the working class and the wild racist incitement were the same in all these regimes. They all demonstrate the same unrestrained rule by the big capitalists and landowners, the same anti-progressive and anti-culture attitudes, the same depreciation of the working man and the same social demagoguery.

Thus, in 1919 and 1920, it was not merely the seeds of fascism appeared in Hungary, but, rather, fascism itself. In the Hungarian fascism of the twenties and forties, not only the fundamental idea, but even the participants were the same. In 1919 in Órgovány, and in 1942 at the massacre in Újvidék, the same Horthy stands at the helm; in the middle of the thirties, it was the same Gyula Gömbös, who adjusted the Hungarian fascism to the newly emerged Nazi movement, who was the leader of the extreme right wing MOVE in 1920. László Endre (a major figure in the Hungarian Holocaust), who was a brutal county leader in the Gödöllő district in 1920, and who became state secretary in the Ministry of Interior in 1944, threw hundreds of thousands of innocent people to the German fascist murderers. The same people, the same crimes: from 1920 to 1944, to the reign of terror of the Arrow-Cross hordes, our history has a direct road.²²¹

The authors argued that the rule of the Hungarian fascist Arrow-Cross Party in 1944 and 1945 had had its roots in the activity of the white terror commandoes that persecuted Communists, Jews and leftist persons after the collapse of the short-lived Hungarian Soviet Republic of 1919. The similarity of the violence convinced communist historians that fascism in Hungary had been born in 1919. Thus, the inter-war Hungarian system was closely associated with the crimes committed by the Nazis and their companions throughout Europe. As a result, it became possible to claim that the counter-

revolutionary regime of Admiral Miklós Horthy was genuine fascism. At the same time, it was also claimed that fascism had emerged during the struggle against communism, and was, in reality, nothing else but anti-communism. Consequently, communism was the real opposition to fascism. This peculiar interpretation of history emerged to justify the power of the Party, because the narrative entailed that the only genuine alternative to the Horthy regime was the communist system. Moreover, since counter-revolution was equated with the rule of Evil, communism represented the rule of Good. This teleological interpretation of history that leads to the inevitable victory of the Communist Party was a typical example of Stalinist historical writing. In fact, this belief in historical inevitability had already featured the interpretation of the 1917 October Revolution and the fall of the Provisional Government, which were regarded the results of historical laws. An attempt was made to adapt these principles, which were based upon a Manichean view of the struggle between light and darkness, good and evil, proletarian revolution and bourgeois reaction, to the particular records of contemporary Hungarian history.²²²

The second source of the sovietization of Hungarian historiography were the post-war political trials in which communist and leftist intellectuals – after 1945 - first encountered a substantial amount of historical records and had to face the pressing challenge of interpreting the recent past. The newly founded People's Tribunals in 1945 called to account those who were accused of committing war crimes. This conformed to international expectations and was also required by the armistice treaty. In spite of the fact that the trials of the major war criminals ended in 1946, the people's courts had an unusual history thereafter. In 1946, they were authorized to deal with crimes committed 'against the order of the republic'. The People's Tribunals prosecuted László Rajk, the most well-known victim of Stalinist purges in Hungary. After this trial, the courts ceased to exist. However, they were resurrected after the uprising in 1956, when crimes against the people's democracy were dealt with once again by People's Tribunals.²²³ Using the

²²¹ Elek Karsai & Ervin Pamlényi, *Fehérterror*, (Budapest: Publisher unknown, 1951), pp. 71-2.

²²² The communist way of thinking in contradictory counter-concepts such as fascism, reaction vs. democracy and its perils concerning Hungarian politics had been already recognized by István Bibó, lawyer and political scientist, in 1945 member of the National Peasant Party. 'A Magyar demokrácia válsága' in his *Válogatott tanulmányok. Vol. 2. 1945-1949* (Budapest, 1986), pp. 13-79. On the first five decades of Soviet historiography, see Konstantin F. Shteppa, *Russian Historians and the Soviet State*, (New Brunswick, Rutgers University Press, 1962) On early Soviet historical scholarship, see John Barber, *Soviet Historians in Crisis, 1928-1932*, (New York, Holmes & Meier, 1981). An intriguing recent work is David Brandenberger, *National Bolshevism: Stalinist Mass Culture and the Formation of Modern Russian National Identity, 1931-1956*, (Cambridge MA – London, Harvard University Press, 2002).

²²³ On the system of the People's Tribunals in Hungary, see Tibor Lukács, *A magyar népbírószági jog és a*

records of a local trial which ended with capital punishment, this essay concentrates on the procedures and practices of connecting abstract historical constructions to actual individual lives in order to render them tangible and provide evidence for their authenticity and credibility. The chapter also seeks to demonstrate that popular forms of memory-biased and politically-biased history writing both contributed to a peculiar way of individualizing history. Focusing on the method of proof, the essay draws conclusions concerning the form, as well as the structure, of communist historical representations.²²⁴

2

At the beginning of 1947, Lőrinc Latorczay, whose original family name was Szim, was denounced for assaulting people in 1920 when he had been the commander of the Military Department of Investigations in Northern Hungary. He was apprehended and tried at the People's Tribunal in the provincial city of Miskolc in 1947-1948 and was sentenced to death as a war criminal. The People's Tribunal condemned Latorczay for crimes committed in 1919 and 1920.²²⁵ In spite of the fact that what he was charged with were war crimes, this was an obvious legal error. Although political crimes committed in 1919 and the following years began to lapse only in 1944, and could, therefore, be tried by the People's Tribunals, these acts were not classified as war crimes.²²⁶

There were ninety-six witnesses present at the court and most of them accused Szim of murdering and assaulting people. As one of them put it, 'there were serious beatings' in the cells of his headquarters. Another witness, who had been in jail there for two days, saw a lot of people covered in blood. When he was beaten he 'wailed so much that it could be heard even on the street'. A third witness was assaulted so badly that he lay

népbíróságok, (Budapest: Közgazdasági és Jogi Könyvkiadó, Zrínyi Katonai Kiadó, 1979), Tibor Zinner, 'Adalékok az antifasiszta számonkéréshez és a népi demokrácia védelméhez különös tekintettel a budapesti népbíróságra', in: *Budapest Főváros Levéltára Közleményei '84*, (1985), pp. 137-69. Zinner, 'Háborús bűnösök pereit. Internálások, kitelepítések és igazoló eljárások 1945-1949', in: *Történelmi Szemle*, (Spring, 1985), pp. 118-40. Sándor Szakács & Tibor Zinner, *A háború "megváltozott természete"*, (Budapest: Genius Gold, 1997), pp. 182-93. Károly Szerencsés, "Az ítélet: halál", (Budapest, Kairosz, 2002), pp. 29-53. On the armistice, see Mihály Korom, *Magyarország Ideiglenes Nemzeti Kormányának és a fegyverszünet*, (Budapest, Akadémiai Kiadó, 1981) The best comprehensive work on the history of the legal system is Mária Palasik, *A jogállamiság megteremtésének kísérlete és kudarca Magyarországon, 1944-1949*, (Budapest, Napvilág, 2000), esp. pp. 41-5.

²²⁴ My intention, however, is by no means to identify a 'paradigmatic' case in order to illustrate broad general 'historical tendencies'. My choice in a certain way is rather random: to depart from an individual case, to investigate it thoroughly and to establish its meaning in its particular historical context. As Carlo Ginzburg has remarked, 'A life chosen at random can make concretely visible the attempt to unify the world, as well as some of its implications.' 'Latitude, Slaves, and the Bible: An Experiment in Microhistory', *Critical Inquiry* 31 (Spring 2005), p. 682.

²²⁵ BAZ ML, Records of the People's Prosecution 1038/1949. On Latorczay's role in the war, see Péter Bokor, 'Egy ezredes két halála', in: *Élet és Irodalom*, 14 May 1982), pp. 3-4. and 'Egy lázadás története', in: *Magyar Hírlap*, 15 October 1993), p. 8.

²²⁶ The Act on the People's Tribunals is in: *Magyar Törvénytár. 1943-1945. évi törvények*, (Budapest,

ill for three months. One of the witnesses gave evidence that beatings happened daily. Even more cruel tortures were inflicted. According to one witness, the defendant hit one of his victims in the face 140 times and knocked out all of his teeth. One man testified that he received twenty-six beatings in a month and said that Szim had hit him even with a seal ring. On one occasion, he was bound to a chair, a stick was put into his mouth and Szim's men spat into it; they tore his hair out and hit his head with a stick causing a wound that did not heal for ten years. Another witness stated that he had seen a person whose face had been torn to pieces. One of the confessions claimed that Szim and his subordinates had beaten a war invalid who was amputated below the knees. One of the ex-prisoners remembered that one of the victim's noses had been bleeding after the 'treatment'. The blood had been collected in a glass and he had been forced to drink it. Several statements claimed that people had been killed during their interrogation, and that Szim had personally shot two men. Another recalled a case in which Szim had killed a person, because he had struck back. A third witness had given account of the extra-judicial murder of a railwayman. This testimony described a scene in which the victim had begged for his life, but the lieutenant gave the order to fire.²²⁷

These confessions described the defendant as a disgustingly violent person. 'Szim subjected the thirteen year old child, women and even the seventy-one year-old man to satisfy his sadistic propensity.' One of the witnesses remembered that the lieutenant injured children: his fifteen-year old brother had been taken away and had returned home severely bruised. Another witness recalled the times when, as a twelve-year old, he had delivered cigarettes and meals to the inmates. Szim disliked this and had, therefore, had him beaten up. The officer had pulled his ears until they started bleeding. Another testified that a woman had been beaten with an iron bar. Another one had seen that 'women were treated in the same way as male captives'. One of the confessions described how Szim showed no mercy even to elderly women. This witness recollected that the officer had kicked his fifty-five year-old mother. Often, prisoners were not fed. Moreover, one witness remembered that, if a relative brought meal, it would be overturned, and the captive had to lick the food up from the ground. The same witness also said that, due to the mental injuries which his wife had received during her visits to the police station, his baby had

Franklin Társulat, 1946), p. 93.

²²⁷ BAZ ML.

‘sucked milk poisoned by his wife’s nerves’ and the child had died in its fifth year.²²⁸ Szim preferred interrogating his victims at night. One of the victims remembered the rumor that Szim and his men investigated by day and interrogated at night. Another witness recounted that he had been taken to Szim for a beating at night. A third one remembered that screaming could be heard every night. Executions were generally carried out at night, ‘One night somebody cried, then, I heard a shot and the crying stopped. I was taken to Szim for interrogation twice late at night’.²²⁹ The popular memory formulated by the witnesses during the trial took on the genre of a thriller. One may construct the blurb of a pulp fiction by using the text of the confessions. This was ‘the horror-story of the Szim-nursing home’. ‘In the cell of his institution called the house of terror’ sat Szim, ‘the monster of the Csabai kapu (the street where the building stood) and those caught in his grasp’ were tortured cruelly. ‘Here it is impossible to sleep due to the constant wailing, corpses are transported weekly’ from the prison.²³⁰

The tropes by which Latorczay was characterized by the witnesses are very old ones. The defendant was described as a person who treated children cruelly. The early Christians were accused of slaughtering children as well as Jews. In the Middle-Ages, heretics and witches were also accused of the same sins. In Roman times, Christians were frequently accused of sacrificing children and of drinking their blood during their ceremonies. This was the main motif for their horrible persecution in Lyon in the second century. Murdering and sacrificing children repeatedly appeared also against heretics: in the eighth century against the Paulicians, in the twelfth century against the Cathars, and in the fourteenth century against the Waldensians. The motif of baking babies was among the accusations against the Knights Templars, while witches were considered to be experts in child killing. The murdering of children is generally considered by every society to be a crime that breaks very basic norms. Therefore, a group which denies or is believed to deny the fundamental rules of its society is usually accused of killing children. Latorczay’s night activity has very similar ancient meanings. Those who act in the night, under the veil of darkness are usually suspicious characters. The practices of the Knights Templars at nightfall was emphasized in their trials, witches flew and also held their meetings at night.

²²⁸ BAZ ML.

²²⁹ BAZ ML.

²³⁰ BAZ ML.

The night recalls an alien, unknown world full of dangers. The night is the world of monsters.²³¹

The narrative of the defendant presented by the witnesses was a narrative of a monster, of a cold-blooded resolute killer. He ‘subjected large masses of people to long-lasting torture revealing unrestrained cruelty, with which he aimed to kill his victims. Only persons of very strong constitutions and mental strength could withstand such treatment’.²³² Such bloodlust may trigger an extreme sense of danger. ‘When Lőrinc Latorczay-Szim, once an officer of Horthy’s clique, was escorted from the Military Political Department to the juridical lock-up, the detective who accompanied him noticed a shocking scene. A dog was sitting in front of the gate of the County Hall. When it saw Szim, it started to whimper showing its teeth, then it ran away in fear. Even the dumb animal suspected the bloodhound in him.’²³³ The figure of Latorczay-Szim, as formed by the witnesses, obviously meant a significant danger to normal people. Such persons are undoubtedly enemies of every society.

The general popular understanding was connected with politically more meaningful concepts in some of the confessions. A musician remembered that he had played a song recalling Béla Kun at the beginning of 1920 and that, as a result, he had been taken in and beaten with a stick. A witness recollected that, when he stood before Szim in November 1920, the lieutenant had shouted at him, ‘So, you are that renowned communist’ and had beaten him up. Others were allegedly taken away, either because of abusing the Horthy-army or singing the *Marseillaise*. One of the confessions claimed that the victim had been beaten because he had delivered a speech by the grave of a Red Army soldier. Another man was convinced that he had been victimized because he had participated in suppressing the counter-revolutionary uprising of the Ludovika Academy during the Soviet Republic. A third one remembered that Szim’s men had raided his premises searching for a red flag, a typewriter and leaflets. During the house-search, he was beaten and was also kicked with a spur. The defendant was characterized as a fanatical anti-Communist. According to one statement, he remarked after killing a person,

²³¹ See Norman Cohn, *Europe’s Inner Demons*, (London, Pimlico, 1993) and Klaniczay Gábor, ‘Az orgiavádak nyomában’ in: Idem, *A civilizáció peremén*, (Budapest, Magvető, 1990), pp. 194-208.

²³² BAZ ML, the indictment.

²³³ *Szabad Magyarország*, 28 September 1947.

‘this is your common fate, dirty communists!’ Szim was also said to have shouted: ‘I will kill all of you like flies in autumn, bloody communists!’²³⁴

Other witnesses attributed more direct political meaning to the defendant’s figure. As one of them put it, ‘Szim was a lieutenant with a crane-feather who acted on Horthy’s highest order with unlimited power’. The crane-feather was the symbol of Horthy’s ‘national army’ which distinguished the soldiers from the Red Army troops who wore the red star. Another witness claimed, ‘I definitely remember that the defendant was mounted on a white horse at the corner of the engine-house’.²³⁵ The color of the horse was not a neutral element in this description. It recalled the well-known scene of Miklós Horthy’s marching into Budapest on a white horse. The witnesses thus posited the defendant as a typical member of the Horthy-regime. Such political meaning was amplified by the politically conscious People’s Tribunal and the left-wing press. In their perception,

Lőrinc Szim was Horthy’s bloody handed henchman in Miskolc.²³⁶

He was a wicked murderer of the counter-revolution who became a colonel due to his brutality in the Horthy-regime.²³⁷

He appeared in Miskolc with a special commission after the take-over of the white terror. He was granted an absolutely free hands to crack down on the leftists, he had unlimited power to achieve his goal. The place of his operation was the so called Szim-sanatorium where he interrogated the leftist people who came into his hands in the cruelest manner together with his subordinates.²³⁸

His aim was to silence every freedom-loving Hungarian by causing fear and dread, and to lead the murderous counter-revolution to power.²³⁹

Thus, Latorczay-Szim was depicted as a brutal criminal, who, in addition, had made the Horthy-regime virtually perceptible. ‘Lőrinc Latorczai Szim was the type of the regime-knight, of this darkest type of human beings which had been produced by the previous decades.’²⁴⁰ ‘The defendant who let the children of the people languish, this was

²³⁴ BAZ ML.

²³⁵ BAZ ML.

²³⁶ *Felvidéki Népszava*, 17 March 1948.

²³⁷ *Szabad Magyarország*, 7 April 1948.

²³⁸ *Szabad Magyarország*, 29 May 1947.

²³⁹ *Szabad Magyarország*, 7 April 1948.

²⁴⁰ *Felvidéki Népszava*, 7 April 1948.

the counter-revolution and the Hungarian terror.’²⁴¹ In the courtroom, Latorczay-Szim became the embodiment of the alleged brutality of the Horthy-regime in its entirety.

As a cruel anti-communist, Latorczay-Szim was associated with the white terrorists in the report of the investigation. ‘The white terror commando committed a series of brutal tortures and executions. All the responsibility is Szim’s, he was the leader; in his lock-up, left-wing people were tortured.’²⁴² The description of Latorczay-Szim as a white terrorist helped to explain his deeds. On the other hand, his figure personalized the crimes of this group. Numerous witnesses believed that they could explain Szim’s cruelty. As one of them put it, Szim had been the cruelest figure of white terror in Miskolc. White terrorists played a significant role in the establishment of the counter-revolutionary system. They were usually recruited from the officers of the Hungarian army in the First World War, and, after the fall of the Hungarian Soviet Republic, they persecuted communists and Jews. Such groups are generally described as ‘officer commandos’. One of the witnesses remembered that the defendant ‘had also been the commander of the widely-known Szim-commando’. Nevertheless, Latorczay-Szim’s unit was not a military detachment like the officer-commandos. His men were regular military troops, who conducted political investigations between 1919 and 1921. Nevertheless, the witnesses remembered that he had been a bloodthirsty sadist who had gained a reputation in Borsod county equal to that of Iván Héjjas in the Trans-Tisza region.²⁴³

Iván Héjjas himself together with his companions were tried at the end of 1946. Héjjas was one of the most notorious figures of the white terror officers’ detachments that had carried out killing, torturing and robbing people between 1919 and 1921 in the region of Kecskemét. Although Héjjas himself and Mihály Francia Kiss who was one of his main followers could not be caught the trial encompassed more than forty defendants. The legal proceeding began in January 1947 in front of the Budapest People’s Tribunal and the sentence for the first instance was issued on 13 May 1947.²⁴⁴ Héjjas’s name in the Szim-trial invoked a particular context of interpreting cruelty,

anti-Semitism...was appeared in the practice of the Héjjas detachment in the atrocities of pre-Fascism to the extent that it was a worthwhile counterpart of the Fascist

²⁴¹ BAZ ML.

²⁴² BAZ ML.

²⁴³ BAZ ML On the investigation of military organisations, see Dr. Vargyai Gyula, *Katonai közigazgatás és kormányzói jogkör (1919-1921)*, (Budapest, Közgazdasági és Jogi Könyvkiadó, 1971), pp. 104-146.

vandalism of the 1940s...They bound their captives with preference that those were bound together by wires pulled through their palms. The splitting off of their skin, the piercing of their eyes, the cutting off their penis, the cutting up the women's breast, the sawing persons into two and the use of the Horthy-kalincs (bikacsök) were prescribed, as a matter of fact.²⁴⁵

Atrocities that were committed with special ruthlessness were emerged as a characteristic feature of the Nazi system by the Nuremberg-trial. The judges in Nuremberg argued that the specificity of the newly formulated concept of the crimes against humanity was not the enormous size or industrial mode of killing, but rather its connection to atavistic practice. Nazi violence was represented as a return of primitivism in the heart of modern civilized Europe. The prosecution, thus, exhibited a shrunken head of a once prisoner of war that was found in the Buchenwald camp. The head that shocked the audience reminded them to the practice of head shrinking of the Latin-American Jivaros that became to be widely known in the Western world a few years before the war. This depiction of primitive violence was accompanied by a constant description of uncontrolled instinctive anti-Jewish atrocities that meant a conscious reference to medieval *pogroms*. The spatial and temporal distancing of uncivilized barbarous violence resulted in that Nazi atrocities were described as peculiar ones that were unexpected and unimaginable in modern Europe.²⁴⁶

Hereby, the judge in the Héjjas-trial considered the white terror in 1919 not only a pre-history of the actual fascist movement and regimes, but rather the birth and beginning of Fascism itself, 'It was this Idea from Szeged which Miklós Kállay [then prime-minister] referred to in 1943 in his unfortunate speech as a theory predating the idea of National Socialism by more than a decade, and yet being essentially identical to it and having a major influence on it. This Idea from Szeged was the first sprout of the enormous tree of Fascism.'²⁴⁷ In the manner of apocalyptic history the sentence articulated a very forceful notion of continuity, 'The reasoning behind the accusation treats Hitler and Szálasi as if there had been no other historical alternative to fascism after 1919; events that followed the logic of history had to lead to 1944, then to 1947, and finally to the courtroom where

²⁴⁴ BFL VII 5e/20630/I

²⁴⁵ BFL VII 5e/20630/I

²⁴⁶ Lawrence Douglas, 'The Shrunken Head of Buchenwald: Icons of Atrocity at Nuremberg' in *Representations* 63 (Summer 1998), pp. 39-64.

²⁴⁷ BFL VII 5e/20630/I

these events and their consequences were being discussed. Thus, the executioner, Mihály Francia Kiss, was in fact already a member of the Arrow-Cross in 1919, long before the party was set up, and perhaps even then knew Hitler.²⁴⁸

The peculiar historical continuity of 1919 and 1944 appeared for the first time in the trial of former Prime Minister László Bárdossy. The verdict in his case brought down on 2 November 1945 argued for a historical continuity and pronounced that the events of 1944 had begun in 1919 in a certain way. The court intended to demonstrate that the counterrevolutionary regime began in 1919 was fostered by individual actions of certain definite persons instead of abstract motives. The sentence argued that the ultimate reason of the war catastrophe of the country had been the foundation of the counterrevolutionary regime led by Admiral Horthy in 1919. The system followed an identical road of politics during its whole existence and Bárdossy was only one person in a series of its carriers, 'In the point of view of the judge the Hungarian system of government took the direction in the Summer 1919 in Szeged that straightforwardly led the nation to World War II, namely the historical catastrophe that struck the Hungarian people.'²⁴⁹ The sentence connected the Hungarian fascist dictatorship of the Arrow-Cross Party in 1944 to 1919 retrospectively and claimed that the foundation of the counterrevolutionary regime was actually the birth of a fascist power, 'The Hungarian counterrevolution created the first fascist dictatorship in Europe. The counterrevolutionary leaders themselves boasted many times that the Idea from Szeged was the pioneer of fascism in Europe. This political system was really fascist-like: it was characterized by the suppression of civil rights, social and nationalist demagoguery and anti-Semitism. The workers were treated as enemies, thus the system was in constant struggle with them.'²⁵⁰

According to the act on the People's Tribunals the 'illegal execution and torturing of people – which could not be persecuted in the previous regime – had to be investigated and punished as 'crimes against the people and humanity'. In describing Szim, the judge made reference to this act, and did not utilize the term 'war crime'. Nevertheless, the reasoning of the verdict consistently stated that the defendant's deeds were tantamount to all the criteria of a war crime. According to the Act of the People's Tribunals, a war criminal was a person who promoted the expansion of the war to Hungary in 1939, or the involvement of Hungary in the war. The question was, thus, how political crimes committed in 1919 had contributed to Hungary's war catastrophe. The sentence argued:

After the fall of the Hungarian Soviet Republic which happened on 1 August 1919, the counter-revolution that spread over its ruins wrote the most baneful and disgraceful pages in Hungarian history.

²⁴⁸ Rév, 'Counterrevolution', p. 250.

²⁴⁹ *Bárdossy László a népbíróság előtt* (László Bárdossy in front of the People's Tribunal) ed.: Pál Pritz (Budapest, 1991), p. 242.

²⁵⁰ *Bárdossy* p. 244.

This is the first page in a chapter that was concluded by Ferenc Szálasi's insensate reign of terror at the end of the year 1944 and the spring of 1945 as the Russian Red Army of liberation was forging ahead.

The war against the Hungarian people was started by Miklós Horthy in his sanguinary frenzy in the year 1919 on behalf of his class and clique with his slayer henchmen, and was pursued by him through various means during the next 25 years, when he imbecilely passed the murderous weapon into Ferenc Szálasi's hands in shameful conditions on 15 October 1945, who cut the last strokes with it on the Hungarian people until the liberation. This war, the struggle of the counter-revolution against the Hungarian people was constant during a period of a quarter of a century, it was waged by the same forces, was motivated by the same goals, difference was made only by its means according to the circumstances of the ages.²⁵¹

The history here ended with a real 'apocalypse': the catastrophe and destruction of the Second World War. The collapse, however, was attributed to one single cause by the judge: the fall of the First Hungarian Soviet Republic. According to the sentence, the road from 1919 towards 1944 was straight and unambiguous: history left no alternative but war after the defeat of the proletarian regime.

There passed 25 years between 1919 and 1944. The oppression, the struggle of the reaction against the Hungarian people started in 1919. In the year of 1945, the glorious soldiers of the Red Army liberated the country under oppression and subjugation. Essentially, throughout the 25 years, the reaction continued its struggle against the Hungarian people with the same means in 1919 and in 1944... Here is a politically uniform process which started in 1919 and ended at the time of the liberation.²⁵²

Apocalyptic or prophetic histories see in the past only pre-histories and pre-figurations, and attempt to represent inevitability and dismiss all alternative possibilities. They are usually based upon the rhetorical device of mirroring back the knowledge of the present into the past, which seeks the signs of events in the past to prove that the eventual outcome was the only possible historical outcome.²⁵³ The historical interpretation of the People's Tribunal implied that the war catastrophe had been the inevitable consequence of

²⁵¹ BAZ ML.

²⁵² BAZ ML.

²⁵³ Michael André Bernstein, *Foregone Conclusions*, (Berkeley LA – London, University of California Press, 1994), p. 16.

the defeat of the revolutionary forces; namely, the Soviet Republic. As the Horthy regime had been born to crush the genuine movement of the people, it had to maintain a constant struggle against the people. The judge argued that the war itself had been nothing other than another means of fighting against the Hungarian people. From this point of view, the only satisfactory explanation of Hungary's participation in the war, was that it was a means of perpetuating the survival of the Horthy regime. The counter-revolution in 1919 had been the beginning of this political system; thus, it was also the start of the war.

In the interpretation of the People's Tribunal's, the collapse of the First Hungarian Soviet Republic was the cause of the war-catastrophe, since it was in 1919 that the fascist regime of 1944 had been born in Hungary.

Not without grounds, Horthy boasted that the first manifestation of fascism appeared in Hungary in 1919, while Hitler and Mussolini admitted the fact resignedly. This fascist era continued during the next twenty-five years.²⁵⁴

The events of 1919 convinced the court that the 'Horthyist-fascist dictatorship' had come to power with the single purpose of eliminating communism; therefore, it concluded that communism was the only true enemy of fascism. The essence of the fascist systems was to fight communism. Consequently, the inevitable fall of fascist powers meant the inevitable triumph of communism, because, besides these two historical forces, there were no other alternatives. In turn, this straightforward historical interpretation was a powerful means of justifying communist rule. The judge argued that the defeat in the war had become unavoidable from the very moment that the first communist regime in 1919 was overthrown. Furthermore, as the war resulted in the destruction of the counter-revolutionary system, its fall had been encoded at the time of its genesis. With this reasoning, the sentence sought to demonstrate the thesis of the inevitable downfall of all non-communist social and political structures. The judge believed that, by such a historical argument, the thesis of the inevitable victory of communist systems could be justified.

The purpose of the trials of war criminals in Hungary was, from the beginning, the creation of historical narratives. The foundations of this peculiar representation of the recent past were laid down by the communist or leftist political attempts to discredit the constructed history of the Horthy-regime in order to bolster the legitimacy of the new

²⁵⁴ BAZ ML.

political system.²⁵⁵ The preface to the decree on the People's Tribunals in 1945, written by István Ries, then social democrat Minister of Justice, already claimed that the beginnings of the road leading to the war catastrophe had to be sought in the events of 1919:

'The destruction of Hungary did not start with Hungary's drifting into the war and less with Sztójay's or Szálasi's Arrow-Cross rule. The counter-revolution succeeding the revolution of 1919 laid the grounds for the Hungarian catastrophe... It could almost be foreseen that they would set the country on fire. They systematically prepared the Hungarian people for suicide.'²⁵⁶

The Political Prosecutor in the trial of another former Prime Minister called the People's Tribunal for a clear differentiation between guilty individuals and the rest of the people. He claimed very powerfully that criminals were possible to be indicated and crimes could be declined. The prosecutor argued that the only appropriate punishment that could equal the character of the culprits was their radical exclusion from the community. They required the finishing off the social drama,²⁵⁷ that is to say the legal confirmation of the irremediable break in society and the final expulsion of the ill-doers, 'The tribunal of the Hungarian people must condemn in front of the whole world the man who became traitor of his nation and people and who pushed this country into the deepest abyss of its history and the sentence must excommunicate him from the body of this nation. The sentence of the People's Tribunal must shout from the housetops that neither the working Hungarian people nor the Hungarian nation are guilty, but this man and those who after betraying humanity, culture and human morality shamefully put the whole Hungarian nation on the market. This is the defendant's crime and of those lackeys who accompanied him. Let the tribunal of the Hungarian people condemn them according to their crimes.'²⁵⁸ The Political Prosecutor in Bárdossy's trial requested the judges to act in the same way, 'Dear Sir People's Judges! Now there is nothing else to do but to point out that the Hungarian people that eventually got a word - for the first

²⁵⁵ See László Karsai, 'The People's Courts and Revolutionary Justice in Hungary, 1945-46', in: *The Politics of Retribution: World War II and Its Aftermath*, (eds): István Deák, Jan T. Gross & Tony Judt (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), pp. 233-51. László Varga, "'Forradalmi törvényesség": Jogszolgáltatás 1945 után Magyarországon', in: *Beszélő*, 4 (November 1999), pp. 57-73.

²⁵⁶ The Decree on the People's Tribunals. No. M. E. 81/1945, at p. 6.

²⁵⁷ The concept of 'social drama' is from Victor Turner, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors* (Ithaca - London, 1974), pp. 35-42.

²⁵⁸ *Imrédy Béla a vádlottak padján* (Béla Imrédy in the Prisoners' Box) eds.: Péter Sipos and András Sipos

time in its history - has nothing to do with these masters, You must expel, deny and exterminate them.²⁵⁹

At this moment the way of forgetting the Second World War did not differ from the general European attempts to come to terms with the past. The immediate reaction in 1945 was the cry of 'Never again!' that signaled the inherent demand for forgetting. In most part of Europe the suppression was carried out by turning the crimes onto the Germans. Histories of German occupation and legends of national resistance were born immediately parallel to those trials that were designed to identify the group of traitors in real persons. In Germany society were divided between perpetrators and innocent, in fact, victimized population, as well. The narrative on Hitler and his vicious clique that terrorized the majority of the people coincided with the immediate postwar experience of most of the ordinary Germans who felt themselves victims of air-raids, destruction and privation. The process of de-Nazification created the category of Mitläufer who were not considered real perpetrators in spite of their affiliation with the regime. This fact made the collective forgetting of participation and co-operation easier all the more due to their subsequent re-integration into the public sphere after 1948. Commemoration in Germany focused on anti-Nazi resistance and avoided to include survivors whereas the mass extermination of the Jews was encircled in silence.²⁶⁰

Originally, 1919 played a similar role in Hungary: the event was recollected in order to obtain historical explanation for the division of the society into perpetrators and victims. For, according to the prosecution, the separate history of masters and the people did not begin with Bárdossy. The prosecutors argued that basically Hungarian history had been divided into two since 1919. The judge argued that in 1919 power had gone into the hands of a well-defined system of governance. By this mean the court hoped to decline the stigma of collective guilt. The events of 1919 was evoked to demonstrate that from here onwards the Hungarian people lost its sovereignty and the country was basically ruled by selfish adventurer politicians and as a result it suffered the strokes of 1944. The First Soviet Republic in 1919 paradoxically was seen from this point of view as a democratic regime and the forerunner of democracy that served the national interest, 'The workers

(Budapest, 1999), p. 360.

²⁵⁹ Bárdossy p. 203.

²⁶⁰ For forgetting the W.W. II. see Tony Judt, 'The Past is Another Country: Myth and Memory in Postwar Europe', *Daedalus* (4. 1992), pp. 83-97. The German case is in Alf Lüdtke, 'Coming to Terms with the Past: Illusions of Remembering, Ways of Forgetting Nazism in West Germany', in: *Journal of Modern History*, 65 (Summer, 1993), pp. 542-572.

took the power in their own hands in Hungary in 1919 and they organized the national resistance against the demands of our neighbors.²⁶¹ The sentence pointed out that in 1919 Hungary faced with two opportunities: it could become either a democratic country or feudalism would prevail. Although the judge argued that the war destruction was a logical consequence of the counterrevolutionary rule, it did not attempt to point out that all other alternatives were erased from Hungarian history afterwards. The history that had begun in 1919 was a constant struggle between the evil leaders and the aspirations of the people which always carried the opportunity of change. According to the historical interpretation of the sentence the tragedy of Hungary was precisely the fact that its leaders always ignored the interest of the people. According to the charge the history of the ruling class meant the continuity of the politics that eventually resulted in the war catastrophe. Bárdossy was accused of ‘accomplishing consistently the politics of the masters’ Hungary, the ruling Hungary, the politics that was begun by Horthy in ‘19 and was consolidated by Bethlen, that passed through Bárdossy, that leads straightforwardly to the same conclusion, this is the politics of the 25 years regime, to where Szálasi’s bandit politics, the politics of this political adventurer loafing about the regime: to 15 October (the day of the failed armistice and the beginning of the Arrow-Cross rule) and to the activity directed to the obstruction of the armistice.’²⁶² In this regard, however, the Hungarian trials and their similar Central and Eastern European counterparts diverged from the Western European pattern from the beginning. In the West, the post-war trials of those accused of war crimes were principally aimed at amending the victims’ memories of wartime sufferings, without any explicit claim to the construction of overarching historical interpretations.²⁶³

The formal similarity of the legal and historical practices seemed to authorize the claim of the judge in asserting true historical statements. History and jurisprudence share common epistemological roots: in fact, both historiography and legal proceedings originated in the demand to establish the reality of the past. Generally speaking, a juridical

²⁶¹ Bárdossy p. 242.

²⁶² Bárdossy p. 202. The Political Prosecutor in Imrédy’s trial began his historical narrative with the events of 1919 as well, nonetheless his precise argument can not be detected due to the fragmentation of the sources. Imrédy p. 356.

²⁶³ See *The Politics of Retribution*. Henry Rousso, *The Vichy Syndrome: History and Memory in France since 1944*, (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1991) Pieter Lagrou, *The Legacy of Nazi Occupation: Patriotic Memory and National Recovery in Western Europe, 1945-1965* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000) and Bernhard Giesen, ‘National Identity as Trauma: The German Case’, in: *Myth and Memory in the Construction of Community*, (ed): Bo Stråth (Brussels: Pieter Lang, 2000), pp. 240-7. On Sweden in the same volume, see Bo Stråth, ‘Poverty, Neutrality and Welfare: Three key Concepts in the Modern Foundation Myth of Sweden’, pp. 393-4. For the Hungarian case, see István Rév, ‘Miért győzhetett oly elviselhetetlenül könnyen a

verdict needs the notion of the past in order to make statements on the present. This means that, in order to claim titles, rights or judgments in a legally appropriate way, one has to know the preceding events of the case in question. In order to claim these rights or the basis for legal actions, one has to prove that something actually took place. Thus, it is necessary to demonstrate the actual *reality* of a happening. Legal reasoning in Western law ordinarily takes the following form: the established facts indicate a plot that is always related to the past, whereas the proven events are organized in a chronological order. The argumentation is always retroactive: an action that is known by the judge is conceived of as having been done because of certain reasons which, however, are only assumed to be probable. This is also the way modern historiography operates.²⁶⁴

Szim personified and realized the narrative described above. The sentence declared: ‘The defendant was one of the outstanding leaders of this exterminating war led by executioners.’²⁶⁵ One of the articles of a newspaper claimed, that ‘the Hungarian people were offended by the activity of the defendant!’²⁶⁶ Another paper wrote that ‘The honor of the Hungarian people requires Lőrinc Szim to suffer for the crimes committed against the people!’²⁶⁷ ‘The People’s Tribunal in Miskolc sentenced the bloody handed executioner of the workers and peasants in Upper-Hungary to death’,²⁶⁸ as one article informed the population. Later, it gave an account of the trial in the following way,

‘The terrifying crimes of the counter-revolution have been revealed during the trial. The true face of the counter-revolution born in crime and blood, and which perpetrated the killing of peasants and workers was shown in its own nakedness.’²⁶⁹

The public trial itself was abundant in horrific details. The court attempted to show tangible or visible evidence wherever it was possible. When one of the witnesses stated that, ‘The defendant kicked even the flesh from my chest,’ then ‘according to the People’s Prosecutor’s proposal the witness takes off his coat and, pulling up his shirt, shows his

kommunizmus Magyarországon?’, in: *Rubicon*, (1989), 7, pp. 4-6.

²⁶⁴ Michel Foucault, ‘Truth and Juridical Forms’ in: his *Power*, (New York, New Press, 2000), pp. 46-7. Patrick Nerhot, *Law, Writing, Meaning: An Essay in Legal Hermeneutics*, (Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 1992), pp. 24-109. See Carlo Ginzburg, *The Judge and The Historian*, (London - New York, Verso, 1999), pp. 12-14.

²⁶⁵ BAZ ML.

²⁶⁶ *Szabad Magyarország*, 7 April, 1948.

²⁶⁷ *Felvidéki Népszava*, 7 April 1948.

²⁶⁸ *Felvidéki Népszava*, 7 April 1948.

²⁶⁹ *Felvidéki Népszava*, 7 April 1948.

chest. The Chairman and the People's Judges inspect the witness' breast and state that a mark from a bruise can be seen on that.' Later, the 'witness takes his upper set of teeth (a dental plate), shows it and declares: all of my teeth were knocked out'.²⁷⁰ These details had no direct relationship with the course of the historical narrative. They played no role in advancing the story. According to the judge, the existence of counter-revolution would have resulted in the downfall of the regime during the Second World War, even without the committing of ruthless crimes. Such particulars fulfilled no narrative function. Having no symbolic function, such details could only state and indicate that the story *really happened*.²⁷¹ The press also emphasized the horrifying details. Press articles bore titles such as the following: 'Horrors of the Szim trial',²⁷² 'Witnesses confess of brutal torture in Szim's trial',²⁷³ 'Gruesome confessions of terrors in the Szim-sanatorium',²⁷⁴ 'Szim knocked out all teeth of a craftsman with his own hands',²⁷⁵ 'First blow given by Lőrinc Szim to victims taken to the house of terrors in Csabai-kapu, old handicapped invalid beaten until he was covered with blood'.²⁷⁶ The articles gave accounts on similar events. 'The henchmen of the Szim-sanatorium hanged their victim by his hair'.²⁷⁷ An article quoted a witness who 'had seen in the cell that a man rolled about in his blood as the nails had been torn from his toes by Szim's executioners'.²⁷⁸ The newspapers attempted to capture the attention of their readers. Shocking brief statements appeared on front-pages: 'Blood-curdling details on the horrors of the Szim-sanatorium',²⁷⁹ 'Lőrinc Szim's henchmen started their carefully chosen tortures at the evening peal of bells,' or 'Lőrinc Szim was Horthy's blood-handed henchman in Miskolc'.²⁸⁰ Popular trials are stages where complicated notions of social reality are re-enacted in palpable ways and, hence, rendered easily comprehensible.²⁸¹

²⁷⁰ BAZ ML.

²⁷¹ Roland Barthes created the concept of 'reality effect' to signify these apparently unimportant particulars in narratives. See his 'The Reality Effect' in his *The Rustle of Language*, (Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1986), pp. 141-8.

²⁷² *Szabad Magyarország*, 24 March 1948.

²⁷³ *Szabad Magyarország*, 25 March 1948.

²⁷⁴ *Felvidéki Népszava*, 18 February 1948.

²⁷⁵ *Szabad Magyarország*, 23 March 1948.

²⁷⁶ *Felvidéki Népszava*, 23 March 1948.

²⁷⁷ *Szabad Magyarország*, 21 March 1948.

²⁷⁸ *Felvidéki Népszava*, 24 March 1948.

²⁷⁹ *Szabad Magyarország*, 20 March 1948.

²⁸⁰ *Felvidéki Népszava*, 17 March 1948.

²⁸¹ *Popular Trials*, ed.: Robert Hariman (London – Tuscaloosa, 1990), pp. 1-16.

Latorczay-Szim and his defense lawyer attempted to rebut the accusations. Their tactic was directed against the charge of war crimes. Nevertheless, they did not challenge the thesis that the political crimes committed in 1919 and 1920 had been war crimes, but instead sought to prove that Latorczay-Szim had not actually carried out the actions attributed to him. The defendant did not plead guilty to the spreading of fascism. Denying this, he claimed that he had prevented the persecuted persons from being carried away by the authorities and that he had opposed the Germans and the Arrow Cross. However, he had not opposed the Russian army, which had made an effort to liberate the Hungarian people from German subjugation. Szim presented himself as a resistance fighter, who had kept the oath he had sworn to the Regent by not handing the barracks over to the Arrow Cross. He summed up his arguments in the following way:

‘In the hardest and crucial period in the history of the Hungarian people, I was already advancing on the way as ordered by the laws of humanity and democratic ideals.’

Basically, he was only a soldier, who had fought when the people demanded it, as in 1919 or during the Second World War.

According to the logic of the court, Latorczay-Szim, who was portrayed as a typical figure of the Horthy-regime, could not have prevented or reduced the devastation of the war. The acquittal of the defendant would have meant that the Horthy-regime had survived the war, and this was impossible to countenance. If the reason for the war was the Horthy-regime, then Latorczay-Szim could only be a war criminal. In order to justify this interpretation, the People’s Tribunal tried to prove that the defendant was not a resistance fighter.

‘According to the defendant’s own presentation, he, as a resistance fighter, gained no significant merits that could be adduced as considerable mitigating circumstance. He did not suffer any legal disadvantages by the Arrow Cross rule, except for having been wounded, which would have been inconceivable if his resistance had been of great value. His injury was instead the consequence of the misunderstanding of the situation.’

Such perception denied that Szim had actually resisted the Arrow Cross. In another statement, however, the court argued that it was theoretically impossible for a Horthy-officer to resist. ‘The Hungarian people have nothing to do with the fact that these two

beasts of prey: the Arrow Cross and the Horthy henchmen were wrangling over the bones.²⁸² The People's Tribunal at this point demonstrated an attitude which was similar to that of certain inquisitors during witch trials; all kinds of behavior of the defendant could prove his or her guilt. The way in which Szim's wounds demonstrated his war crimes was the same way in which the inquisitors condemned the suspected witches on the basis of the literature of demonology that clearly prescribed identities. If the defendant 'were to confess, she was guilty; if she remained silent, even under torture, she did so by virtue of an enchantment (the so-called *maleficium taciturnitatis*); if she denied being a witch, then she lied, seduced by the Devil, the father of lies'.²⁸³

Secondly, the sentence proved that Szim had led the life of a counter-revolutionary. In spite of the fact that he fought in the Hungarian Red Army, he had 'secretly' prepared himself for the coming of the counter-revolutionary regime. The prosecutor articulated this narrative in the following way,

'The defendant displayed a unity of desire and decision in the summer of 1919. The defendant started his activity before his capture, namely, he surrendered the company he commanded into the hands of the Czechs. He pursued this in captivity in Bohemia, when he organized people for the white terror. When he arrived home, it was a natural outcome that he, as a white terrorist officer, was put at the head of this commando...'

The sentence accepted this interpretation as true and argued the following,

'His counter-revolutionary aspirations had already manifested themselves during the existence of the Soviet Republic. He had been the commander of one of the companies of the Hungarian Red Army, of the Red Army, which had defended Hungarian territories against the surrounding states that would subsequently organize themselves into the little *entente* in the spring and summer of 1919. The defendant believed that he could serve the so-called "national idea" manifested in the damned "thought of Szeged", which would later direct our foreign policy towards the national disaster with its extreme irredentism, by surrendering together with his troops to the Czech army and, thus, he himself poured murderous machine-gun fire onto his own soldiers who were fighting against the Czechs around Miskolc.'

²⁸² BAZ ML.

²⁸³ Ginzburg, *The Judge and The Historian*, p. 103.

‘It is obvious that he owed his honorable position to the full confidence of Horthy and his clique, who appreciated his merits in leading the counter-revolution to victory. He obtained the post of the commander of the so-called department of military investigation – since he was the ardent supporter of the ‘white terror’ which was the ground of the counter-revolution – which was created to terrorize and ravage the counties of Borsod, Gömör, Abaúj, Zemplén and Heves.’²⁸⁴

The biography is a means of maintaining an identity that has already been formed. Life narratives reflect and reveal the character and essence of their bearers. These stories are able to demonstrate that the attitudes that caused the present behavior of a person were already present in his or her past. In mental hospitals, the case records play this role.²⁸⁵ Prisons construct the essential character of the convict, the *criminal* through an observance and recording of his or her life-story. Penal institutions are convinced that the personality of the criminal can be identified with his or her crime, since malicious acts are the result of the past lives of the individual: crimes are born in life-stories.²⁸⁶ Biographical records played a role similar to that of certain rituals in tribal societies where ambiguous identities were fixed. During these rites, entities that cannot be categorized without doubts are usually imposed to occupy one prescribed position in the taxonomy, or are simply eliminated through a ceremonial meal. Anthropological data testify to the way in which a system of categories attempts to deal with ambiguity or anomaly. A well-ordered structure of classifications tries to encompass all the phenomena of the surrounding world, whereas an ambiguous or anomalous event entails a challenge to it due to the invitation of more than one interpretation. The experience that does not conform to the previously set system is ordinarily considered ‘impure’ or dangerous. In other words, an indefinable event spoils the pattern and causes pollution. In order to dissolve the confusion the maintainers of the structure may choose to control the danger physically and to aim at excluding any plurality of meaning by settling for one or the other interpretation.²⁸⁷ Legal proceedings aim to achieve true knowledge about the past by connecting past acts to individuals. These

²⁸⁴ BAZ ML.

²⁸⁵ Erving Goffman, *Asylums: Essays on the Social Situation of Mental Patients and Other Inmates*, (London: Penguin, 1991), pp. 155-6., pp. 375-7, & p. 87.

²⁸⁶ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, (New York: Vintage, 1979), pp. 251-2. On biography as evidence, see István Rév, ‘In Mendacio Veritas, in: *Representations*, 35 (Summer 1991), pp. 1-20.

²⁸⁷ For example, a monstrous childbirth may threaten the cultural order of a society. The Nuer cope with this anomaly by secluding the possibility of manifold interpretations. They treat the children as baby hippopotamuses born to humans accidentally and drive them back to their proper place among animals: the river. Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, (London, Routledge, 1966), pp. 37-40, 49-53 & 94-5.

institutions perceived the defendants as well-defined entities whose personal deeds formed a coherent unity with the personality of the culprit. The courts detected the connection between the past of the accused and his or her crime, as well as the expectations of his or her future. The legal procedure was interested in the origins of the crime within the criminal, be it the result of an instinct, the unconscious, the environment or family heritage. Crime was regarded as a consequence of the specific character of the individual, the way of life, or the thinking of the criminal. In reality, the trials themselves shaped the subjects of the committed crimes in order to establish the most appropriate and effective punishment for the criminals.²⁸⁸

If the defendant aspired to lead the system to victory, which was the reason for the war catastrophe, then the statement that he was a war-criminal seemed to be logical for the People's Tribunal.

‘Thus, in this light, the defendant’s acts met the criteria of war crimes. The connection to war is not excluded by the longer period passed between the time of committing the acts and the actual breaking out of the war.’

Regarding the above-described narrative, Latorczay-Szim did not merely symbolize the Horthy-regime as a social and political system, but symbolized its history from its beginning to its inevitable end. To the court, his life narrative represented the history of the downfall: his destiny shed light on the fate of a whole social system. Latorczay’s actual person represented the historical continuity between white terror and the war catastrophe, while his figure brought an abstract process to life. By staging him in the court, a particular historical narrative could be justified. He was the commander of ‘a commando called the Department of Military Investigation; actions like these are ranked among the first phenomena of the reaction in Hungary, and, as such, they prevailed in the series of events which led necessarily to Hungary’s drifting into the war and later to the fatal downfall.’²⁸⁹ Thereby, a retrospective view of the happenings of 1919 made it possible to create a historical interpretation based upon individual actions. This fact provided the People’s Tribunal with the proper conditions to fulfill its duty and to make statements that could be accepted as a sentence. Lawful sentences justify individuals and

²⁸⁸ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, pp. 17-22, 99-101, 189-94. Foucault, ‘Truth and Juridicial Forms’, pp. 56-7, & 83-4.

²⁸⁹ BAZ ML.

their personal deeds, whereas legal proceedings deal with individual activities. Consequently, utterances are not valid sentences unless they meet these requirements. A trial is a place where it is not sufficient to say certain things in order for them to be accepted: the conditions have to be appropriate and the participants have to follow the expected procedural routine.²⁹⁰ In this way, the People's Tribunal successfully performed the act of sentencing people. As a valid sentence, however, or as an accepted truth, it verified an abstract historical representation the only evidence of which was the biography of the defendant constructed by legal means.²⁹¹ Consequently, the trials of war criminals did not prove the representation of an abstract historical process - the continuity of the events of 1919 and 1944 - based upon comprehensive research, but rendered them tangible through the construction of individual personalities.²⁹²

3

Post-war political trials seemed to prove the Soviet-type of teleological narrative about the inevitable victory of communism by generating actual life courses that were directly tangible in the courtroom. Thus, it is hardly surprising that this peculiar mode of historical representation began to dominate communist interpretations of the recent past. The first published history textbook for the eighth class of the primary schools in 1948 began the history of the counter-revolutionary regime by focusing upon the brutal persecution of communists by 'Horthy's gangs',

'The counter-revolutionary hordes were authorized to massacre anyone labeled as 'communist conspirator', without a legal sentence in the street. The officers' commandos situated in hotels Gellért and Britannia and in various barracks terrified the capital. The

²⁹⁰ See John L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1975), pp. 14-5.

²⁹¹ Mark J. Osiel also claimed that the formation of collective memory in court is unintentional. The author also expresses doubts concerning the success of history writing in legal proceedings. 'Ever Again: Legal Remembrance of Administrative Massacre', in: *University of Pennsylvania Law Review*, (1995), 144, 2 pp. 463-74. For a comprehensive view on the structure of retrospective justice, see Stanley Cohen, 'State Crimes of Previous Regimes: Knowledge, Accountability, and the Policing of the Past', in: *Law and Social Inquiry*, 20 (Winter 1995), pp. 7-50.

²⁹² Therefore, contrary to the opinion of most of the historians, these trials concerned themselves with individualisation rather than abstraction. According to the previous interpretations, the purpose of these legal acts was to produce an abstract image of a historical phenomenon all in all through the symbolic persons of the defendants. A recent study on László Bárdossy's case, who was the first pre-war Prime Minister to be condemned to death, pronounces that, 'The whole trial, but especially the sentence for the first instance shows a very definite effort to establish a then profoundly new conception of history. In the spirit of this conception not only Bárdossy was condemned devastatingly but also the quarter of century between 1919 and 1944.' Pál Pritz, 'Bevezetés' in *Bárdossy*, p. 16. See also his *A Bárdossy-per* (Budapest, 2001) In a similar manner the editor of the records of another prominent ex-Prime Minister's case states that, 'The trials held in front of the People's Tribunals and especially those public criminal proceedings that were carried out against persons occupied the office of the Prime Minister or leader of the state had the important designation to represent pejoratively and to deny unambiguously and definitely the history of that quarter of century passed between the two world wars.' Péter Sipos, 'Imrédy Béla pere a népbíróság előtt' in *Imrédy Béla a vádlottak padján*, p. 68.

situation was the same in the whole country. In Kecskemét, about one hundred persons were caught and killed in the Orgovány woods under the direction of Iván Héjjas. The real masters of the country were the bloodthirsty Prónay-, Ostenburg- and other detachments.²⁹³

The authors were convinced that the nature of violence reflected the fascist essence of the system. The textbook claimed that, in December 1919, 'The fascist terror continued to collect its victims'. The second edition of the schoolbook in 1950 stated that 1919 meant the birth of a system that was inherently against the people, since Horthy's group aimed at 'restoring the rule of the great land-owners and capitalists, diminishing the achievements of the revolution and taking bloody revenge on the Hungarian people'.²⁹⁴ The historical interpretations emphasized the foundation of the putative fascist regime in Hungary.

Apart from highlighting the fact that Hungary had been the first fascist dictatorship, scholarly attempts to understand the counter-revolution provided more sophisticated explanations for the foundations of fascism. In 1951, in a book on the white terror, two young historians argued that the system of brutal oppression had been formed as a result of the resistance of the Hungarian people. The authors pointed out that, once they had experienced the benefits of a socialist regime, the Hungarian workers would no longer tolerate the restoration of capitalism. The combination of the techniques of suppression was the crucial factor in the genesis of Hungarian fascism.²⁹⁵ The emphasis on violence and oppression is hardly astonishing. For communist scholars, the history of the inter-war regime was a genuine indictment that could be represented most adequately by following the pattern of the post-war trials of war criminals. The form of historical narrative did, in reality, include legal texts. Thereby, communist historians used a type of historical narrative the accepted truth of which was based upon no historical proof. Built upon legal authority and vested with the political authority of partisanship, communist historiography could claim the truth of these representations without the verification of historical narratives. Soviet-type historiography thus shifted the authority of historical representations from its regular basis of independent research and the interpretation of evidence towards political devotion and partisanship. Thus, the sovietization of history

²⁹³ *Történelem VIII*, (Budapest, Publisher unknown, 1948), pp. 64-5.

²⁹⁴ *Történelem VIII*, (Budapest, Publisher unknown, 1950), p. 186.

²⁹⁵ Karsai - Pamlényi, *Fehérterror*

domesticated a pattern of historiographical authority that preceded the formation of modern historical scholarship. The modernization of historical studies took place as a result of the rejection of historical interpretations as articulated by traditional institutions of authority, such as the Church and the Prince, and the endowment of organizations, such as universities, which possessed the potential to define the criteria of proper scholarship.²⁹⁶

In 1953, the first volume of a series of source publications was published by Dezső Nemes, a research fellow in the Institute for Party History. The title of the book was *The Coming to Power and the Reign of Terror of the Counter-revolution in Hungary*.²⁹⁷ The editor contributed to the volume with a lengthy study entitled *For the History of the Bloodthirsty Counter-revolution*. The author re-articulated the standardized opinions on the violent nature of the counter-revolution as a proof of its fascist essence and the inevitability of the foundation of the fascist dictatorship. Besides this, he elaborated a complex historical explanation concerning the necessary participation of the putative Hungarian fascist system in the war. Nemes argued that, although the social democrat government that succeeded the dictatorship of the proletariat on 1 August 1919 had advanced the restoration of capitalism, the bourgeoisie had not trusted it. According to the article, the ‘capitalist classes’ preferred a counter-revolutionary dictatorship in order to secure their interests. The author concluded that it was logical that the massacres committed by Horthy’s troops against the communists had increased confidence in his person on the part of the imperialists. They perceived the activity of the ‘robber and murderer detachments’ as the policy of the ‘strong hand’ that was needed to restore capitalism.

‘The counter-revolution gave power to the most bloodthirsty beasts of capitalism, to the most bloodthirsty representatives of the great capitalists and landlords. The Hungarian great capitalists and landlords, however, supported the coming to power of precisely these representatives, which was not only acknowledged by the *entente* imperialists, but was also endorsed by them. Horthy’s army gained the trust of the industrialists by the bestial terror directed against the workers.’²⁹⁸

²⁹⁶ On the institutional segments of the modernization of history, see Gerard Noiriel, *Sur la “crise” de l’histoire*, (Paris, Éditions Belin, 1996)

²⁹⁷ *Iratok az ellenforradalom történetéhez*. Vol. 1. *Az ellenforradalom hatalomrajutása és rémuralma Magyarországon 1919-1921*, (Records to the History of the Counter revolution. Vol. 1. The Coming to Power and Reign of Terror of the Counter revolution in Hungary 1919-1921) (ed): Dezső Nemes (Budapest, Szikra, 1953)

²⁹⁸ Dezső Nemes, ‘A vérengző ellenforradalom történetéhez’ (To the History of the Bloodthirsty

The Party historian pointed out that the Horthy-regime had lived up to the expectations of the capitalist class that had been its sponsor. Nemes emphasized that the governments always acted on behalf of the capitalists. They reduced wages and tolerated a high level of unemployment, inflation and speculation. Nevertheless, the policy of unrestrained exploitation could only be maintained by means of sheer terror because of the desperate resistance of the workers. The author demonstrated the intensity of discontent by describing various miner strikes and referring to the high membership of the trade unions. As a result, according to the study, the reign of terror came to an end: the massacre was the means designed to restore and maintain capitalist power after the communist experience. The terrorist regime developed logically, since the old means of suppression could no longer fulfill their task. Consequently, they argued, the counter-revolutionary regime employed a wide variety of measures in order to establish a profound system of oppression. The various governments introduced summary jurisdiction, political prisons, internment camps and frequent executions. The communist historian claimed that the fascist dictatorship had been established as the only possible tool to eliminate communism and thereby preserve capitalism.

Nemes presented his evidence to prove that fascism had inevitably led to war. Firstly, the exploitation of the workers had resulted in privation and serious economic hardships. Although the profit of capitalists rose, productivity declined. The author stressed that, in this situation, capitalism could only be saved by foreign loans. Nevertheless, repayments could be achieved through even more ruthless exploitation. Since the territory of exploitation had been narrowed, the Hungarian capitalist class had begun to search for new areas. The communist historian concluded that this inevitably resulted in a policy of revision and war. Secondly, foreign loans raised the dependency of the country on foreign capital, mainly on German economic and political interests. Thus, the 'adventure politics' of war of the counter-revolutionary regime had inevitably led to the destruction of the Horthy-regime.

'Eventually, during the 1930s, and especially at the time of the Second World War, Horthy and his fellows "successfully" transformed the country into Hitler's colony and the monopoly territory for the expansion of the German imperialist great capital, and resulted

in Hungary's participation in the anti-Soviet imperialist war of robbery. They pushed the country into a new catastrophic war of robbery, which destroyed the Horthy-regime. Its fall was as shameful and disgraceful as its coming into existence.'²⁹⁹

The constructed continuity between 1919 and 1944 made it possible to represent the Second World War as the world-wide collision of fascism and communism. Party historians emphasized the details of white terror and the persecutions against communists. They also claimed that the Nazi system had been the direct consequence of 1919. Thus, the white terror of 1919 overshadowed the memory of the genocide of the 1940s: the horrors of the counter-revolution eclipsed the abyss of the Hitlerite extermination. 1919, as a prelude, expelled the Jews and other victims from the narrative: it was claimed that the real victims of the death camps of fascism had been the communists.³⁰⁰ Thereby, it became possible to suggest that the only purpose of the Nazis had been the elimination of communists and that all anti-communist regimes were actually fascist. Party historians constructed a rigid interpretation of history that consisted exclusively of two factors: fascism and communism. All events of the past could be comprehended with the help of this scheme. The communist narrative of the Second World War did not make a development similar to that of the West possible. In the West, from the end of the 1950s, and after the Eichmann-trial in particular, the memory of the war was inseparably linked to the Holocaust. Thus, the notion of fascism began to be used to educate Western European peoples from committing mass extermination once again. In the Soviet *bloc*, in contrast, the concept was exploited to justify communist rule.

The narrative of the necessary victory of communism proved to be fairly fragile. The indictment-like form of communist historical interpretation had one further important consequence. In its form, it was a counter-history. Counter-history writing is a peculiar mode of historical representations: it aims at depriving the target group from its self-identity by constructing a counter-identity. Counter-histories reverse the positive self-assessment of the adversary in order to substitute it with a negative image.³⁰¹ From the perspective of the inevitable defeat, the history of the Horthy-regime became a counter-

²⁹⁹ Nemes, 'A vérengző ellenforradalom', p. 108.

³⁰⁰ On the controversial politics of memory in Poland see: James E. Young, *The Texture of Memory* (New Haven – London, 1993), pp. 119-54. The communist interpretation managed to construct a narrative of the post-1945 anti-Semitic pogroms and their connection to the Holocaust in Hungary, astonishingly, without the Jews. Péter Apor, 'The Creative Fear: Fascism, Anti-Semitism, Democracy and the Foundation of the People's Democracy in Hungary' in *Myth and Memory*, pp. 263-79.

³⁰¹ Amos Funkenstein, 'History, Counterhistory, and Narrative', in: *Probing the Limits of Representation*, Saul

history, because a political and social structure that inescapably led to collapse could only be a bad system. Counter-histories, however, generally fail to produce the positive self-image of their supporters. They focus on the image of the adversary and construct the self-image in contrast with the image of the enemy group. In practice, this meant that communist historians hoped to prove the necessary victory of communism by demonstrating the inevitable fall of the Horthy-system. However, although they did manage to provide a relatively successful negative image of their predecessor, they failed to incorporate positive evidence of the inevitable glory of communism into the narrative. To base the history of inevitable victory solely upon the history of the inevitable fall foreshadowed its very own inevitable fall.

Funeral

1

For many decades, the Pantheon of the Labor Movement situated in the Kerepesi cemetery of Budapest used to be regarded by the then ruling Hungarian communist party as one of its principal commemorative constructions. Nowadays, the building stands abandoned. On the one hand, while the era of the communist politics of history seems to be over for ever, this is precisely why the monument may seem familiar to us with its megalomaniac attempt in the history of the re-interpretations of the national past. On the other hand, this monumentality is just what renders the story of the Pantheon distant and unfamiliar: what could be the origins of this obsession towards the dead?

The memorial, as we know it today, gained its form in 1959 by the inauguration of its most significant and architecturally the most monumental part: the mausoleum of the labor movement. The mausoleum itself consisted of different elements. Its central building was the mausoleum proper containing urns of cremated corpses; it was completed by six pillars designed to commemorate those who were buried outside the cemetery; a row of honorary graves, considered to be the most prestigious burial site for those who were not cremated, was situated in front of the central building. A plot by the side of the mausoleum was opened to receive the remnants of less significant persons, while four other plots and a so-called 'heroes' plot' were counted among the parts of the Pantheon of the Labor Movement as well. Although the mausoleum had been inaugurated in 1959, the final shape of the Pantheon was the result of an on-going process that lasted until the middle of the 1960s: partly because of construction works, and also because of the re-burial of corpses in order to attach them to the Pantheon. In its final form the communist pantheon in the Kerepesi cemetery consisted of approximately 500 tombs. Apparently, the ultimate purpose of the creation of the Pantheon was to gather the graves of all significant communist personalities in one place in order to form one outstanding site of cult and memory.³⁰²

³⁰² Vilmos Tóth, 'A Kerepesi úti temető másfél évszázada', (The One and Half Century of the Kerepesi road Cemetery) *Budapesti Negyed* 24 (Summer, 1999), pp. 97-103.

The idea of a martyrs' sepulcher derived from the classical communist period that preceded the outbreak of the popular anti-Stalinist revolution in Budapest on 23 October 1956. Remembering the martyrs was an important issue in the communist party even before the establishment of the dictatorship. The Hungarian Communist Party organized a commemoration for its war-time martyrs on 27 July 1945 where the idea of their re-burial and provisional sepulcher was raised, followed by the proposal of a memorial site for communist martyrs a year later, in Spring 1946. A list of victims that highlighted the role of communist resistance fighters during the war was established while the five communist martyrs of the period between 1919 and 1944 were to receive a common grave and an honorary re-burial.³⁰³ A competition for a Martyrs' Sepulcher was advertised in 1947. Nonetheless its winning work was not appropriate to be raised in a cemetery, and the National Propaganda Department renewed the competition on 13 July 1948.³⁰⁴ The leadership of the Hungarian Workers' Party proposed on 18 January 1949 – soon after its eventual take-over in 1948 – that a common sepulcher for five great martyrs of the party together with the victims of the First Hungarian Soviet Republic in 1919 should be raised. The submission did not specify the names of the five great persons, but stressed that the monument ought to occupy a busy public square in a proletarian district.³⁰⁵ The memorial was to be bestowed in the cemetery in a separate plot with statues of a man's height. The decision provided a four weeks deadline to accomplish the construction work and János Kádár and György Marosán were appointed as the responsible persons for supervision.³⁰⁶ The building of the martyrs' sepulcher was considered a task of party propaganda in order to diminish the widespread ignorance of the communist martyrs. The party leadership planned to issue an album commemorating 145 fighters of the movement in autumn 1950³⁰⁷ and the following April (1951) the Institute for Party History was instructed to elaborate a proposal concerning the commemoration of a few heroes and martyrs of the First Hungarian Soviet Republic.³⁰⁸ Although the attention of the party was to cover a wide range of martyrs and even the

³⁰³ Politikatörténeti Intézet Levéltára (Archives of the Institute for Political History) 274/4/41, 274/4/136, 274/4/138, 274/4/140, 274/4/142, 274/4/145, 274/4/149

³⁰⁴ Magyar Országos Levéltár (National Archives of Hungary, hereafter: MOL) 276/55/10

³⁰⁵ MOL 276/86/14

³⁰⁶ MOL 276/54/26

³⁰⁷ MOL 276/86/73

³⁰⁸ MOL 276/86/75

sepulcher was planned to include various periods, the monument was never realized before 1956, the year of the anti-Stalinist revolution.

The actual construction of the burial site began after 1956 with the very practical and pressing problem of the Hungarian communist party to find an appropriate place for the communists who died during the revolution of 1956. The party leadership considered these persons the great heroes of the nation, therefore decided to bury them in the Kerepesi cemetery, which was, and still is today, the most prestigious *par excellence* national site of burial. This cemetery has been regarded the virtual Pantheon of the Hungarian nation and the honorary resting place of the great dead of the political community for a long time. Here rest the most significant actors of the history of the nation, among them politicians, authors, poets, actors and actresses, composers, artists, diplomats and military commanders. These outstanding personalities range from the era of 'national awakening' at the turn of the 18th and 19th Centuries, the reform period and the birth of modern Hungary in the first half of the 19th Century, the revolution and war of independence in 1848-1849, the great modernization era in the second half of the 19th Century to the turbulent 20th Century. In short, the Kerepesi cemetery unfolds the great narrative of national history.

Consequently, since the communist dead in the Pantheon were necessarily related to other corpses and tombs in the cemetery, these penetrated into the field of historical representation. The communist construction of the memorial site inherently conveyed in itself the intention to re-interpret national history symbolically and generate a new type of historical continuity. This interpretation was originated in the gradually emerging relationship of the dead of 1956 with the fallen victims of the First Hungarian Soviet Republic in 1919. The Pantheon of the Labor Movement was the logical and indispensable realization of this particular history.

2

When the newly organized institutions of the Communist Party acquired a relatively stable form, the issue of the fallen of 1956 was raised. The initiative came from the Budapest organs of the party that remembered the siege of their main building – the core event of the counterrevolution – as their own sacrifice. The corpses of the defenders of the Budapest party headquarters were exhumed on 5 March 1957 in order

to be identified and re-buried as heroes. Apart from the armed defenders of the party building the communist leadership considered Imre Mező, the secretary of the Budapest party committee who had been killed as one of the negotiators by the battle at the Republic square. Two other persons, Sándor Sziklai and Lajos Kiss, were mentioned as well.³⁰⁹ Their death was included in the first volume of the government's white book; thus it became well known in the communist public. The official booklet described the siege of their family house (Kiss was actually Sziklai's father-in-law) and the battle between the old communists and the attacking 'bandits'.³¹⁰ On 9 March the party's Provisional Executive Committee in Budapest submitted a proposal to the Provisional Executive Committee of the Central Committee for renovating the graves of communist martyrs and raising a provisional sepulcher.³¹¹ It stated that, 'The graves of the martyrs of the counterrevolution in 1956 are treated in a manner unfair to their struggles and to victims of the labor movement.' The graves were considered inappropriate due to their extremely bad condition. Therefore the report put great emphasis on repairing the burial sites of the martyrs of the counterrevolution. This renovation, however, was regarded only a provisional solution as the aim was to give the martyrs of the counterrevolution their appropriate burials in two months. The real reason of inappropriateness, however, was revealed by a letter to the first secretary of the Budapest Provisional Executive Committee from the communist party secretary of a factory in Budapest. It pronounced, 'The fact that our comrades are buried together with their murders revolted us deeply.'³¹² Then he demanded, 'Our martyrs have to be buried thoroughly isolated from counterrevolutionaries in an honorary plot that are their due.' The letter clearly expounded the idea that the communist fallen of 1956 could not rest together with the bodies of counterrevolutionaries since they were the victims of the counterrevolution. Death and funeral are among the most powerful social and cultural borders. Death eliminates in a moment the complex social being carried by the physical individuality. The social body of the person is constructed through long and complicated social mechanisms and its social de-construction requires a similar process. Death as a social and cultural act ends when the deceased finds its appropriate place among its

³⁰⁹ Open Society Archives 300/40/1/1300 Hungarian Monitoring (5 March, 1957); *Népszabadság* (hereafter: NSZ) (5 March, 1957)

³¹⁰ WB Vol. 1 p. 27.

³¹¹ MOL 288/7/3

³¹² MOL M-BP-1-1 Secretaries 1956-57/18 Mrs. József Csikesz's papers

companions and this demands an appropriate funeral and resting-place. The dead individual passes over to the world of the dead and rests in peace after having an appropriate funeral. The funeral ceremony is a community ritual in which the survivors accept the place and mode of burial as proper and the final passage of the person.³¹³

For communist interpreters the anti-communist revolt in 1956 was not an isolated event. In fact, they perceived it as part of the historical continuity of the counterrevolution that had begun in 1919, after the fall of the First Hungarian Soviet Republic, when white-terror commandoes persecuted communists, leftist persons and Jews, had pursued during the existence of the counterrevolutionary Horthy-regime, had culminated in 1944 and finally had erupted once more in 1956. Therefore, the communist fallen of 1956 represented only one group of the victims of the counterrevolution for the party and it seemed adequate for the communist leaders to commemorate these persons together. The 9 March proposal of the Budapest party leadership presented a plan of erecting a monument for the communist martyrs of 1956, those of the First Hungarian Soviet Republic in 1919 and the interwar Horthy-era. This sort of design for the appropriate sepulcher for a different class of dead created a peculiar historical interpretation. The dead, first of all, set 1919 and 1956 in a particular relationship to each other: the message of the common memorial was that the incorporated people were connected by the mode of their death. All of them were comprehended as manifestations of a violent anti-Communist counterrevolution. ‘Holocaust monuments are produced specifically to be historically referential, to lead viewers beyond themselves to an understanding or evocation of events,’ writes James E. Young.³¹⁴ Likewise, the interpretation of 1956 entailed tangible historical meaning in the memorial: the popular anti-Stalinist uprising achieved similar features, like the white terror persecutions against communists in 1919 or the executions of illegal communist party leaders during the Horthy-regency. This interpretation provided evidence for claiming that the revolution in 1956 had been actually a genuine counterrevolution. On the other hand, the representation encompassed 1919, the Horthy-regime and 1956 into one historical continuity based on a putative unbrokenness of counterrevolution. Eventually a committee for the Martyrs’ Sepulcher was raised to solve these issues. The proposal set the committee as a task to call for applications to design the memorial. The

³¹³ Robert Hertz, ‘A Contribution to the Study of the Collective Representation of Death’ in his *Death and the Right Hand* (Aberdeen, 1960)

Secretariat decided over the submission only in April. This document formulated the idea of a common sepulcher for all the martyrs, namely the communist fallen of the First Hungarian Soviet Republic in 1919, those of the inter-war regime and the communist heroes of 1956. The plan of a martyrs' sepulcher was taken for granted among the leadership of the party by July. The Committee for the Martyrs' Sepulchre required the placement of tables for the martyrs of 'the proletarian revolution in 1919, the struggle against fascism and of the counterrevolution in 1956'.³¹⁵

Meanwhile as the communist party made an effort to bury its dead, a peculiar separation began to crystallize itself around the corpses. The third volume of the white books included a chapter that contained the brief biographies or names of 200 communist victims in order to indicate and to define the group of revolutionary fighters.³¹⁶ The significance of the martyrs was raised and stressed by the simultaneously opened exhibition on the counterrevolution that received a growing public attention between the end of May and July according to newspaper articles. The reports were aware primarily of the violent nature of the uprising, which reflected the organizers' original intention.³¹⁷ The Budapest Committee prepared a report that was received on 5 July 1957 by the party Secretariat. The document stated that on 1 November 1956 the Revolutionary Committee of the Council of the Capital, an organization of the freedom fighters, had attempted to build a common honorary grave for the fallen. The communist members of the Council, however, had succeeded in burying the corpses together with those members of the Department of State Security who had 'fallen defending the People's Republic'.³¹⁸ Thus, followed the report, those who had been 'fighting with arms in their hands against our People's Republic', those who had fallen defending the People's Republic and those who had died as a result of an accident had been buried in the same place. Therefore, the author of the report concluded that those who had fallen in the fight against the counterrevolution had to be

³¹⁴ James E. Young, *The Texture of Memory* (New Haven – London, 1993), p. 12.

³¹⁵ MOL 288/7/11

³¹⁶ WB Vol. 3 pp. 125-42.

³¹⁷ NSZ (29 May, 1957); György Kalmár, 'Bejegyzés helyett az ellenforradalomról szóló kiállítás vendégkönyvébe' (Instead of Noting the Guestbook of The Exhibition on The Counterrevolution) NSZ (26 June, 1957); Margit Várkonyi, 'Egy kiállítás látogatói...' (Visitors of An Exhibition...) *Népakarat* (4 July, 1957) Cruelty was also represented by sorrowful stories like the following that recollected the death of a nine month old son of a communist village leaders. The small child died because of the delay of medical assistance since the communist person's family had to run away from counterrevolutionaries. Jenő Gerencséri, 'Élt 9 hónapot' (He lived for nine months) NSZ (27 July, 1957)

³¹⁸ MOL 288/7/11

separated by a garden setting - a hedgerow that would result in an appropriate resting-place.

Rites of separation are those which disconnect their subjects from their previously occupied social position to annul their former identities and produce the ability of creating new ones.³¹⁹ One of the primary consequences of the rites of separation is the construction of borders. These ceremonies do not simply indicate that an individual went over from a social group to another; they also state that there is a clear border to be crossed between certain statuses and positions. Almost an entire year later, a document of 5 May 1958 that was submitted by the Administrative Department towards the Secretariat elaborated the plan of division. The approximately 80 to 100 dead communist heroes would receive clearly separated burial sites. The proposal assigned a terrain of 56 m multiplied by 63 m to the left-hand side from the main road of the cemetery. It was lined with an avenue, and the entrance was to be formed by two 5m wide two-winged iron gates. The whole site would be fenced in with 50-cm high hewn hard limestone wall. The submission described the plan of a common burial site for those partisans, soldiers, and security policemen who 'were killed in action during the armed struggle against the counterrevolution'.³²⁰ On 16 June 1958, approximately one month after the report which designed the division of the fallen of 1956, the communist prime minister of the 1956 revolution, Imre Nagy and his two companions – Miklós Gimes (leader of the post-revolutionary intellectual resistance, Pál Maléter, minister of defense in Nagy's government, were hanged. At first, they were dug in the courtyard of the prison with no signs, but in holes covered with shabby furniture and trash. Three years later the remains were transported to a remote plot in what was at that time a remote cemetery of Budapest and were buried under fake names. In that plot, there had already rested two other victims of Nagy's 1956 government: the fourth defendant of the trial, Géza Losonczy (minister of state in Nagy's government), who had died earlier in prison during interrogation and József Szilágyi (former chief of Nagy's secretariat), who had been executed earlier, in April, than his former fellow-defendants in the Imre Nagy trial.³²¹ Their burial was a real rite of exit, because they had no ceremony, no tombstones and no inscriptions, besides the victims lost their identifications: their proper names. By the two complementary rites of initiation and exit the communist party indicated clearly the borders of two opposing groups: that of revolutionaries and counterrevolutionaries. Revolutionaries were and could be identified as victims of the counterrevolution, whereas the continuity of counterrevolution rested upon the constant sequel of revolutionary victims. This fact led to an important consequence.

The demand of making the continuity of martyrs palpable resulted in the physical continuity of their bodies: their actual common grave. On the day after the execution of the communist leaders of the 1956 revolution, 17 June 1958 when the issue

³¹⁹ Arnold van Gennep, *Rites of Passage* (Chicago, 1960) Sir James George Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, Abridged ed. (London, 1987), pp. 595-607. Fejős, Zoltán, 'Az átmeneti rítusok', (The Rites of Passage) *Ethnographia* 90 (Autumn 1979), pp. 409-10. Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process* (New York, 1995), pp. 95-6. See also Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger* (London, 1966), pp. 96-7.

³²⁰ MOL 288/7/27

³²¹ István Rév, 'Parallel Autopsies' in *Representations* 49 (Winter 1995), pp. 19-20. See also Rainer, M. János, *Nagy Imre: Politikai életrajz, 1953-1958* (Imre Nagy: Political Biography) Vol. 2. (Budapest, 1999), p. 436. György Kövér, *Losonczy Géza, 1917-1957* (Budapest, 1998), pp. 337-54. On the search for the corpses after the fall of communism see József Pajcsics, 'A 301-es parcella titkai' in *Magyar Hírlap* (16 June, 1999)

of the sepulcher was raised again, at the meeting of the Politburo, the idea was set up. The Committee for the Martyrs' Sepulcher proposed also a list of names of those who had to be placed in the memorial.³²² Five well-known martyrs of 1956 closed the roll of names. In spite of the fact that the document failed to mention the way of their death, it became widely known among the public from other sources and media. Three of them, Imre Mező, János Asztalos, and Éva Kállai, were killed at the square of the Republic during the siege of the Budapest party headquarters on 30 October 1956. Sándor Sziklai was shot when the rebels attacked his house. The fifth person was party secretary in Csepel, an industrial district of the capital that was counted a traditional communist basis. The First Hungarian Soviet Republic was represented by eight persons including the once chief of the general staff of the Hungarian Red Army and one of the main leaders of the Communist Young Workers' Movement founded in 1919. The remaining six men were executed in 1919 and 1920 during the anti-Communist reprisals carried out by the counterrevolutionary regime. The fall of the Soviet Republic represented the beginning of anti-Communist violence. The biographies emphasized the communist alignment of the victims and called attention to the fact that these persons had been the firmest fighters of the revolutionary elite. The people were as follows: the first one the head of the Department of Political Investigations of the Commissariat of Interior; the second the one of the political leaders of the revolutionary law court; the third and forth ones commanders of the communist party troops; the fifth political deputy in the Red Army; and the last person a commander of the communist police, the Red Guard. Recalling the memory of these men as executed martyrs fulfilled another function apart from stressing the closeness of 1919 to 1956. It served as a means to forget the red terror, which corrupted the otherwise pure image of the Hungarian Soviet Republic. The biographical notes that consisted simply of two contrasting statements-- the one about the person's revolutionary commitment and the other on his death-- revealed the men committed to an idea and executed for his conviction and concealed the men of ruthless political terror. It stated, 'He defended the power of the workers armed with a gun in Székesfehérvár until 4 August 1919. He was executed in December 1919.' The design of the sepulcher clarified that the party leadership considered the appropriate resting place of the communist fallen of 1956 not together with the other victims of the conflict, but next to the martyrs of the Soviet Republic in 1919.

³²² MOL 288/5/83

The original idea of the sepulcher was to incorporate the communist victims of the inter-war period. Among them were secretaries of the illegal communist party, the party press, and the Communist Youth. Sometimes these figures led trade unions and organized strikes. Often they fought in various sites in Europe. Some of them were members of the internationalist brigades during the Spanish Civil War. A few persons were resistance fighters in France against Nazis. The brief biographical notes attributed great significance to the mode of death of the persons included. Almost all of them died a violent death. One of the persons was beaten to death during interrogation, the other one was murdered after his arrest, and a third one was shot in a fight with the police. Others were executed in the war as communist partisans. Thereby, the dead demonstrated that the extermination and persecution of communists was not suspended between 1919 and 1956. In reality, the killings by counterrevolution continued. For instance, the biographical note of one of the communist martyrs of the Horthy-regime began by mentioning that the woman had been the member of the Budapest Workers' Council in 1919. Three other persons fulfilled various leading functions in the government of the proletarian state. 1919 eventually reached 1956: the biography of the party secretary of Csepel who had been killed in 1956 pointed at the fact that the man had started his revolutionary career in 1919 as member of the communist directorate of Csepel.

The register that proposed those who would be buried in the sepulcher contained not only the names that were supposed to represent the martyrs of 1919, the Horthy-regime, and 1956: one of the most exciting facts in the history of the Pantheon of the Labor Movement is that the historical connection between the bodies of the martyrs of 1919 and 1956 attracted many other cadavers even before the First Hungarian Soviet Republic. The sepulcher incorporated five dead workers from the genesis of the Hungarian labor movement. These figures were considered as representatives of the revolutionary leaders of the late 19th Century workers' parties. One of them was described as 'the leader of the opposition acted on against opportunism in the General Workers' Party of Hungary during the 1880s'. The list contained an ironworker, who had been a pioneer in the socialist movement of Hungary, whereas one of his fellow workers was considered as the main figure in the history of the emergence of trade unions. The classical period of Hungarian labour movement was represented by a social democrat, who 'was the leader of the trend of class struggle in the party during the

1890s'. The demands of the gigantic tomb extended over even remnants of heroes of 1848. The register started with Mihály Táncsics, who had been a radical plebeian during the 1848 revolution. His figure was inherited by the Kádár-regime from the 1950s. During this time Táncsics had been represented as the archetype of the revolutionary communist worker and had been made part of a revolutionary holy trinity together with Lajos Kossuth, the politician, and Sándor Petőfi, the poet.³²³ However, in the context of the relationship between the martyrs of 1919 and 1956, Táncsics's corpse created a mythical genesis of the Hungarian labor movement and demonstrated that in reality Hungarian history had always been driven by the workers' aspirations. Every Hungarian schoolboy and schoolgirl knows and knew the story of the beginnings of the revolution in 1848 in Pest-Buda, which had been initiated according to historical common knowledge through the release of Táncsics from his prison by the revolutionary crowd led by Petőfi.

The proposal for the Martyrs' Sepulcher thereby deviated from the original intention. János Kádár, Secretary General of the Party, realized the nature of the alteration. He claimed that there was a confusion of ideas in the proposal. Kádár stated that while the submission spoke about a martyrs' sepulcher, it contained persons most of whom had died in bed. He concluded that either those people had nothing to do with the memorial or the name of the monument was not proper. Nevertheless, he accepted the idea of a common resting-place for great communist figures. The Secretary General argued that 'this should be the memorial and burial site of those persons who gave their lives to the cause of the working class'.³²⁴ He was convinced that it did not matter how the person had died or had he or she been a martyr or not; what counted was only the role which he or she had filled in the movement during his or her life. Therefore, he closed the argumentation. The Martyrs' Sepulcher had to be renamed as a memorial for the great dead of the workers' movement. The majority of the leadership of the party shared this opinion. On 29 July in the Politburo another leading communist turned back to the idea of the continuity of martyrdom. He proposed that the sepulcher would be dedicated to the martyrs of 1919, the era between the two world wars, the World War II

³²³ The canonical formulation was provided by József Révai, chief party ideologue in 1948 on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the 1848 revolution. 'Kossuth, Petőfi, Táncsics öröksége'. Originally published in *1848-1948. Száz év a szabadságért* [1848-1948: One-hundred Years for Freedom] (Budapest, 1948). It was reprinted in András Gerő, *Az államosított forradalom. 1848 centenáriuma* (Budapest, 1998), pp. 25-31.

³²⁴ MOL 288/5/83

and 1956. The leader argued, 'This memorial has to be featured by accusations against the counterrevolution!' Nevertheless, Kádár's intervention was decisive. He insisted on the double function of the construction, that of the memorial and place of burial. It is apparent that the debate ended with a decision to gather so many corpses that would arrange themselves into an uninterrupted continuity. The majority of the leadership of the party shared this opinion. Eventually they opted for the construction of a memorial for the great dead of the workers' movement instead of a simple martyrs' sepulcher. The inscription of the Pantheon apparently refers to this fact: 'They were living for communism, for the people'.³²⁵

3

A member of the Politbüro expressed the plans for the future of the sepulcher at the meeting. The communist leader stated that the building was designed for the next decades as well. Then he told his comrades that the basement would not be finished at that time, since it would be the burial place of the future. This conception created continuity between past and present communists. In this sense the Pantheon mediated between dead and living party members. In its original decision on 9 August 1957, the Secretariat chose to inaugurate the memorial on 20 November 1958, the fortieth anniversary of the foundation of the Communist Party of Hungary. This was a clear indication of continuity.³²⁶ The sepulcher fulfilled a function similar to that of the tombs of saints in early Christianity. Heaven and Earth were perceived to meet at the grave of saints. The saints' souls stayed above the sky whereas their corpses rested under the ground. The saints who stood close to God could mediate between him and human beings. The grave was considered to be the saint's place on earth, therefore one of the channels of communication with Heaven became the tombs of the outstanding dead. Cultural anthropology testifies that the dead generally are thought to be concerned with two sorts of entity: material and spiritual. According to their double nature they are considered to be able to mediate between dead ancestors and living members of the community. Continuity of ruler-ship was occasionally assured by visiting a predecessor's tomb in the medieval Germanic tradition. Entering the graves of previous

³²⁵ MOL 28822/1963/14 and 7/171

³²⁶ MOL 288/7/11

kings was conceived as a passage over the other world and a communication with the dead ruler himself, whereas taking his sword meant to return to this world as his successor. Inheriting power from the other world created continuity between the dead and the living.³²⁷ The possibility of transition secured the continuity of the political corporation. The Pantheon that contained the future tombs of still living communists stated that the body politic of the Party would not die since there always would be physical bodies in which it could resurrect.

A similar material representation was unveiled in the USSR approximately ten years after the first decision on the Martyrs' Sepulcher in Hungary. On 9 May 1967, the day of victory, the Eternal Flame of Leningrad that immortalized the martyrs of the revolution in 1917 was transported to the Pisskaresskoye Cemetery, which contained the tombs of the dead of the World War II. This symbolic action implied continuity between the fighters of October 1917 and those of the World War, which was claimed in a more stressed manner on 8 May 1967, on the occasion of the arrival of the Eternal Flame in Moscow at the memorial of the Unknown Soldier. The ceremony prompted that generally the soldiers of the two events had fought for the same cause, and, what is more, they formed one eternal army. N. G. Yegorichev, first secretary of the Moscow Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union stated it clearly in his inauguration speech, 'It is as if the soldiers of the revolution and the soldiers of the Great Patriotic War have closed ranks into one immortal rank, illuminated by the Eternal Flame of glory, lit by the living honor of the fallen who will always live.'³²⁸

The gradually broadening circle of corpses related to each other led to a particular effect: the abstract organization, the Party seemed to be immortal as a corporation since it constantly re-produced itself within the physical bodies of its mortal members. The communist party apparently achieved its own corporate body – *Corpus Communismi Mysticum*³²⁹ - the eternity of which was independent of the death of individual communists. The idea of physical continuity was forcibly described by a

³²⁷ Peter Brown, *The Cult of the Saints* (Chicago, 1981), pp. 3-4. Victor Turner, 'Death and the Dead in the Pilgrimage Process' in his *Blazing the Trail* (Tucson – London, 1992), pp. 29-47. Patrick J. Geary, 'Germanic Tradition and Royal Ideology in the Ninth Century: The Visio Karoli Magni' in his *Living with the Dead in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca – London, 1994), pp. 49-76.

³²⁸ Nina Tumarkin, *The Living and the Dead* (New York, 1994), p. 128.

³²⁹ The replacement of Christian religiosity with political mysticism can be regarded an element of the 'political religion'. The concept was developed by Emilio Gentile in the context of Italian fascism. 'Fascism as Political Religion' in *Journal of Contemporary History* 25 (May - June 1990), pp. 229-51.

newspaper article recollecting the lynching of a security police officer after the siege of the Budapest party headquarters,

The Heart was beating in the breast of a man who devoted all his life to the cause of the workers. The Heart loved and hated and gave one's share according to one's merit. It loved life, honest people, those who finally threw off the yoke 12 years ago. It hated those who put that yoke on the people, death and its carriers. That Heart was tore out of the body on 30 October, 1956. It beat for the party's cause and suffered for others even in its last moments.

The following paragraphs contained an interview with one of the murderers. The author concluded that the killers did not understand why the party did not want to revenge itself: "How can she understand that the Heart which she tore out with her fellows still continues to beat. It lives within those who took the flag again which was painted red by the martyrs' blood."³³⁰ The party had nothing for which to revenge. Although it had losses, the continuity of its life suffered no rupture. The theme appeared also in fiction at that time. The novel that was appreciated highly by the communist literary critique as one of the best works on the First Hungarian Soviet Republic included a fictional discussion between a leading communist functionary and a common member of the party. The discussion takes place in the prison while the two men were waiting for their execution.

'Sometimes' – said Kűvir (ordinary party member) silently and once more smoothed down his forehead – 'it comes to your mind that if you die it is all the same.' – 'What, comrade Kűvir?' – and now Korvin's (communist leader) brown hawk-eyes were shining with sorrow. – 'And what about our children, or if not ours than the children of others? Thoughts like this lead to where poor Jóska Cserny (a traitor) is now. Life did not begin with us. It does not end with us. All of our deeds will survive us, both the right ones and the wrong ones, as well as all of our thoughts. Everything points further...We revolutionaries have the vocation to provide examples.'³³¹

³³⁰ István Pintér, 'Bosszúért lihegve' (Panting for Revenge), NSZ (22 March, 1957)

³³¹ József Lengyel, *Prenn Ferenc hányatott élete avagy minden tovább mutat* (Ferenc Prenn's Life of Vicissitudes or Everything Points Further) (Budapest, 1958). A television series were broadcasted for the fiftieth anniversary in 1969 based on the novel.

In 1957, meanwhile communists in Budapest were struggling with establishing a proper burial for their fallen, on the other side of the globe, in Princeton, another example of dealing with the body appeared. In that year Ernst Kantorowicz published his book, *The King's Two Bodies* that later would be highly acclaimed and favorably cited among broad circles of scholars in the humanities and social sciences.³³² The volume aimed at detecting the origins of the strange ideas and practices that surrounded the English royal body in early modern times. By the 17th century lawyers of the royal court elaborated a highly sophisticated theory of the double nature of the king's body to be employed in legal reasoning. Legal theorists distinguished between an immortal body politic and a mortal body natural. The purpose of this distinction was to provide basis for arguing that whereas the king as a natural person was doomed to die, his rights and claims were never to be declined since his body political never died. Kantorowicz identified the roots of this theory and practice in the medieval ideas concerning the double nature of the ruler's body. According to medieval imagination this particular form of a natural physical body was always indivisibly connected to a mystical immortal entity.

It is evident that for Kantorowicz the ideology and practice connected to the king's two bodies conveyed the crucial problem of the continuity of political communities. 'Undoubtedly the concept of the <king's two bodies> camouflaged a problem of continuity', as he formulated in his own book.³³³ How to preserve the identity of corporations in time if those persons who constitute it constantly perish? In the historian's contention the notion of the twinned royal body meant an answer to this pressing question. The King in his body politic served as the head of the political corporation of his subjects, while due to his immortality guaranteed stability to the entire community. The ceremonies of death and regeneration were the royal funeral and the coronation throughout the Middle Ages. The King who incorporated the eternal body politic of the state was not dead unless he was separated from his immortal dignity. Therefore, the death of the body natural was succeeded, at least in 14th and 15th century England and France, by a second death of the body politic that was arranged ceremonially during the royal funerals. Until the final burial an effigy of the deceased ruler substituted the physical body that was vested with full regalia and was honored as

³³² Ernst H. Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies* (Princeton, 1957)

³³³ *ibid.* p. 273.

if living. At the funeral ceremony the supra-individual body politic was separated from its old body natural to be resurrected in a new physical body of the succeeding king during the coronation ritual.³³⁴ After the funeral the bodies of the deceased rulers found their appropriate resting place within the continuous line of other members of the same corporate entity. Royal dynasties constructed burial sites of their own in the 11th and 12th centuries. In the French site of Saint-Denis or in the English one in the Westminster Abbey, tombs of dead kings and queens followed each other. In Central Europe each ruling dynasty formed its own private sanctuary. The kings from the House of Árpád buried themselves in the cathedral of Székesfehérvár, virtually the royal capital until the middle of the 13th Century. The Přemysl kings of medieval Bohemia formed their dynastic cemetery in the cathedral of Saint Vitus in Prague, whereas the Polish House of Piast did the same in the cathedral of Kraków dedicated to Saint Venceslav.³³⁵ The cult of the dead united religious and political aspects. The religious aspect was understood as a mystical knowledge of the other world, whereas the political aspect covered the ideas which were formulated concerning the construction of society.³³⁶

An important feature of the process, albeit implicitly the argument always conveyed it, remained hidden probably even for Kantorowicz himself. The theological transformation of the Eucharist that happened during the 12th and 13th centuries had far-reaching consequences for the production of continuity of abstract corporations. Until the Carolingian Age the term of *corpus mysticum* was used to describe the Eucharist. It was a mystical body of Christ, whereas the Church was simply called *corpus Christi*. During the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, however, the meaning of the concept turned upside down. The dogma of transubstantiation that was proclaimed in 1215 perceived the Eucharist as the real body of the Savior, while the Church came to be endowed with the features of a mystical body. From that time on, the community of Christians organized itself through and around the real presence of the Savior.³³⁷ Believers who received the Holy Host shared Christ's real mortal body through the ritual

³³⁴ *ibid.* pp. 409-19. Ralph E. Giesey, 'Models of Rulership in French Royal Ceremonial' in *Rites of Power*, ed.: Sean Wilentz (Philadelphia, 1985), pp. 41-64. Giesey provides a minutely detailed analytical description of French royal funeral ceremonies in his *The Royal Funeral Ceremony in Renaissance France* (Geneva, 1960).

³³⁵ Gábor Klaniczay, *Holy Rulers and Blessed Princesses: Dynastic Cults in Medieval Central Europe* (Cambridge, 2002), pp. 342-7. Giesey, *Royal Funeralary Ceremony*, pp. 29-35. Colette Beaune, 'Les sanctuaries royaux', *Les lieux des mémoire*, Vol. 2, ed.: Pierre Nora (Paris, 1986), pp. 57-87.

³³⁶ Reinhart Koselleck, 'Einleitung' in *Der Politische Totenkult*, eds.: Reinhart Koselleck and Michael Jeismann (Munich, 1994), pp. 9-20. and *Zur politischen Ikonologie des gewaltsamen Todes* (Basel, 1998)

³³⁷ Carlo Ginzburg, 'Representation: The Word, the Idea, the Thing' in his *Wooden Eyes* (New York, 2001), pp.

of communion and became one and the same body. They all became members of Christ's mystical immortal body, the Church. However, the formation of the mystical corporation required the real presence of the Savior in the Host. Only the physical consummation of Christ's body could transform believers into one body. They formed one body since they were all made of the same material: the body of the Savior. The communion meant a constant renewal: Christ's mystical body was regularly re-generated as individual physical bodies became the carriers of the real body of the Savior.

The exercise of the communion and the role of the Eucharist provided the pattern for the doubling of the king's body and eventually meant the ground for imagining the continuity of royal power. Throughout the Middle Ages public affairs remained inseparable from the physical body of the monarch. Public issues like jurisdiction, constitutional affairs and warfare were regarded manageable in the real presence of the ruler. The king personally was the sole source of law and order. For medieval people the state, namely royal power was palpable as far as the physical body of the monarch was accessible. Managing the organization of the state and bureaucracy, therefore, basically meant the extension of the royal body. Various images could fulfill the function as well as sending members of the royal family on various missions.³³⁸ The bodies of the citizens were connected with the political community through the physical body of the monarch. The idea of *praesentia* – real presence – and the practice of the communion became a definitive pattern for the emergence of abstract communities and continuities in the medieval West. Abstract entities and imaginations remained to be constituted by the actual tangible physical connection of its members. In a truly mystical manner, it was the direct physical relationship that transformed the mere gathering of individuals into a thoroughly distinct quality, a genuine community. This mysticism of genuine communities that Kantorowicz himself was longing for during his whole career was revived in the romanticist irrational critique of modernism and by its corporate ideas on the perfect society. According to it an ideal society should transform itself from the raw mass of individual egoisms into a truly coherent community, thus by mystical

63-78.

³³⁸ David Starkey, 'Representation through Intimacy: A Study in the Symbolism of Monarchy and Court Office in Early-Modern England' in *Symbols and Sentiments: Cross-Cultural Studies in Symbolism*, ed.: Ioan M. Lewis (London, 1977), pp. 187-224.

means elevating individual characteristics that would melt together in the immortal supra-individual entity and secure mystical corporate identities.³³⁹

4

The martyrs of the First Hungarian Soviet Republic in 1919 achieved new significance. Their violent death marked and proved the historical origins of the anti-communist counterrevolution. The proposal received by the Politbüro on 17 June 1958 from the Committee of the Martyrs' Sepulchre defined the names of those who the Pantheon should have commemorated.³⁴⁰ Among the 72 proper names that would be inscribed on six columns eighteen persons would represent the history of the First Hungarian Soviet Republic including six martyrs and leaders like Béla Kun. The monument included the proper names of those persons as well who turned to communism in Russia during the revolution and were fighting as internationalists for Soviet power. This group established firm connection between the dead of the revolutionary labour movement before World War I and the founding fathers of the Communist Party of Hungary. All those people who preceded 1919 in the common grave and memorial built their relationship first of all with the Hungarian Soviet Republic. They obtained their place as perpetrators of the revolution and victims of the counter forces.

The Committee for Canvassing and Propaganda submitted a proposal for celebrating the 40th anniversary of the First Hungarian Soviet Republic of 1919 on 16 July 1958. It referred to the decision of the Secretariat of 31 January which had called the attention to the importance of commemorating the 40th anniversary. The submission suggested several persons to be members of the Preparatory Committee, among them leading figures of the party including the Secretary General, popular actors, and writers. The intention of the party was to organize a nation-wide celebration and considered the event as extremely significant in the sequence of national anniversaries. As Kádár said, 'Let the anniversaries mean an event of the Hungarian nation.'³⁴¹ He also stated, 'I am for the nation-wide celebration.' The event itself was intended to be a colossal celebration. The preparations started at the end of the previous year, in 1958. The

³³⁹ Alain Boureau, *Kantorowicz: Stories of a Historian* (Baltimore – London, 2001)

³⁴⁰ MOL 288/5/83

reception was to be organized for 800 or 1000 persons and to include guests from the Communist Party of the USSR and from the Central Committee of the Communist Youth of Hungary. The National Council of the Trade Unions called for a revolutionary shift; 21 March became a public holiday; artistic performances were also taken care of by the organizing committee, new operas by prominent contemporary composers evoking scenes of peasant life were to be played in the Opera House. The theatre of the People's Army was to put on the stage the play of one of the major communist writers of the Soviet Republic. The party leadership assigned the role of each social group in the commemoration. A festival of revolutionary songs performed by workers' choirs was to be held. The Communist Youth introduced a spring cultural muster of the young people, whereas the National Council of Women issued a poster that depicted the relation of children and the dictatorship of the proletariat. The army started to arrange a friendly meeting with the Czechoslovak People's Army.³⁴²

During the Summer of 1958 a spectacular ideological offensive started to unfold in post-revolutionary Hungary. This was the period when many of the great ideological resolutions that determined the frames of exercising politics for the subsequent decades were published. The resolution concerning the 'populist authors', which itself used to be a diverse group consisted of leftist peasant democrats, rightist peasant romanticists or anti-capitalists inclined towards the communists, introduced these measures. It was followed by the publication of the principles of cultural policy, which formulated a flexible framework for the subsequent political intervention and party direction. The common shared feature of these documents was that they, in general, tried to avoid direct confrontation with non-communist ideas or groups. The party rather aspired to differentiate various sub-groups in these and to define its policy towards these according to the extent the individual sub-groups inclined to accept collaboration with the communist leadership or not. This tactic resulted in the dissolution of alternative political identities without the necessity of administrative intervention. This relatively flexible political tactic reflected the recognition of post-revolutionary communist leaders that the struggle between communism and alternative political visions was far from being over. Communists realized that there remained various strong non-communist social and cultural ideas and identities, which they still had to fight with. Although, the

³⁴¹ MOL 288/5/87

³⁴² MOL 288/54/109

party now considered the communist takeover after 1945 an important opportunity to dominate the political arena, following the crisis of 1956 they began to increasingly see themselves in the midst of a still undetermined historical process. The ideological offensive was a means to move the fulfillment of this process closer to the communist cause.³⁴³ The First Hungarian Soviet Republic got a prominent role in this policy as an embodiment of the revolutionary traditions of the labor movement that was believed to capable of counterweighing the alleged bourgeois-intellectual pathos of 1848. On 25 July 1958, in the meeting of the Central Committee, István Tömpe argued passionately for the spectacular celebration of the 40th anniversary, ‘now the 40th anniversary is coming, do not we do the same with 21 March, as it was done before for long years that a few communists were gathered in a small room and they celebrated. And one ceremony is not enough for the 40th anniversary, but there have to be more such movements, which elevate 1919 to the appropriate highness of our revolutionary traditions.’³⁴⁴

For communists, the First Hungarian Soviet Republic was relevant as the culmination of that historical process that had led precisely to its proclamation. At the meeting of the politburo on 22 July 1958, the communist party leaders discussed for the first time the issue of celebrating the 40th anniversary of the revolutions in 1918 and 1919. During the meeting, János Kádár argued for considering the events of October 1918 and the foundation of the party as a process that culminated in the exclamation of the Soviet Republic.³⁴⁵ The celebrations occurred according to the appeal of the first secretary. The series of ceremonies started with the commemoration of the revolution of October 1918. On 31 October 1958 the Patriotic People’s Front inaugurated a memorial table at the Eastern Railway Station remembering those soldiers who joined the revolution just before their departure toward the battle-field. The Scholarly Educational Association held a scientific conference on the revolution.³⁴⁶ From the new perspective, the democratic revolution in October 1918 was retrospectively conceived merely as a preparation for the true fulfilment of human progress. The statement on the connection of October 1918 and March 1919 was confirmed by professional argument. Tibor

³⁴³ On the aspects of the ideological offensive see Kalmár, *Ennivaló és hozomány*, pp. 134-89. Révész, *Aczél*, pp. 96-103. Ständeisky, *Az írók*, pp. 371-90.

³⁴⁴ Kalmár, *Ennivaló és hozomány*, p. 156.

³⁴⁵ MOL 288/5/87

³⁴⁶ MOL 288/5/94

Hajdú, who ten years later would become the leading scholar in the field, devoted an original interpretation to explain why the October Republic had to be regarded a preparatory phase for the Soviet Republic. The historian, who had started his research on 1918-1919 already in 1951, concerned himself with the problem of the councils-soviets in the two revolutions. His main argument was that the councils had been the true institutions of the revolutionary masses, and, therefore, the absolute power of the soviets had meant the genuine victory of revolution. Hajdú explained that the councils in Hungary had been formed according to the example of the Russian revolution proving that those organs had been the exclusive way to revolution. According to the scholar, the rebellion in October 1918 prepared the victory of the soviets since Károlyi's government came to power by the powerful assistance of the councils of workers and soldiers. Nevertheless, as he stressed, the bourgeois regime could not have led the revolution to fulfil itself as it constantly opposed the power of the soviets. Consequently, the Communist Party had to be founded in order to create a truly revolutionary centre and eventually the party fulfilled the expectations and brought all power to the councils.³⁴⁷

In Autumn 1958, the publishing house of the party launched a volume containing Béla Kun's – leader of the First Hungarian Soviet Republic - selected writings on the dictatorship of the proletariat. The preface, which was Kun's biography, was formulated by Ferenc Münnich, Prime Minister, himself participant in the Hungarian Soviet Republic and Kun's comrade. This fact did not only signal Kun's rehabilitation as a genuine and respected communist leader, but also the increase of the significance of his regime in 1919 for communist leaders after 1956.³⁴⁸ The increase of the significance of the First Hungarian Soviet Republic is well reflected in the submission of the Committee for Canvassing and Propaganda on 22 January 1959 that proposed the publication of a series of portraits on warriors and martyrs of the workers' movement. The Politburo accepted the proposition on 27 January. There was nothing surprising in the list of persons. It contained basically the same names as the Pantheon, surveying all the heroic periods of Hungarian communism from the ancient times of founding the workers' parties through the dictatorship of the proletariat and the illegal activity of the party until the resistance. However, the memory of 1919 ruled even heavier this representation of communist martyrs. The register contained 80 names and almost half

³⁴⁷ Tibor Hajdú, *Tanácsok Magyarországon 1918-1919-ben* (Soviets in Hungary in 1918-1919) (Budapest, 1958)

of them - 37 persons - were directly connected to the dictatorship of the proletariat. Besides them the document mentioned in six cases that the beginning of the revolutionary career was 1919, the Soviet regime.³⁴⁹

Modern Hungarian history was arranged into a continuous narrative. The past was imagined as a gigantic competitive strategic game; each step of the revolutionary communists was followed by a countermeasure of the adversary, which in turn produced subsequent actions of the previous side. The party developed its first coherent historical interpretation in this manner for the 40th anniversary of the Hungarian communist movement. The document, which was a fine piece of dialectic analysis of action and reaction, was discussed on 16 September 1958.³⁵⁰ According to the basic perception, the course of party history began with the first upswing of revolutionary movements. In 1868 the General Workers' Association was founded in Pest and joined the first Internationale, and the reaction came very soon. After the defeat of the Commune in Paris in 1871 the government dissolved the Association. However, faithful followers of Progress did not surrender, but attempted to form the first workers' party in Hungary in 1873, which was oppressed by the police. Revolution could recover only in 1880 when the first party, the General Workers' Party of Hungary, was founded. This event meant the beginning of a prosperous period in the workers' movement. In 1889 the second Internationale was formed and called the workers for demonstrating for their rights. Hungarian workers went on a strike on 1 May 1890. The success of the demonstration resulted in the enthusiastic congress of the workers' party, which decided to call itself the Social Democratic Party of Hungary. That was the beginning of an era that was featured by the rapid development of the Hungarian proletariat and stressed the historical survey. The document stated that the birth of the workers' movement meant the formation of the new revolutionary class that was destined for carrying on the cause of progress. The Social Democratic Party agitated for the overthrow of the monarchy and aimed at establishing the political power of the workers. The party's historical paper called attention to the fact that this improvement of the movement had been supported morally and ideologically by the Russian revolution of 1905. The revolutionary boom, however, could not reach its goal, since the world war was triggered by the imperialists,

³⁴⁸ Béla Kun, *A Magyar Tanácsköztársaságról* (Budapest, 1958)

³⁴⁹ MOL 288/5/115

³⁵⁰ MOL 288/5/94

stated the authors. The social democrats betrayed the workers; they supported the government in its war efforts.

The revolutionary movement could react only in January 1918 by going on a massive strike for accepting piece proposal of the Russian Soviet government. This meant again the turn of the progressive forces. Left-wing socialists formed anti-militarist groups, and Hungarian prisoners of war in Russia joined the Red Army and eventually founded the Hungarian organization of the Communist (Bolshevik) Party of Russia led by Béla Kun. This time, however, the workers' movement launched a general attack. In October 1918 the absolute military defeat and the revolutionary uprising of the people occurred, and the democratic people's revolution swept the Hapsburg-monarchy away. On 31 October 1918 the workers of Budapest went on a general strike led by the left-wing social democrats and revolutionary socialists that developed into a victorious armed revolt. The country followed the people of Budapest, and the despotic monarchist war power was overthrown. The united revolutionary strength of workers, peasants, and soldiers headed by the proletariat that was hardened by numerous heroic fights overcame the government.³⁵¹ The masses did not stop there. They claimed the communist interpretation, and the struggle for the socialist republic started immediately. Its forces grew rapidly and finally gave birth to the Party of Communists in Hungary on 20 November 1918. Revolution culminated in this event, stating, 'By the foundation of the communist party the organized vanguard of the forces of socialist revolution appeared on the scene of political struggles to lead out the nation by bringing the workers into power from that whirlpool into which it was pushed by the power of capitalists and landlords.'³⁵²

The exclamation of the First Hungarian Soviet Republic was a final result and the peak of the steps taken by revolutionary forces, 'The communist party made fundamental revolutionary propaganda for the creation of the Soviet Republic, the oppression of counterrevolutionary aspirations of monarchists who began to organize themselves.'³⁵³ Although 'the bourgeois – social democratic coalition attempted to stop the revolution and against the radicalized masses intended to reach an agreement with the class of monarchist landlords and to secure the support of the monarchist grand bourgeoisie,' the only way out of the crisis was the formation of the Soviet Republic,

³⁵¹ *ibid.*, p. 16.

³⁵² *ibid.*, p. 17.

concluded by the historical analysis of the party. The organized workers joined the communist party and forced the social democrats to associate with the communists. The narrative considered the peak of the revolutionary movement the birth of the dictatorship, 'The creation of the First Hungarian Soviet Republic was an outstanding victory of the international communist movement as well as of the Hungarian communist movement, obviously, which was able to lead the working class into power proletariat.' The proclamation of the dictatorship of the proletariat meant only a provisional glory of revolution, however. As a response, the counterrevolution gathered its forces and carried out a successful counterattack. Their representatives left the country to form alliance with the enemy, the entente imperialists, while their inner allies, the traitorous right-wing social democrats, disrupted the Soviet regime from within.

At this time the counterrevolution managed to persist in the overcome of the workers' movement and pursued the party's narrative. As a reaction to the revolutionary upswing, the alliance of bourgeois and landlords reconstructed their oppressive regime. However, this time it had to be grounded on even more brutal measures - open white terror. The sole action to balance the success of reaction the communist party could do was its own re-organization underground. Nevertheless, after achieving relative tranquillity, the illegal party started to plan real revolutionary steps. It seems that from the narrative depiction that any obstruction to the counterrevolutionary regime had to face with was a result of communist organization. The party led the workers to strike, gave voice to the demand for land of the peasantry, and revealed the aspirations of warmongers. All these efforts gained their reimbursement: the world crisis resulted in a radicalization of the masses, which was driven by the communists into a colossal strike on 1 September 1930. The party's historical representation interpreted the demonstration as a huge revolutionary victory which did not culminated in an actual revolution only due to the system of total repression introduced by the government in order to survive the crisis. The communist movement responded with the creation of a united antifascist workers' front. According to the narrative, this developed into as a huge force as it was possible to overcome only by pushing the country into the war. If the war was the desperate measure of the counterrevolution to save its power, the counteraction was the organization of the resistance by the communists.

³⁵³ *ibid.*, p. 18.

The party managed to unite all democratic forces under its flag, thus growing into the real leader of the nation.

After defeating reaction by creating a nation-wide democratic ground, communists could accomplish the democratic transformation of the country. The historical interpretation began with the section on post-war events by enumerating the progressive steps of the new communist directed government, 'the democratic forces led by the communist party created the new democratic state of Hungary, basically solved the task of appropriating the land and the distribution of big estates, realized the workers' control over production.'³⁵⁴ The struggle between revolution and counterrevolution, however, did not pause: 'The attack was begun by the forces of reaction. In the following months after the liberation the counterrevolutionary block of capitalists, kulaks, fallen landlords and the clerical reaction loosing its big estates as well was formed.' 'The communist party was well aware of the menace and launched a counterattack'. It founded the Block of the Left that was considered a front of workers, working peasantry, and progressive intellectuals. The study concluded that this measure proved to be correct, since the victory of the socialist revolution became consolidated in 1948 by the unification of the two workers' parties.

This fundamental victory provided the ground for increasing industrial and agricultural production as well as the standard of living, pronounced the authors. Socialism was well on its way until the next action of counterrevolution. This time Imre Nagy, seemingly a faithful communist who became Prime Minister in 1953, initiated it. The traitorous leader urged the kulaks to attack the agricultural co-operatives, attempted to reduce industrial production, aspired to weaken the leading role of the party, and intended to support the petit bourgeoisie. His measures resulted in the increase of the power of counterrevolution,

The counterrevolutionary forces triggered an armed revolt to overthrow the people's democracy in October 1956. They carried out the most double-dealing counterrevolution in history by letting the revisionist betrayals into the fore as battering ram following the callings and instruction of the Radio Free Europe of the American imperialists. Imre Nagy and his fellows acquired by unprecedented hypocrisy to be involved in the Central Leadership, to get into the government, issuing even the martial

³⁵⁴ *ibid.*, p. 39.

law against counterrevolutionaries in reality only to be able to dissolve and paralyze the forces of the revolution, to pass the power to the counterrevolution and diminish the dictatorship of the proletariat easier. The fascist counterrevolution appeared with an eager rapidity from the counterrevolutionary uprising masked itself as democratic at first and the rage of the white terror began. The revisionists masked themselves as 'communists' and the right-wing social democrats activated by the counterrevolution assisted to the re-formation and appearance of reactionary bourgeois parties and to open appearance and rage of fascist forces... On 4 November 1956 the new revolutionary centre, the revolutionary worker-peasant government led by János Kádár was formed. It provided clear revolutionary instructions for the struggle against the counterrevolution: for saving the workers' power, restoring the lawful order of the people's democracy.³⁵⁵

The party's historical analysis concluded that the victory of communists over the counterrevolution meant the final clash of those opposing forces. Counterrevolution suffered an ultimate defeat, thereby leading history to a rest, 'Hungary as a country of the irresistibly advancing socialist world system came to the fore of international progress and will stay there forever.' In the party history the event of the First Hungarian Soviet Republic played an extraordinary role. The preceding events appeared to direct themselves towards the revolution as preparatory occurrences, whereas the subsequent periods seemed to have their roots in 1919.

In his ceremonial speech delivered at the 40th anniversary of the proclamation of the First Hungarian Republic, Prime Minister Ferenc Münnich interpreted modern Hungarian history as a continuous struggle of revolution and counterrevolution. As in the previous occasion of the 39th anniversary, the ceremonial speaker's person himself contributed to render the historical interpretation authentic since Münnich was an active participant in the dictatorship of the proletariat and fought in the Hungarian Red Army. The party leader conceived the revolution of 1848 the definitive starting point of the process leading up to 1919. He called attention to the fact that since the revolution of 1848 had not solved all the problems of social progress, revolution remained an issue of Hungarian politics. However, in 1919 the appropriate revolutionary measure was not to form a capitalistic bourgeois society as it could be in 1848, but to destroy capitalism in favour of socialism. The proclamation of the dictatorship of the proletariat, hence

³⁵⁵ *ibid.*, pp. 44-5.

became the true action of the revolutionary movement, and its leader, the communist party, was the legitimate representative of progress. The speaker stressed that,

The Hungarian working class was the rightful heir and worthy follower of the centuries-old traditions of revolution and freedom fight of the Hungarian people. This meant first of all to solve the problems remained after the fall of the revolution and war of independence in 1848-49, namely to perish the feudalistic remnants, to achieve and defend the independence of the country. The Hungarian people led by the working class stopped the imperialist war, overthrew the rule of the Hapsburgs in our country and created the republic in October 1918. The working class, however, could not be satisfied with a repetition of the demands of 1848: with the making of a bourgeois democracy. The world had developed a lot and considerable changes occurred also in the Hungarian society since 1848. In 1848 progress required the clearing away those obstructions that blocked the development of capitalism, in 1919 capitalism itself became the obstacle of social development. The First Hungarian Soviet Republic would have not finished the uncompleted work of 1848 unless it had improved to a great extent the program of 1848.³⁵⁶

In Münnich's point of view, the entente powers were forced to concentrate greater military forces against the socialist Hungary due to the unexpected successes of revolutionary armies. Counterrevolution united its forces, armies, and members of the fallen ruling classes and opportunistic revisionists to oppress the regime of the workers. The downfall of the First Hungarian Soviet Republic pointed to 1956:

The 'democratic' counterrevolution led into fascism. The *reality* of humanist phrases became Siófok and Orgovány, the cruelty of the officers of the Hotel Britannia (the Budapest headquarters of white terrorists), the 25 years of official terror that almost pushed the nation to catastrophe. The counterrevolutionary uprising of October 1956 attempted to repeat by the help of the international imperialism what the Horthy-fascism accomplished in 1919: to restore capitalism... In 1919, at the time of the overthrow of the dictatorship of the proletariat in our country the trade unionist government led by Peidl paved the way for the overcoming of the Horthy-fascism. In 1956 the double-dealing group of revisionists led by Imre Nagy played the major role in preparing and disguising the preparation of the counterrevolution. The billeting officers of Horthy's

company in 1919 as well as the Hungarian revisionists in 1956 masked their disgraceful betrayal by democratic phrases. The accusing communists of being anti-national, the democratic and chauvinist phrases that played a principal role in the official ideology of the Horthy-fascism came to the surface again in 1956 and were heard in a modernized form in the incitements of the revisionist enemies of the Hungarian communist movement.³⁵⁷

According to Münnich, Hungarian history revolved around the axis of 1919 and ‘the Soviet Republic brought a historical turn in spite of its defeat by the help of forces without.’

Historical continuity rendered it appropriate to lay wreaths at the memorial table of the party headquarters at Republic Square (where the bloody siege took place on 30 October 1956) on the 40th anniversary of the exclamation of the First Hungarian Soviet Republic of 1919 by the international deputies of socialist countries on 21 March 1959.³⁵⁸ Newspaper front-pages on the day of the 40th anniversary indicated that the post-1956 communist regime perceived itself a successor of 1919. The front-page of the party’s daily depicted a member of the newly founded communist armed force, the Workers’ Guard, whereas the background of the picture was provided by a poster of recruitment from 1919. The poster represented a Red Army soldier carrying a flag with the inscription: 1919-1959. The front-page of the peasant daily titled *Free Land* (Szabad Föld) was not as explicit. It published a photograph of a workers’ guard without any background. The relationship was constructed by the fact that the picture was placed within the editorial, commemorating the First Hungarian Soviet Republic.

Communist interpreters conceived the First Hungarian Soviet Republic as an event that revealed the unbroken continuity of modern Hungarian history. The revolution in 1919 was meant to be an axis-event around which the happenings of history rolled and to which the chronological series could bound back and forth in time. Preceding events could be connected to the history of the first proletarian regime as a sort of pre-history, whereas succeeding occurrences directly led up to 1956 which, in turn, originated from 1919. 1919 thereby was conceived simultaneously a beginning and also a fulfillment. The revolutionary workers’ state fulfilled the aspirations of the

³⁵⁶ NSZ (21 March, 1959)

³⁵⁷ NSZ (21 March, 1959)

³⁵⁸ MRA News (21 March, 1959)

nineteenth century labor movement and at the same time generated an expectation for the second and final coming of the dictatorship of the proletariat. Regarding this, the role of 1919 in the post-1956 communist historical consciousness was similar to that of Christ's materialization in the Christian eschatology. The earthly presence of Jesus Christ was perceived both the already happened coming of the Messiah and the promise for the Last Judgment that caused future expectations. Thus, Jesus' life in this world determined the past retrospectively and the foreseeable future.³⁵⁹ The decisive difference was, however, that whereas Christians did not expect any historically new event in the future, according to the post-1956 communist interpretation, the dialectics of revolution and counterrevolution moved history forward even after 1919.

The proclamation of the first dictatorship of the proletariat thus meant a real historic event. Historic events are dissimilar to historical events. The term historical has a neutral meaning and merely refers to the fact that an occurrence is perceived within the process of history. The concept of historic, on the contrary, entails that the event has a special significance in history; it is generally considered to change and also to reveal the meaning of history. Communists saw the Russian revolution in 1917 a historic event concerning universal history. Likewise Italian fascists held that the *Marcia su Roma* in 1922 had a similar significance.³⁶⁰ In the communist version of Hungarian history, 1919 gained a special historic importance. The proclamation of the First Hungarian Soviet Republic appeared the greatest event in Hungarian history. The communist legislation decided to enact this historical recognition. An act was planned to codify the memory of the Soviet Republic. Originally the Parliament was to be convoked on 18 March 1959; however the Secretariat objected this idea. It argued that on that day there would be numerous other speeches as important as the report of the government and the proposal of the budget. Regarding the conditions the submission on the Soviet Republic would lose its significance stated the Secretariat. There would be 20 speakers and only one of them would address the issue of the Soviet Republic, which would overshadow the importance of the event in public opinion. Consequently, the party leadership decided to hold the ceremonial meeting on the day of the anniversary, 21 March. The Secretariat considered that day appropriate, as there would appear no other issues on the agenda.³⁶¹

³⁵⁹ Karl Löwith, *Meaning in History* (Chicago, 1949)

³⁶⁰ Claudio Fogu, 'Fascism and *Historic* Representation: The 1932 Garibaldian Celebrations', *Journal of Contemporary History* 31 (April, 1996), pp. 317-345.

³⁶¹ MOL 288/5/117, NSZ (21 March, 1959)

Eventually, the proposal for the act was delivered by the survivor of the Hungarian commune, Prime Minister Ferenc Münnich, who stressed that, 'We took on and pursued the legacy of 1919, when we fought the dictatorship of the proletariat out and defended it against the counterrevolutionary attack.' In his speech 1919 meant the experience that made it possible for Hungarian communists to establish the appropriate road towards socialism in the country.³⁶² Communist historiography devoted a particular monograph to the crucial day for the festivity. Tibor Hajdú once again was called for writing a book on 21 March 1919 for the 40th anniversary, although the volume eventually appeared only in early 1960. His *21 March* finely demonstrated the preparation and gathering of revolutionary forces and the maturing of revolution itself in spite of the inertia of the government that objectively supported the counterrevolution in the preceding months. The book depicted vividly the eventual triumphal march of communism and the union with social democrats.³⁶³ Within the two and a half years that passed between October 1956 and March 1959, from the communist perspective the First Hungarian Soviet Republic was transformed from a relatively insignificant event in the party's own history into the most important anniversary of the nation.

On 23 January 1959 the leadership had already stressed that the Pantheon of the Labor Movement would be unveiled on 21 March 1959, on the fortieth anniversary of the First Hungarian Soviet Republic. The document called attention to the fact that the ceremony had to be treated as one of the events of the anniversary; the inauguration was to be published in the press and to be included within the documentary that recorded the celebration of the fortieth anniversary.³⁶⁴ The firm connection between the anniversary of 1919 revealing the meaning of the modern history of the Hungarian communist movement and the Pantheon of the Labor Movement was not accidental. For the communists, the historical process that was crystallized around 1919 had become palpable by the sepulcher and monument. By the Pantheon and the surrounding Kerepesi-cemetery the continuity of the Hungarian past could be experienced and relived by the party as the Pantheon of the Labor Movement organized spatially other tombs around itself within the Kerepesi cemetery.

³⁶² NSZ (21 March, 1959)

³⁶³ Tibor Hajdú, *Március huszonegyediké* (21 March) (Budapest, 1959) The book was published in the series 'Treatises In Historical Studies' (*Értekezések a történettudományok köréből*). The director of the series, István Barta personally asked Hajdú to write this book as the 40th anniversary of the First Hungarian Soviet Republic was approaching. Personal communication with Tibor Hajdú, Fall 2007.

³⁶⁴ MOL 288/21/1959/6

Communists actually conceived the Pantheon together with its historical environment. Sándor Szerényi's guidebook to the mausoleum believed in the necessity of incorporating the sepulcher in the wider context of the cemetery. He called the attention to the graves of other - non communist - outstanding persons of Hungarian history like Kossuth, Táncsics, and Károlyi. The brief book also included photos of the tombs of these men together with images of the Pantheon.³⁶⁵ The group of graves during the construction of this part the Kerepesi cemetery was forcefully connected to each other. Although the mausoleum can be approached directly through an independent gateway, the ordinary way begins by the main entrance. This road passes by different tombs and sepulchers of various significance. The main entrance leads toward the first actual graves of the cemetery, to the heroes' plot on the left-hand side of the road, which was dedicated to the communist martyrs of 1956. The path then turns to the right toward the mausoleum. At the crossroads is situated the sepulcher of the seven Hungarian Jacobins who were executed in 1795 in Buda. They formulated ideas on the reformation of Hungarian politics and society influenced by the French revolution. In reality, the seven formed a small and isolated conspirator group. After the plot was revealed by the Hapsburg secret police, they were condemned to be beheaded, and were buried in anonymous graves after their execution. Their bodies were found in 1914 and were taken into the City Archives to be preserved in small wooden caskets. After being buried anonymously in the Kerepesi cemetery in 1926 the Jacobins were re-discovered and reburied in the same cemetery during the planning of the Pantheon in 1959. They received a sepulcher a year after its inauguration, on 20 May 1960.³⁶⁶ The next stop of the walk toward the memorial of the great dead of the workers' movement is count Lajos Batthyány's mausoleum. Batthyány was the Prime Minister of the revolution in 1848 and was the first constitutional Prime Minister of the country. He was executed in Pest in 1849. Although he was not a popular and still less a charismatic leader, the bullets of the firing squad transformed him into a martyr of the nation. His reburial in 1870 opened the series of great burial ceremonies of national heroes in the Hungary of the Monarchy. The count's mausoleum was inaugurated in 1874.³⁶⁷ The promenade

³⁶⁵ Sándor Szerényi, *Ismertető a Mező Imre úti temető Munkásmozgalmi Panteonjáról* (A Guide to the Pantheon of the Workers' Movement in the Cemetery at Imre Mező street) (Budapest, 1977), p. 11.

³⁶⁶ *Népakarat* (28 November, 1957), *Magyar Nemzet* (20 May, 1960)

³⁶⁷ Ildikó Stéfán, 'Gróf Batthyány Lajos halála és temetése', (The Death and Funerals of Count Lajos Batthyány) *Sic Itur Ad Astra* 4 (Vol. 2-4 1993), pp. 6-17.

ends in a place-like site the biggest part of which is occupied by the building of the mausoleum.

On the other side, however, is situated a sepulcher for the martyrs of the proletarian regime in 1919. The memorial was erected on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the First Hungarian Soviet Republic in 1949, and inaugurated by János Kádár, who became Secretary General of the party after 1956. Behind the mausoleum of the workers' movement two other great sepulchers can be found. The first one belongs to Lajos Kossuth, who was the major political leader of the revolution in 1848-49 and died in exile in Turin in 1894. He was buried in the Kerepesi cemetery two weeks after his death, but his mausoleum was completed only in 1909. The second sepulcher is dedicated to count Mihály Károlyi, the Prime Minister of the revolution in 1918, considered by the communist leaders as a mediator between the bourgeois and proletarian revolutionary regimes. The Pantheon of the Workers' Movement was situated at the end of this road. James E. Young claims that the monument and its geographical environment are interrelated. A memorial is a point of reference within the surrounding landscape, while its meaning is appropriated in connection to its neighborhood. 'A stainless steel obelisk situated in an empty field, for example, generates different meanings from that situated in a neighborhood shopping mall.'³⁶⁸ In the cemetery Hungarian history was seen from the perspective of the great dead of the workers' movement. It began with the rather underdeveloped initiative of the Jacobins to modernize the country. The modernizing efforts culminated in the bourgeois revolution of 1848, whereas the Károlyi-regime of 1918 attempted to correct its failures. The republic could not meet the requirements of the age, however; therefore a communist revolution broke out. Its defeat meant only a short pause in history as the existing communist system gloriously fulfilled the historical destiny. Accordingly, the memorial could be exploited in commemorations of different historical anniversaries since it was not connected to any specific event, but rather a thorough context of history. On 4 November 1965, for instance, the party laid wreath by the sepulchre when it remembered the anniversary of the Soviet invasion in 1956.³⁶⁹ In 1967 the wreath-laying

³⁶⁸ Young, *The Texture*, pp. 7-8.

³⁶⁹ MOL 288/22/1965/1

ceremony for the 48th anniversary of the First Hungarian Soviet Republic was situated by the Pantheon.³⁷⁰

The architectural design of the sepulcher prompted continuity as well. The parallel tombs of the honorary plot in front of the main building led the eyes straightforward to the entrance of the mausoleum. The six pillars, which were situated in couples, formed the optical shape of parallels disappearing in the distance, and produced the effect of linearity. The artists who created the work of art confirmed this perception. The architect explained that the modern architectural form had been chosen since a classical line of columns could not have expressed the message of the monument properly. Therefore, the sepulcher had been constructed from ancient basic elements to expound the contrast between the cemetery--seeing the past and the monument opening up for the future. According to him, not the merciless idea of death took shape in the building. The monument symbolized beginning and not mortality, said the artist. The sepulcher was intended to form the beginning of the future for which many Hungarian martyrs of the idea of progress sacrificed their lives.³⁷¹

The abstract historical narrative was forcefully connected to the real presence of actual corpses during the inauguration ceremony. It happened in a way similar to Catholic masses in which the crucial historical narrative of Christ's death and resurrection is connected to the Sacrament, the real presence of the Savior. The Eucharist is a forceful and tangible evidence of the recollection of an event happened a long time ago.³⁷² The speaker formulated the connection as follows,

³⁷⁰ MOL 288/7/276

³⁷¹ Mária Dutka, 'A jövőbe néznek' (Looking at The Future), *Magyar Nemzet* (15 March, 1959)

³⁷² See Louis Marin, *Portrait of the King* (Minneapolis, 1988) The French thinker's study is part of a tradition in the theory of representation that aims to prove – in a somewhat speculative manner – that forms of representation create the real. Marin argues that the royal body of Louis XIV was produced through its representations and the king was King only in these. Thereby, the reality of royal power was formed through representation. See also Jean Baudrillard, 'Simulacra and Simulations' in his *Selected Writings* (Cambridge, 1988), pp. 166-84. and *Symbolic Exchange and Death* (London – Thousand Oaks – New Delhi, 1993), pp. 51-86. F. R. Ankersmit, 'A Phenomenology of Historical Experience' in his *History and Tropology* (Berkeley – Los Angeles – London, 1994), pp. 188-94. Baudrillard builds his argument on the way the Iconoclasts understood the images of God. They were afraid that believers would recognize the presence of God only in his representations. They were well aware of the capability of images of God to be more real than God himself was. The Iconoclasts objected the representations of God since they were preoccupied with the possibility of a replacement or substitution of God with his images, namely that God would subsist only in his statues or pictures. The philosopher calls the more real a hyperreal, whereas the aforementioned order of sign and signified a third order simulacrum. F. R. Ankersmit calls this specific concept the substitution theory of representation. The substitution theory argues that the representation is a replacement for a represented thing that is absent for any reason. The representation is accepted as the substitution for the represented due to their identity. However, without the process of representation there can not be any identity since an entity which involves the existence of a pair can not be born with the presence of solely one of them. Identity comes into existence through representation, they are being born

Be this memorial an eternal symbol and let it remind us to those thousand and ten thousand other people whose names cannot be read here, who possessed neither title nor rank, who died as regulars of the workers' movement. Be they either the unanimous soldiers of the proletarian revolution in 1919, or give their lives for the idea as volunteers of the Russian civil war or the Spanish war of independence; they rose to the highest rank of man: they were revolutionaries, heralds and creators of the future...Let us remember those heroes and martyrs who gave their lives for the socialist future at home during the first decades of the formation of the workers' movement, in Soviet land during the Great October Socialist Revolution and the civil war or in the prisons of the Horthy-fascism.³⁷³

As a journalist of a county newspaper perceived several years later in 1971, 'History comes close to man, or rather more precisely man comes to a direct closeness to history.'³⁷⁴ Sándor Szerényi, secretary of the Committee for Piety, which was responsible for communist burials from 1964, formulated his thoughts in a similar manner, saying, 'Two centuries of Hungarian history are here together.'³⁷⁵ The narrative on history that was re-capitulated in the inauguration ceremony obtained its persuasive force from the real environment of the cemetery. The real presence of tombs and bodily remnants made the account convincing and authentic.

This peculiar mode of representation provided a highly personificated vision of history. The six pillars standing in front of the mausoleum of the eventually inaugurated memorial contained names of the dead organized into chronologically ordered groups. The groups were intended to represent the different periods of the Hungarian-related workers' movement in chronological order. Although the pillars included no inscriptions apart from the names, the plan of the memorial specified the historical eras.³⁷⁶ The first eight persons formed the pioneers of the Hungarian workers' movement, whereas the next eight were called the Hungarian heroes of the Great October Socialist Revolution in Russia. Twenty-nine outstanding fighters of the First

at the same moment. See also his 'Danto on Representation, Identity and Indiscernibles' in *History and Theory* 37 (December 1998), pp. 44-70.

³⁷³ Magyar Rádió Archívuma (Archives of the Hungarian Radio, hereafter: MRA) News 21 March, 1959 10 pm, NSZ (22 March, 1959)

³⁷⁴ Iván Ordas, 'Séta a panteonban' (A Tour in the Pantheon), *Tolnai Népszerűség* (1 November, 1971)

³⁷⁵ Szerényi, *Ismertető*, p. 5.

³⁷⁶ MOL 288/22/1963/14, Szerényi, *Ismertető*, pp. 12-4.

Hungarian Soviet Republic succeeded them. The next 42 persons represented the illegal communist party. They worked underground between the wars. The document referred to them as the heroes of the fight of the Hungarian workers' movement against fascism. Fifteen other men were grouped separately as the outstanding heroes of the armed struggle of the Hungarian workers' movement against fascism. Similarly, six names represented the Hungarian heroes of the struggle of the international workers' movement against fascism. The series ended with the martyrs of the fight against the counterrevolution in 1956 and the great dead of the workers' movement of the socialist Hungary.

The engraved names as referents identified a certain number of life narratives that were unfolded in obituaries and biographical collections of deceased party members. Thus, for example, the biography of Imre Mező, the most well-known communist fallen of the fights in October 1956, that was compiled shortly after his death built firm connections to general abstract historical notions. The very first date mentioned in the biography, thus ignoring his birth date, was 1914 the beginning of the Great European War. According to the authors, as a consequence of the war the young nine-year-old had to earn for the living of his family. This detail reflected the historical theses of the war as the cause of the impoverishment and privation of the society. The next date was 1927 when the young worker left Hungary due to the hopeless unemployment for finding a job in Belgium. At this point the biography connected his life to his revolutionary predecessors. In Antwerp the would-be communist settled down and received the first political lessons from Hungarian leftist émigrés. Whereas the youth of the hero meant connections to previous lives within the movement, his death established links toward the present and the future. The biography described how Mező had been shot during the siege of the party headquarters in Budapest in 1956. Then in the conclusion the paper related the self-sacrifice to the survivors, saying, 'His life is exemplary, his martyr death is a reminder, a warning for our people constructing the new world.'³⁷⁷ The life narrative was not a single and isolated one: it necessarily referred to other lives. These accounts, however, were evoked by the usage of proper names. An utterance that uses proper names is able to make identity statements. The actor of certain deeds is defined, while in turn the actions identify the actor in question. To put it in a simple way, it is possible to state by the mean of proper names that who

did what. A once identified name necessarily creates a relationship to other names.³⁷⁸ The names that were engraved on the Pantheon to identify individual lives achieved their meaning in comparison to the whole series of dead bearing proper names. The personal acts, which were embodied by these, followed each other thus forming a continuous flow of actions. Revolutionaries came after one by one standing on each other's shoulders and the revolution was permanent. The community of communist fighters, therefore, was not constituted by a mystical transformation of physical relationships. On the contrary, the construction of this community occurred in a very rational ordinary way: due to the succession of actual individual lives. The Pantheon of the Labor Movement, hence, referred to no mysticism of genuine communities, but rather provided a rational understanding of the continuity of communism through the mundane everyday process of education and training that could preserve and re-generate heritage. However, precisely this rational comprehension of the unity of the party guaranteed the abstract continuity of the movement. The party as a community of individuals seeking the road towards communism could always remain the source of truth that points towards the unquestionable final goal in spite of the occasional individual failures in finding the right way to that goal.

5

The rational corporate continuity of the party had somewhat strange but important implications. Károly Kiss, who aptly formulated it in his inauguration speech, said, 'And if we made mistakes or stopped short during the fight, it was not the party who was wrong; it was us, individual persons who proved to be feeble.'³⁷⁹ After 1956 the primary problem of self-representation of the new communist party was its trouble with continuity. On the one hand, it was doubtless that the party confessed itself a successor of the previous communist regime. By declaring 1956 a counterrevolution the communist regime claimed itself a restoration. The Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party demanded the right to be the heir of the transition that began in 1945. It said,

³⁷⁷ MOL M-BB-1-21 (1956-57), p. 37 Imre Mező's biography (p. 8)

³⁷⁸ István Rév, 'The Necronym', *Representations* 64 (Fall, 1998), pp. 76-108.

³⁷⁹ NSZ (22 March, 1959)

Everything what the party accomplished in the last one and half decade concerning the revolutionary leadership and the development of class-consciousness of the working class, the education of tens and hundreds of thousands of communists, the assistance to the whole Hungarian working people to find its consciousness, to improve its spiritual and material conditions, the revealing and destruction of squads of reactionary big landlords and grand bourgeoisie masking themselves under various veils, the creation, improvement and stabilization of democratic and socialist achievements of the Hungarian people belong inseparable to the last three years of our party.³⁸⁰

This statement comes from the report composed by the Central Committee for the party congress in 1959. The document pronounced in the subsequent sections,

We have to consider the development of our party and the people's democracy a homogeneous process from the liberation onwards, we confess and pronounce that the successes of our party gained in the last years were based on the achievements that were accomplished during the more than one decade long period preceding 1956, we confess the continuity of the struggles of our party, those struggles due to which we led to victory the people's democratic revolution heading the progressive forces of the nation and capitalized on the liberating victory of the Soviet Union over fascism that liberated also our country, we realized the re-construction of the country, the distribution of land, the democratic transformation of our state and social life at a rapid pace fighting against the reactionary forces and accomplished the creation of the dictatorship of the proletariat and the beginning of socialist construction in our country in a peaceful way by gaining the support of the majority of the working masses.³⁸¹

On the other hand Kádár's communist party had to distance itself from the terror of the predecessor regime. The report composed by the Central Committee for the party congress in 1959 stated that, 'The leadership of the Hungarian Workers' Party (pre-1956 Hungarian communist party) committed many failures during the building of socialism which prevented the enforcement of proletarian power, withdrew socialist construction and weakened its social bases.'³⁸² The report attributed errors to the former leader of the party, Mátyás Rákosi. The former secretary general was accused of insisting to his sectarianism and resisting the definitive correction of failures. The leadership collectively was condemned by the new party, 'The serious failure of the old leadership of the party that it avoided the struggle based on principles and replaced it with tactics without principles completed with an application of mere administrative measures.'³⁸³

³⁸⁰ MOL 288/21/1959/62, p. 10.

³⁸¹ *ibid.*, p. 11.

³⁸² MOL 288/21/1959/62, p. 13.

³⁸³ *ibid.*, p. 17.

The previous leadership resisted to the solution offered by the twentieth congress of the CPSU because of their sectarianism, indecisiveness and slowness.

The identity of the party despite its members' individual deeds could solve the dilemma of continuity and discontinuity. The new communist party found a way by the help of which its continuity remained unbroken without having the burden of identifying itself with the very unpopular oppression of its predecessor. The continuity of communism remained unbroken while certain attitudes and deeds of its individual heirs were excluded from the tradition. In the text wrong decisions were attributed always to personal actors like the leadership or individuals like Rákosi, whereas the right measures were taken by the party as such. Although individuals could commit failures, the 'party' always had the ability to correct them, 'The party openly detected these failures in June 1953 and aimed at correcting them...These decisions were basically right...and were capable of bringing positive changes in the life of the party and the country.'³⁸⁴ The communist party was always considered identical with its essence--being always the right revolutionary centre. Although the pre-1956 communist organ was dissolved and the new Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party was basically a new foundation, that period was characterized in the report on the party's past activity as follows, 'This era was marked by the forging together of party unity.' The document ignored discontinuity by using a phrase that emphasized identity over difference. The perpetuity of the communist party was elucidated by the manner of naming the forthcoming congress. It was obvious for the leadership to count their meetings starting from the foundation of the communist movement in Hungary in spite of the constant dissolution and re-organization of parties. The leaders stressed that the meeting in 1959 would be the seventh congress of the party since its existence had been continuous for four decades.

It was justified just because of the necessity of taking these four decades into consideration to call our congress but the seventh congress of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party. Of course, there are certain contradictions in this title at first sight since this congress actually is the first and not seventh congress of the HSWP re-organizing itself after 1 November 1956. However, by calling this congress the first one we would deny the origins of the HSWP from the single and homogeneous Hungarian workers' party, the HWP formed by the unity of the Communist Party and the Social Democratic Party in 1948, then we would deny our conviction that the HSWP is following and improving the great deeds and revolutionary traditions of the Hungarian Workers' Party. However, we cannot call this congress simply the fourth congress of our party, although it is the fourth congress succeeding the third congress of the HWP in 1954, since we cannot begin to count the congresses of the Hungarian revolutionary workers' party, namely the milestones of the revolutionary workers' movement by solely the HWP pulling out

³⁸⁴ MOL 288/21/1959/62, p. 13., p. 18.

thereby the development of the HWP from the entire history and chronology of the Hungarian revolutionary workers' party, that is to say from the history of the communist movement. The HSWP is a communist party even according to its party rules that from its formation onwards pursued and furthered the politics, programme, goals and ideas of the communist party. The HSWP is the party of Marxism-Leninism, namely the party of the struggle for communism, therefore it is the successor of only the true revolutionary traditions of the Hungarian workers' movement. It denies everything in the past of the Hungarian workers' movement what meant an opportunistic, reformist attraction and turns against them. Therefore, we cannot count the congresses of the old social democratic party in forming the chronology of our revolutionary Marxist-Leninist party. The HSWP was formed and organized to be the leading mass party of the Hungarian people's democracy building socialism on the grounds of drawing the lessons of the counterrevolution in 1956 and the union with the social democratic party, nevertheless the roots of the HSWP go back the past of the Hungarian communist movement and it is the inseparable part of the Hungarian communist movement. We call this congress the seventh congress of our party because ever since there exists a revolutionary, namely Marxist-Leninist workers' party in our country and it has existed for forty years, the deputies of the revolutionary workers party in Hungary gather for the seventh time to survey the way passed, to analyze the lessons of the past period and to assign the tasks for the forthcoming time.³⁸⁵

6

The heroes' plot was inaugurated in the Kerepesi cemetery at the end of 1960. The plot contained graves of fallen men who were members of the communist governed armed forces and were killed during the 1956 uprising. The fallen were buried in order of rank in a circle. Those who entered the burial site would notice in the centre the grave of Colonel László Lukács. On the tombstone the inscription said only two dates: 1919-1956. Walking around the circus one could recognize further four similar gravestones: 1919-1956. The fallen were considered heroes, persons who did their duty fighting against the enemies of communism and did more by giving their lives for communism. However, their status as heroes was confirmed only by their death, being killed by counterrevolutionaries. Their whole life gained its meaning only in the light of their death. A martyr becomes a martyr merely after his or her death; without death martyrdom does not exist. A martyr's death makes a martyr's life. An inscription on a tombstone is a biography compressed into two dates, that of death and birth. The biography on a martyr's gravestone is interpreted by the fact that he or she died a martyr. Born in 1919 - without any political intention - Colonel Lukács and his fellow officers were killed during a counterrevolution, which provided new meaning to their birth. 1919 meant the beginning of martyrdom, thus the dead incorporated history. The corpses embodied and personified a historical continuity. According to communist interpretations, 1919 meant the beginning of communist martyrdom as the Horthy-

³⁸⁵ *ibid.*, pp. 1-2.

regime, which came into power after the fall of the First Hungarian Soviet Republic, executed some of the prominent figures of the former communist government.³⁸⁶

The heroes' plot seemed ready only in 1960 and thus its inauguration took place only three weeks later than that of the monument at Republic Square (Köztársaság-tér), a memorial dedicated to the victims of the counterrevolution. The Secretariat received a proposition, which contained also a model of the artistic arrangement of the site. It stated that the most appropriate date of inauguration would be 4 November.³⁸⁷ On that day in 1956 János Kádár had declared in a radio speech the foundation of his new government which had been called the Workers' and Peasants' Revolutionary Government. On that day Soviet troops entered Budapest and helped Kádár to re-establish the communist power in the country. Nonetheless, as the Administrative Department could only report on 6 September 1960 that the heroes' plot had been made ready, the inauguration was postponed until 10 December.³⁸⁸ The proposal of the dedication stated evidently that the fallen were considered as martyrs of the communist movement. As they were armed men, their memory was tributed by the highest military respect. The guard of honour was ordered and the Minister of Defence addressed the memorial speech. Members of the armed forces, workers of prominent factories, and representatives of a few pioneer teams formed the audience. Organs of the Communist Party--armed forces and the Communist Youth--were expected to lay wreaths. Plans were made to broadcast the event via the press, radio, television, and newsreel. The death of the honoured communists was considered a revolutionary action. During the wreath-laying ceremony the orchestra planned to play revolutionary marches and to finish the performance with the Internationale.³⁸⁹

The inauguration of the monument in Republic square that took place on 30 October 1960 was planned to be a colossal performance as the headquarters of the Party Committee of Budapest, situated at Republic Square, on 30 October 1956 passed through a heavy siege at the end of which the insurgents executed the captured security policemen. The proposal intended to gather fifty thousand people for the opening

³⁸⁶ An extremely revealing interpretation on the heroic and saintly social behaviour is in: James O. Urmson, 'Saints and Heroes' in *Essays in Moral Philosophy*, ed.: A. J. Melden (Seattle, 1958). On the connection of martyr and his or her death see Brown, *The Cult of the Saints*, pp. 71-6. On martyrdom in the Hungarian context of 1989 see Rév, 'Parallel Autopsies', pp. 15-39.

³⁸⁷ MOL 288/7/74

³⁸⁸ MOL 288/7/89

³⁸⁹ MOL 288/7/94

ceremony, though this number was reduced later to 500. Speakers were members of both the government and the Politburo. Party and governmental organs laid wreaths as well as the Communist Youth. Great attention was paid to the preparation, and the submission proposed even that spotlights should be placed on the roof of the party headquarters to provide the most advantageous illumination of the monument. The fallen were incorporated into the caste of revolutionary martyrs. The inscription of the memorial was read as follows, 'In memoriam of those who fell for the freedom of the Hungarian working people.'³⁹⁰ The monument emphasized this meaning to the extent that eventually no individual names were added to the inscription. The existence of an abstract continuity, called the idea of communism, was aptly expressed by the address given at the inauguration ceremony of the memorial at Republic Square. It said, 'The bronze statue of the monumental memorial demonstrates precisely the message of the memorial: the fighter can be killed, but the idea is triumphant.'³⁹¹

³⁹⁰ MOL 288/21/1960/1, 7/90 and 5/206

³⁹¹ MRA News (31 October, 1960)

Narration

1

The communist historiography on the First Hungarian Soviet Republic departed from a wide range of various sources after 1956. Communist historians laid great stress on working in archives, detecting newer and newer documents and supporting their argument by exhaustive knowledge of evidence. For instance, in his last sentence the author of a book on the role of the worker regiments in the Hungarian Red Army felt it necessary to announce that, 'I used contemporary documents preserved in the Archives for Military History, contemporary press material and memoirs of contemporaries for writing this book.'³⁹² The popular comprehensive narrative written by military historian Ervin Liptai in 1965 contained 346 footnotes for 459 pages that included published memoirs, press articles and also unpublished archival sources.³⁹³ The same author in his book concerning the history of the Hungarian Red Army emphasized his usage of non-Hungarian sources that were formerly unknown for the Hungarian public in order to produce a better and profound understanding of the campaigns of the army.³⁹⁴ During their interrogation these relics were exploited as clues: based upon these researchers deduced what past occurrences the remnants reflected.³⁹⁵

A young scholar who later in the 1980s and 1990s would become a leading intellectual historian in Hungary began her career with the research of the questions of revolution and counterrevolution in the trans-Danubian region (*Dunántúl*) and published a book with the same title in 1961. The author discovered the traces of counterrevolution in very different sources. For instance, the historian managed to identify the signs of counterrevolution in the records of the trial of the Hungarian People's Commissars that

³⁹² Tibor Hetés, *Munkásezredek előre!* (Worker Regiments, Forward!) (Budapest, 1960), p. 141.

³⁹³ Ervin Liptai, *A Magyar Tanácsköztársaság* (The First Hungarian Soviet Republic) (Budapest, 1965), pp. 461-73.

³⁹⁴ Liptai, *A Magyar Vörös Hadsereg harcai* (The Fights of The Hungarian Red Army) (Budapest, 1960)

³⁹⁵ Contemporary historical theory recently has received a profound critique for its failure of incorporating the practice of research in the description of the historical creation. Chris Lorenz, 'Can Histories Be True?' in *History and Theory* 37 (vol. 3 1998), pp. 287-309. See also David Carr, 'Die Realität der Geschichte' in *Historische Sinnbildung*, eds.: Klaus E. Müller and Jörn Rüsen (Hamburg, 1997), pp. 309-28. The direction of my investigation compares to the most with Paul Ricoeur's attempt to incorporate the stage of research into the linguistic determination of historical representation. See his 'Histoire et rhétorique', *Diogène* 168 (October - December, 1994), pp. 9-26. The difference is that while the French philosopher considers the selection of sources as evidence for argumentation the result of the rhetorical construction of the historian, my purpose is to point out that the interpretation of documents itself leads to rhetorical construction.

followed the fall of the Soviet Republic in 1920. During the process a witness stated that they had rebelled against the Soviet Republic in 1919 because, 'they could not stand the rule of the reds.' The author concluded from the account that, 'In the same days an open counterrevolutionary uprising happened also in Tolnatamási a far away region of the Trans-Danubia.'³⁹⁶ The peasants' aversion against the violent state power that intervened abruptly into their ordinary everyday practice was interpreted the doubtless sign of counterrevolutionary practice by the historian. What is more, the author found evidence for that counterrevolutionary activity had constantly threatened the Soviet Republic. For instance, the book pointed out that although there had been no open resistance against the appropriation of big estates and the creation of co-operatives, the owners had obstructed and had attempted to hinder the entire process. Later many of them were kept as directors of their nationalized estates, however they were reluctant to make any bigger investments thereby these people were considered saboteurs. Likewise the reluctance of well-to-do peasants to carry out the necessary agricultural work was interpreted as actions directed against the revolution. The book underlined that these had been genuine counterrevolutionary attempts since they had been capable of dissolving the alliance of workers and peasants. Peasants who were accustomed to sell their products on the market usually objected the mandatory delivery on agricultural goods. This behavior was also coined as anti-Communist resistance by the author. Later the historian stated that the revolution had had to fight even for the new crop against counterrevolution. Nevertheless, peasant behavior could be described in terms of political support for the communist regime, as well. For instance, the scholar perceived the popular land occupying movement spread among poor peasants that aimed the seizure of big estates as a driving force of the revolution.

The reading of sources convinced the author that the history of the First Hungarian Soviet Republic had been a genuine clash between revolution and counterrevolution. The historian managed to identify each trace of the past as either the reflection of revolution or the instance of counterrevolution. The introduction clarified it too that the work concerned with the history of the struggle between revolution and counterrevolution. Firstly, it pointed at the fact that the Trans-Danubia became the hinterland of the Soviet Republic undertaking the revolutionary fight for social progress

³⁹⁶ Zsuzsa L.Nagy, *Forradalom és ellenforradalom a Dunántúlon 1919* (Revolution and Counterrevolution in the Transdanubia 1919) (Budapest, 1961), p. 134.

and national subsistence. Secondly, the author called the attention to the fact that this struggle meant a constant conflict with counterrevolution that appeared in various forms apart from open riot. Accordingly the scholar argued that,

We would be wrong if we thought that the counterrevolution took merely armed steps under the wings of the entente against the Hungarian Soviet Republic. Nationalistic and anti-Semitic slogans spread by whispering propaganda, propagation of the compromise with the entente, preaches from the pulpit, speculation with banknotes, the abuse of bureaucracy and expertise belonged to the war properties of counterrevolution as well as the weapons received from Vienna, the activity of right-wing social democrats or the work of the entente officers on mission. The struggle against counterrevolution meant not only to suppress the strike of railworkers and armed uprisings, but also to defend the green corn from cutting, the ripe grain from setting on fire, to throw out the inappropriate persons from the soviets and to begin a movement in the plants for raising productivity.³⁹⁷

The dichotomy or dialectic relationship of revolution and counterrevolution provided the bases for emplotting the history of the Hungarian commune. Ervin Liptai, a leading military historian of the period, dedicated his book, *The First Hungarian Soviet Republic*, which was the first comprehensive volume of scholarly standards published after 1956, to the description of the causes of the destruction of the revolution and the victory of the counterrevolution. The historical work was structured according to the principle of triumph succeeded by downfall. Liptai's book began with a description of the desperate social, political and economic conditions of pre-revolutionary Hungary: a way of representation that was capable of underlining the glory of the ensuing revolution. The profound discussion of the troubles created the zero point of departure that was juxtaposed by the subsequently victorious communist regime. The monograph that was published in 1965 started to enumerate the flaws of the contemporary Hungarian political and social system with the statement that the country had been bound to a state, the Austrian-Hungarian Monarchy, determined to collapse since its various parts had been connected neither by common traditions, economic interest nor by political aspirations. Secondly, the author emphasized that the oppression of the nationalities had forced them to develop ideas and plans of independence. Thirdly, the book discussed the social conditions in agriculture and presented statistical data to depict the poverty of small peasants,

Apart from dwarf holders and half-proletarians scraping by a patch of soil the 45 percent of agricultural population that took approximately six million people together with family members got not even a hoe-ful land. In the shadow of great estates poverty was breeding freely.

³⁹⁷ *ibid* pp. 5-6.

For the majority of peasants the basic elements of knowledge, the appropriation of writing and reading skills were as inaccessible as medical assistance or hospital nursing in case of sickness. Whereas the income of fifty great landlords exceeded the 100 000 forints per year, the income coming from the farms of the 88 percent of those who owned property did not reach even the fifty forints. Fifty forints per year could not save a family consisting of several members even from death of starvation. Peasants either begged for work by great estates, by great holders or tried to get a communal work Hundreds of thousands of families scraped from hand to mouth without any perspective for improving their conditions.³⁹⁸

In this situation the regime that promised to radically improve all the aspects of Hungarian society seemed to be obviously glorious. Liptai considers the revolutionary government of October 1918 as having benign intentions, but no means to govern the country. The troubles and difficulties that had been sharpened by the war defeat could be overcome solely by a socialist-communist dictatorship. The author was convinced of that only a thorough re-structuring of the society could have made it possible for the country to leave the past behind for the future,

Thus the struggle was decided: the dictatorship of the proletariat was born. For the first time in the history of Hungary – the workers took power into their hands. A new era began in the life of the Hungarian people: the era of freedom. The hearts of the proletarians of factories and land were filled with happiness never felt before because of shaking off the thousand years old chains of exploitation. The perspectives of a bright future free of exploitation and oppression were drawn for the starving and weak country corrupted by the crimes of the classes of the lords.³⁹⁹

The perception of triumph determined the further discussion of events, as well. The book gave an account how the various social classes and groups had joined the new regime with genuine enthusiasm and expectations. The emotional peak of the chapter was reached when the historian described the successful telegraph connection between Lenin and Béla Kun, while the leader of the Russian revolution had mediated the greetings of the Bolshevik party. The First Hungarian Soviet Republic appeared a victorious regime: the book discussed the measures of the government that were interpreted to improve the living conditions of the majority of the population. Meanwhile, the army was successfully braving the imperialist aggressors as it was revealed from the description of the Northern Campaign of the Red Army.

The author used the metaphor of triumph in order to explain the opportunity of counterrevolutionaries for joining the proletarian government. Since the revolution appeared to be victorious once and for all, communists did not pay enough attention to

³⁹⁸ Liptai, *A Magyar Tanácsköztársaság*, p. 8.

³⁹⁹ *ibid.* p. 132.

isolate the opportunistic and irresolute leaders, 'On 21 March the leaders of the communist party had not known yet that one part of the social democrat party and trade union leaders would bring the counterrevolution in their minds into the crucial positions of the First Hungarian Soviet Republic. They had not known that the dictatorship of the proletariat would pay enormous price for the compliance regarding the social democrats.'⁴⁰⁰ Liptai flashed the ensuing tragedy for the first time in the case of the counterrevolutionary revolt on 24 June 1919. On that day several professional officers and their troops attacked the headquarters of the people's commissars and other crucial buildings. The riot, however, failed rapidly: virtually in a couple of hours the counterrevolutionaries left without any mass support. The scholar interpreted the event as the evidence that the soviet government had not suppressed satisfactorily the bourgeoisie and this fact had resulted in the relative freedom of counterrevolutionary organization. The chapter concluded that, unfortunately, nothing had happened to change this sorrow situation. The statement that counterrevolution remained a considerable force prompted the possibility of a second and successful revolt.

As a consequence of the search for signs and precedence of the future catastrophe, these narratives were frequently emplotted according to the structure of the fulfillment of previous prediction. Tibor Hetés's book that was devoted to the worker regiments of the Red Army was structured according to this principle. The historical monograph that was published in 1960 discussed the role and function of the worker troops during the campaigns of the communist army. The main statement of the author was that those units had meant the most revolutionary regiments and, consequently, the best attacking force of the Hungarian Red Army. The supreme command reached its greatest successes when the worker regiments were applied and, in turn, when those troops were withheld the army failed. Hetés described the failure of the offensive against the Romanian army in July 1919 that had resulted in the dissolution of the red troops and claimed that, 'the majority of the worker regiments did not take part in it due to the sabotage of the officers.'⁴⁰¹ Through this statement the author implied that the military leadership had consciously deprived the army from its troops that had been most fit for action. Then he also claimed, 'The fall of the first Hungarian dictatorship of the proletariat was not hinged on the workers' resoluteness for standing their ground, it

⁴⁰⁰ *ibid.* p. 136.

⁴⁰¹ Hetés, *Munkásezredek előre!*, p. 140.

happened rather as a result of the actions of the outer enemy having numerical superiority and those of the inner opportunists and traitors.'

The emplotment of the book was construed in order to demonstrate the struggle over the worker regiments. The author predicted in advance the future betrayal of the most revolutionary troops in the beginning of his work. The historian juxtaposed the intention of the communists who had wanted to form a determined revolutionary army based on the worker units to the policy of the social democrats who had constantly obstructed the organization since they had wanted to avoid the arming of the workers. Later, when the regiments were formed they decided to apply them solely in the hinterland. Apart from that, social democrat leaders appointed professional officers and ignored the worker commanders. This conflict foreshadowed the later withdrawing of these companies from the Red Army. Hetés, however, argued that the social democrats could have not reached their purpose until the army had advanced victoriously. Nevertheless, when the troops received the first command to retreat in June the opportunistic views of the social democrats began to influence the soldiers. The book claimed that because of the worker regiments had not been led by communists, their members had tended to accept the view of capitulation coming from social democrat circles and occasionally had even denied to fight. The effect of opportunistic opinions contributed to the failure of the attempts of communists to preserve the bellicose spirit of the army and, eventually, led to the final defeat of the Red Army in July. Thereby, the author concluded that finally at the end of the story it was fulfilled what even could be expected at the beginning: the betrayal and corruption of the revolutionary worker regiments.

Although Ervin Liptai's book, *The First Hungarian Soviet Republic*, was finished before a detailed discussion of the white terror, its readers had not even the slightest doubt concerning the sense of the tragic downfall. The last chapter of the book was imbued with impermeable sadness and sorrow, 'The defeat of the betrayed and corrupted Red Army dealt the dictatorship of the proletariat a deadly blow. Despair and bitterness seized the masses.'⁴⁰² After learning the news of the defeat the people's commissars first were thinking on fortifying the capital and pursuing the armed resistance. Nonetheless, this time the government was not unified and the communists decided to resign. Then the author continued with a description of the final meeting of

the revolutionary leadership, 'The same persons gathered again who on 21 March approved with enthusiasm the decision concerning the proclamation of the dictatorship of the proletariat, who gave a new turn to the events by their brave upholding the defense of the soviet republic on 2 May. This time no animating words were run. The Budapest Central Workers' and Soldiers' Council mourned: they came to bury the dictatorship of the proletariat.'⁴⁰³ The description is a vivid re-enactment: it is even possible to see the members of the council slowly entering the meeting hall burdened with heavy thoughts and feeling remorse while they were silently listening to the speakers. According to Liptai they had very good reasons to do this. The historian closed his book with the conclusion that the downfall of the communist regime would be succeed by merciless oppression, 'Twenty-five years passed within dark oppression and a sea of suffering.'⁴⁰⁴ Liptai had also an explanation for the woeful outcome of the events: according to his monograph all troubles had been derived from the possibility of counterrevolutionary conspiracy. The communist historian gave an account on counterrevolutionary conspiracies within the leadership of the army and even within the government where right-wing social democrats had plotted against the dictatorship of the proletariat. These two centers of conspiracy managed to drive the army into a badly prepared campaign against entente troops where the general staff itself betrayed its own soldiers and maliciously exposed them to defeat and dissolution. According to the historical monograph this retreat sealed the doom of the dictatorship: at the last meeting of the revolutionary leaders the right-wing traitors within the government undermined the determination of the government to resist the interventionist troops and forced the communists to resign and to exile.

At the end of his book the author depicted the event when the Workers' Council was mourning the resign of the communist government. The source of the description was Kun's last speech there. The process during which the text of the speech was transformed into the act of mourning is very instructive. The essence of Kun's message was that he would have liked a different end. The revolutionary leader expressed his desire for fighting on barricades instead of silent resign. Kun also told that communists would withdraw from the country in order to prepare themselves for the next battle. Liptai read it as a text expressing despair and accusations, 'In his despair and

⁴⁰² Liptai, *A Magyar Tanácsköztársaság*, p. 446.

⁴⁰³ *ibid.* 456.

desperation he (Kun) also accused the masses for leaving the dictatorship of the proletariat in the lurch.⁴⁰⁵ Then, from the analyzed source, the historian drew a conclusion about the event – the sign of which was preserved by the document. The lesson Liptai drew from the perception of Kun's despair was that the revolutionary leader had been mourning because of the sorrow downfall of the Soviet Republic. The text, however, could be read in many different ways. It also could be conceived, for example, as a sign of urging communists for further illegal resistance. The speech could be regarded the last plea of a fallen dictator to incite his faithful followers to the final battle. The phenomenon of despair could be even interpreted in a very different manner. It is also imaginable that Kun was desperate because the masses did not want to fight for his regime anymore.⁴⁰⁶ In this case the same perception of despair would reflect an absolutely different event. In this case it would not be a source that guarded the event of mourning for posterity and, especially, for future historians, but a document that recorded the act of the people's aversion towards communist dictatorship. The fact of sorrow could be perceived only in relationship with the conviction that the end of the First Hungarian Soviet Republic that meant the destruction of the revolution and the rule of the counterrevolution was tragic. The act of mourning was reflected by the source merely from the perspective of tragic ending.

2

After 1959 the depiction of the events of the first dictatorship of the proletariat was unfolded in the form of tragedy. In 1959 two books were published which covered the whole period of the revolutionary years in 1918 and 1919. The first one was Miklós Gárdos's book, *Két ősz között* (Between Two Autumns), which interestingly mixed fiction with historiography proper. Gárdos himself called his book a chronicle differentiating it from historical scholarship.⁴⁰⁷ The author stated that all the details in his work were authentic and faithful to historical reality, though he treated the topic in the manner of chronicle or reportage. The term chronicle was meant rather the readable

⁴⁰⁴ *ibid.* 459.

⁴⁰⁵ Liptai, *A Magyar Tanácsköztársaság*, p. 456.

⁴⁰⁶ Exactly this happened in a newest book on the First Hungarian Soviet Republic. Konrád Salamon, *Nemzeti önpusztítás, 1918-1920* (National Self-Destruction, 1918-1920) (Budapest, 2001), pp. 173-4. Here the author argues that Kun's last speech reflected the discontent of workers towards the dictatorship.

⁴⁰⁷ Miklós Gárdos, *Két ősz között* (Between Two Autumns) (Budapest, 1959), p. 367.

and personal style than the strict chronological sequence of events. The notion of the chronicle was exploited by him to separate his work from normal historical science, however, not in the sense of a proto-history, but rather as true representation of the events from a different point of view. Gárdos concentrated on actors, used a close description of their personal feelings and motives and did not aim to establish general social tendencies within the events. In spite of his aim to build his narrative upon 'true facts', the writer fictionalized consciously his work by using conventional techniques of constructing fiction like conversations which move the plot forward, inner monologues of actors and imagined conflicts in the agents' minds. The author intended to bring the reader close to the represented period and for this purpose he found the tools of fiction more appropriate than those of scholarship.

Although there was no main figure in the narrative the story could be followed along through the character of a young revolutionary, Ottó Korvin. He was a real historical person: the young man worked as a clerk in a bank during the war and became a resolute anti-militarist. Korvin formed a group of revolutionary socialists and struggled against the war and for social revolution. They supported the revolution of October 1918, but not the government that was for them simply another form of bourgeois oppression. Korvin's figure was used to symbolize the general meaning of the novel: his personal fate was appropriate for representing the overall history of the First Hungarian Soviet Republic. The young man filled in the position of the head of the Department of Political Investigations of the People's Commissariat of Interior and therefore he was accused of manslaughter and was executed after the fall. In Miklós Gárdos's novel the very last pages were devoted to a scene where Korvin and one of his fellow prisoners had been led to the prison after the days of interrogation. The description was preceded by another one about Béla Kun who gave an interview on the situation in Hungary. The Hungarian Bolshevik leader talked in Vienna being in internment, 'I know what happens in Hungary. The white terror is raging...Officer bandits are killing hundreds of people.'⁴⁰⁸ In this context Korvin's capture and torture, being only one among many other, symbolized the counterrevolution,

During these weeks spectacles like this were frequently seen in the streets of Pest. Since Horthy's marching in, when the crane-feathered commander-in-chief had talked about <the guilty Budapest> in his speech stammered in broken Hungarian, the man hunting for communists

⁴⁰⁸ *ibid.* p. 362.

accelerated. In the cellar of Hotel Britannia, in the barracks in Kelenföld, everywhere where the ill-famed white commandos stayed communists were killed. And the prisons were full of workers, as well – white courts passed sentences in summary proceedings.⁴⁰⁹

The other book that surveyed the entire history of the proletarian revolution also included Korvin's destiny into the final chapters of the soviet republic. This volume consisted of brief articles called itself a collection of reportage. It was written by a group of journalists who used the term once again to differentiate their product from professional historical research. The team did not mean that their work was not based on facts, on the contrary in the foreword it was stated that it described the revolutionary activity of proletarians 'in the light of facts.'⁴¹⁰ The purpose of the distinction was to justify the adversarial choice of topics, the lowering down the scale towards ordinary people, the powerful subjective voice and the ignorance of footnotes and general conclusions that was presumed to be the requirements of real historical scholarship. Korvin's torture was included to dramatically signify the start of counterrevolutionary rule that inherently entailed the most brutal white terror according to the communist journalists. The paragraph on Korvin's interrogation was succeeded by the following sentence, 'Terror flooded the city'.⁴¹¹ The book exemplifies well the crucial role of the downfall in representing the history of the First Hungarian Soviet Republic. The events of the white terror occupied almost one fifth of the whole work: 43 pages of the total 220. The relatively great proportion of the articles devoted to the violence is even more striking when one considers that the history of the communist regime proper was told in barely more than a double length: 109 pages. The remaining chapters described the preparation of the revolution. Korvin's figure became a canonized detail in representing the counterrevolutionary terror that followed the dictatorship of the proletariat. In Péter Földes's novel that was published in 1962 and depicted the struggles of the Hungarian Red Army Ottó Korvin also appeared at the end of the story. After Kun predicted the coming of white terror at the last meeting of the Workers' Council the reader could encounter only Korvin from the leading figures of the soviet regime. The young man represented the beginning illegal activity in the circumstances of persecution. In the last pages he was sitting in camouflage on a bench in a park and searching for other

⁴⁰⁹ *ibid.* p. 363.

⁴¹⁰ József Horváth – Gyula Kékesdi – János Nemes – Nándor Ordas, *133 nap* (133 Days) (Budapest, 1959), p. 6.

⁴¹¹ *ibid.* p. 185.

comrades who were forced to hide themselves, as well.⁴¹² A popular work written mainly for schoolchildren in 1969 was finished with the scene of the execution of Ottó Korvin and his fellow comrades. The book described the trial and emphasized that the counterrevolutionary court had been unable to prove its charges against the revolutionaries. In spite of this, stressed the author, the defendants had been sentenced to death and were hanged.⁴¹³

Regularly the narratives were divided into two major parts: the first one gave an account on the victorious advance of revolution and its heroic struggle, whereas the second one was devoted to the signs of counterrevolution and the sad downfall. In a tragic story the horrific end usually juxtaposes a magnificent success. In order to depict the fall terrifyingly sad it has to be preceded by sections that establish the greatness of the tragic hero or actor. Without the glory of the agent the reader could not feel that the downfall meant a genuine loss. Therefore, these narratives usually have a double character: their first part contains a rising period that tells the story of how the hero emerges from the state of being nobody, while the second parts give account on how the harmony breaks apart. That is the ordering structure of Miklós Gárdos's novel, *In Between Two Autumns*, as well. The revolutionary people, which was virtually a nonentity before raised to shape its own existence, fell again losing everything. The novel began with the war defeat in October 1918. That was the absolute zero point from where the steps started upwards. Gárdos represented the first step the appointment of the opposition politician, count Mihály Károlyi as Prime Minister that had been coerced by the irresistible wave of the people's movement. From here onwards the plot ran in two lines until the exclamation of the Soviet Republic, the real goal of the revolution: the first one was built from the machinations of the government and its parties to freeze the reformation of the country, while the second one was carried by the increasing signs of the insurmountable power of socialist revolution. On the one hand, the author described the desperate attempts of the Károlyi-government to save bourgeois power in Hungary: all the reforms the leadership made were regarded to be forced by the labor movement. First of all, the government aspired to maintain the rule of the Hapsburg dynasty and kingdom in the country. Prime Minister Károlyi gave guarantees to the king that he did not support the republic. Nevertheless, as the author illuminated its readers, the

⁴¹² Péter Földes, *Mennyei páncélvonat* (Armoured Train from Heaven) (Budapest, 1962), pp. 432-3.

⁴¹³ Miklós Zalka, *Mindenkihez!* (To Everybody!) (Budapest, 1969), pp. 150-3.

thousands of workers had demanded the immediate proclamation of the republic. Then the novel provided a vivid description on the drama between the inability of the government to make decisions and the newer and newer reports about the enthusiasm of the masses for the republic. Gárdos called the attention that although the leadership had dethroned the king it had been meant only to save the order of exploitation. The book contained a characteristic scene when the ministers had declared the new form of state, however, together with a call for stopping the 'class struggle' that had been initiated by a social democrat politician. The novel did not forget to underline that the attempt had been futile: the workers had not abandoned the fight for their real interest. The chapter ended with a leaflet, written by young revolutionaries while they had been listening to the social democrat minister, which had clearly stated, 'Our real interest is the communist republic!'⁴¹⁴

On the other hand, the signs of the approaching victory of revolution constantly appeared through the novel. Thus, the author included a chapter on a rebellion in a mine where the workers had formed their council and had taken the organization of production into their own hands. The miners marched in front of the offices of the mine and urged the director and his secretary to join - at least verbally - to the revolution. The rapid success of the newly founded communist party was used also to represent the accumulation of the forces of revolution. The author stated that although the party had been created only at the end of November 1918 it had immediately attracted huge masses, 'The worker members of the social democrat party having revolutionary emotions left the party in crowds from the beginning of November until the end of December. And besides, new masses who never participated in politics formed ranks with the communists: the new party that stepped into publicity in the beginning of November conquered newer and newer thousands hour by hour.'⁴¹⁵ The book did not fail to emphasize that the only measure what had remained for the government to take in this situation was to imprison the communist leaders. This step, nonetheless, could not prevent the revolutionary masses to realize their aims: social democrats were soon astonished by the fact that the communist party could operate effectively even without its first rank leaders. Social democrat politicians were forced to negotiate with their communist counterparts since they learned that the workers were to rescue the

⁴¹⁴ Gárdos, *Két ősz*, p. 83.

⁴¹⁵ *ibid.* p. 133.

Bolsheviks. According to the novel communists entered the government due to a massive support of the working class. In this perspective the formation of the Bolshevik dictatorship seemed a genuine triumph: the stubborn persistence and self-sacrificing struggle of the workers in spite of the hindrance by the governments resulted in the birth of their true political representation and leadership. The author demonstrated vividly the atmosphere of triumph in a scene where the news of the dictatorship were introduced for the Workers' Council,

Garbai (the speaker) was still speaking. But for the hall it was already unimportant what he was talking about. Kun was cheered; the new united labor party was cheered. Suddenly someone started to sing. First, the melody of the Marseillaise, its stirring first verse flew over the hall...By the last words a woman on the gallery from the group of the workers of Csepel in a sonorous voice had already begun a new song. Many of the old social democrats had already known this song, though they could rarely hear its text...First, the song was coming only from the gallery, from the mouths of the communists of Csepel. [Then the first verse of the Internationale follows.] However, the flying melody of the refrain absorbed the voice of the majority in the hall. When it was sung for the second time, most of them had already stood.⁴¹⁶

This was the zenith of the novel: from here onwards decline followed. Although the book concentrated on the achievements of the dictatorship of the proletariat, the descriptions of the efforts contained outstanding results and increasing number of bad omens alike. The quotation of two characteristic parts elucidates well what is meant here. The first one is the summary of the advantages of the new regime that was fit at the end of that chapter, which gave an account on the take-over and the first measures of the Soviet Republic,

Two weeks in a country in revolution – is an extraordinarily little time. But the first two weeks, the first two weeks of the dictatorship of the proletariat demonstrated that communists wanted to proceed fast and determinedly in the construction of the new society. The measures that signified the new era were born after each other following the victorious night of 21 March. The main tools of exploitation were nationalized, namely factories, banks, mines, means of transportation and the great estates. The eight hours working day was introduced, wages were raised by thirty percent, women were secured with equal wages for equal work. Rents were decreased by twenty percent; insurance was extended to all workers even to workers of the land. The state of the proletariat took the schools into its own hands: all private institutions of education were nationalized. There passed no day during these two weeks without lots of new steps that attempted to help and improve the conditions of working men. Newspapers informed the public about the organized holiday of proletarian children or the new worker inhabitants of the superfluous rooms of bourgeois apartments or cheap theatre tickets or raising the benefits of widows and orphans three times more.

However, these two weeks ripened serious and dark troubles, as well. It was impossible to perish all the misery and poverty of the four years war and the difficulties flooding the suddenly shriveled country in two weeks. In the lands of nationalities that were torn apart from the old Hungary new states are being formed now – and the capitalists and landlords of the new

⁴¹⁶ *ibid.* p. 208.

states viewed Soviet-Hungary with hungry eyes. The entente, the officers of which commanded the Romanian, Czech and Serbian bourgeois armies as absolute masters, were watching with increasing anger how the state of workers and peasants was settling down in the middle of Europe...⁴¹⁷

The second citation comes from the part that described the event which was generally considered the greatest military and moral success of the First Hungarian Soviet Republic, namely the occupation of Kassa (now Kosice in Slovakia), ‘The Red Army moved forward. In Kassa the news of the proclamation of the Slovak Soviet Republic in Eperjes [now Prešov in Slovakia] a few day ago was declared in a mass meeting. Hungarians and Slovaks demonstrated for the dictatorship of the proletariat...But behind the frontlines, in the back of the fighting Red Army the woodworm of counterrevolution was gnawing.’⁴¹⁸

3

Gondolin is the name of a beautiful elvish city, the last one that resists Melkor, the nefarious god in his war against the people of beauty, the elves and the benevolent humans. The king of the elves concealed his capital in a ring of mountains and after the decisive defeat in the last battle he and his people retreated here. The hero of this fable is Tuor, a man who fights the evil god and after a laborious journey finds the hidden city. The first part of this tale ends at this point: Tuor enters the gate and gets astonished by its wonders and glory,

Now the streets of Gondolin were paved with stone and wide, kerbed with marble, and fair houses and courts amid gardens of bright flowers were set about the ways, and many towers of great slenderness and beauty builded of white marble and carved most marvellously rose to the heaven. Squares there were lit with fountains and the home of birds that sang amid the branches of their aged trees, but of all these the greatest was that place where stood the king’s palace, and the tower thereof was the loftiest in the city, and the fountains that played before the doors shot twenty fathoms and seven in the air and fell in a singing rain of crystal: therein did the sun glitter splendidly by day, and the moon most magically shimmered by night. The birds that dwelt there were of the whiteness of snow and their voices sweeter than a lullaby of music.⁴¹⁹

This engaging picture of ensuing glory is juxtaposed by an uneasy vision of destruction, ‘a drake was coiled even on the very steps of the palace and defiled their whiteness; but swarms of the Orcs ransacked within and dragged forth forgotten women and children

⁴¹⁷ *ibid.* pp. 237-8.

⁴¹⁸ *ibid.* p. 294.

⁴¹⁹ J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Book of Lost Tales*, vol. 2 (New York, 1992), p. 162.

or slew men that fought alone. Glingol was withered to the stock and Bansil was blackened utterly, and the king's tower was beset. High up could they descry the form of the king, but about the base a serpent of iron spouting flame lashed and rowed with his tail, and Balrogs were round him; and there was the king's house in great anguish, and dread cries carried up to the watchers. So was it that the sack of the halls of Turgon and that most valiant stand of the royal house held the mind of the foe, so that Tuor got thence with his company, and stood now in tears upon the Place of the Gods.⁴²⁰ Both quotations come from J. R. R. Tolkien's short story on the fall of the elvish realm, Gondolin.

The emplotment of Tolkien's tale is moved by this tension of glory and destruction. After Tuor's arrival a brief section describes the peaceful life in the city and its grandeur. The crucial moment in the fall of Gondolin is the treason of Maeglin, an elvish prince who came to the city many years before. The man was captured by the evil and he could not resist revealing the situation of the secret gateway to the city. Tolkien prompts Maeglin's fatal role in advance when he tells the story of his life before moving to Gondolin. The boy was born in a far away forest, however, his mother was derived from the hidden city. Many years later the lady and his son began to long for her ancient homeland and decided to return. The king accepted with friendship his lost relative and her son was elevated among the elvish princes. Nonetheless, happiness was eclipsed by Maeglin's hidden love towards the daughter of the king that was hopeless to fulfill due to the close degree of relationship. As a result, the young prince began to carry darker and darker thoughts and started to be haughtier and haughtier. Then the second part of the short story begins with Melkor's gloomy plans and the majority of its paragraphs concern the deadly siege of the city walls. Almost half of the tale contains vivid descriptions of the destruction of the buildings, the massive massacre of the population and the apocalyptic fire that takes over the town. The perception of downfall dominates the mind of the reader, however through its juxtaposition the formerly impressions of *grandeur et gloire* Tolkien masterfully puts his audience into the state of sorrow and feeling of tragedy. Albeit, the story ends with the successful escape of the hero and his

⁴²⁰ *ibid.* p. 187. To be honest, there is not one short story that is called 'the fall of Gondolin.' Though Tolkien's *The Silmarillion* contains a piece with this title it is rather a brief account that discusses the destruction of the city, however almost nothing about its previous glory and beauty. The story with the same title included in the second volume of *The Book of Lost Tales* is a longer and fuller version, however does not accord with every aspect of the formerly written text. Tolkien, *The Silmarillion* (London, 1983) and *Lost Tales*, pp. 146-222.

family, it does not provide the narrative with a happy ending. Contrarily, this scene is rather another mean of heightening the emotional atmosphere. The runaway people are attacked many times by the enemy and are characterized not by the sense of joy for their successful rescue, but by a never-ending sorrow for their ruined city. The fable is finished by their eventual finding a peaceful place, but are still described a desperate and dissolving people. The moral conclusion of the short story is that the fall of Gondolin was the most horrible and sad deed in history and Melkor's most nefarious act. Tolkien's fairytale belongs to a tradition that I would call the 'history of downfall.' That genre generally consists of two distinct elements. A beginning part usually tells the story of a flourishing realm that provides prosperity to all of its citizens and where law and order are encompassed by material richness. A second part, however, ordinarily gives an account on the gathering of stormy clouds and spreading darkness. At the end the good empire is destroyed after a long and desperate fight. Its collapse results in the suffering and servitude of its inhabitants.

The generic structure of the dichotomy of glory and destruction is a fundamental aspect of historical tradition in East-Central Europe. This is a peculiar mode of historical discourse and a specific genre of story telling that had a long-lasting tradition in East-Central European national historical representations. The foundation and institutionalization of professional historiography took place in the second half of the nineteenth century that the peoples of the region experienced an era of decline. The point of view from where their past was seen was basically the failure of national aspirations for independence and liberty manifested in the revolutions of 1848. Czechs, Poles and Hungarians were all defeated in their armed struggle. Poland's next uprising in 1863 also failed, and albeit Hungary agreed on a pact with Austria in 1867, the country still lacked profound independence of the state. It is true that the pact was depicted a triumph, a reconciliation between the nation and the king, the tragic consciousness of history remained lively, however. Polish historical consciousness ordinarily views the past of the country as a cycle of catastrophes. Events are usually ordered according to the master narrative of destruction and renewal. A characteristic and also determining episode of this history is the partition of the early modern Polish state that occurred between 1772 and 1795. In between those years the territory of the country was divided among the contemporary great powers of Prussia, Austria and Russia. Quotidian historical sense as well as scholarly representations hold that this

event has to be regarded a tragic downfall of a flourishing empire. The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries generally are described as the Golden Age of Polish spirit and national existence: the exceptionality of the Polish people was expounded perfectly during this period. Poles formed a unique shape of the state, the republic of nobles, Catholicism prevailed over the country, and Poland was the shield of Christian Europe and the Great Mill of the continent. The partition ruined exactly this perfection of national spirit and pushed the country into the abyss of oppression where no feature of its character could be expressed.⁴²¹

Hungarian historiography especially showed a preference towards this genre, as well. During the nineteenth century the battle of Mohács in 1526, where the Osman-Turks had almost perished the army of Hungarian noblemen and even the king had lost his life while running away from the battlefield, acquired a special significance for the history of the nation. It began to be considered the decisive tragic event of the country that separated the preceding glory of the medieval kingdom from the subsequent period of national decline. The ancient kingdom was usually characterized a flourishing empire ruling ‘the three seas’ and its kings were regarded triumphant conquerors. The succeeding centuries, however, were ordered into the master narrative of heroic but tragic wars for national integration and independence.⁴²² The legend of Mohács subsisted during the years of communism, as well. The popular history book that discussed the history of late medieval – fourteenth and fifteenth centuries – Hungary bore the marking title of ‘Hungary’s Flourishing and Deterioration’. The author of this work articulated the contrast almost in the same way as Tolkien did. The glory was depicted through the construction of the royal castle by the great medieval king, Mathias,

Meanwhile the castle was built, as well. Mathias made new palaces raised one after the other with spacious dining halls and superb sleeping areas that were differentiated by their variedly decorated gilded ceilings. A chapel was also built on the side of the Danube with a water-organ and a double baptismal font made from marble and silver. The library stood next to it having on its shelves heaps of Greek and Latin books, hand written nicely illustrated Corvinas [codices of Mathias Corvinus] with splendid binding and among them modest printed volumes. From here opened the large vaulted room showing the copy of the starlit sky. Elsewhere golden

⁴²¹ Ewa Domańska, ‘(Re)Creative Myths and Constructed History: The Case of Poland’ in *Myth and Memory in the Construction of Community*, ed.: Bo Strlth (Brussels, 2000), pp. 249-62.

⁴²² Domokos Varga, *Magyarország virágzása és romlása* (Hungary’s Flourishing and Deterioration) (Budapest, 1974) Ferenc Szakály, *A mohácsi csata* (The Battle of Mohács) (Budapest, 1975)

reception halls were built, council and meeting-halls, hidden deep niches, cold and warm bathrooms. High stairs, covered passages, terraces.⁴²³

This picture was juxtaposed by that of the destruction, ‘Turkish troops, however, raided over the defenseless country. They were killing, plunging and setting on fire, took and drove captives: masters and servants.’⁴²⁴ The book discussed the process that had led from the beginning triumph to the final corruption. Although it is true that Hungarian Marxist historiography broke with the concept of Mohács as the ultimate decisive battle, historical scholarship still considered the clash a border of periods. Historical interpretation regarded the event as part of a larger context: that of the decay of feudalism and ‘feudal ruling classes’. The battle of Mohács was seen as an accidental but still inescapable point of culmination of this process of destruction of Hungarian feudalism. According to the Marxist approach the battle closed the age of the mature feudal state in Hungary and began a new era of dependence, semi-colonization and the deadlock of social development.⁴²⁵ Another characteristic monograph that concerned the foundation and discontinuance of the Principality of Transylvania after Mohács – sixteenth and seventeenth century – was published as the ‘Corruption of the Fairy Garden’. The title that resembles to the tolkienian style referred the contemporary naming of Transylvania.⁴²⁶

Stories of the First Hungarian Soviet Republic became palpable and comprehensible when incorporated into this narrative tradition. Historical accounts partly acquire their meaning from the fact that they can be read as narratives. The reader perceives the similarity of narrative forms and genres, whereas the form of the historical account reminds him or her to those kinds of story structures which generally are already available for him or her. The form a historical interpretation eventually takes suits in a culturally accessible set of narratives. Therefore, historical accounts could be understood as parts of and in the context of narrative traditions. Narratives about the dictatorship of the proletariat referred to a broader cultural pattern that compressed the truth desired to tell by the historians-chroniclers into a metaphoric form.⁴²⁷

⁴²³ Varga, *Magyarország virágzása és romlása*, pp. 115-6.

⁴²⁴ *ibid.* p. 153.

⁴²⁵ See e. g. Szakály, *A mohácsi csata*

⁴²⁶ János Barta, *A „Tündérbkert” romlása* (The Corruption of the ‘Fairy Garden’) (Budapest, 1983)

⁴²⁷ Hayden White, ‘Interpretation in History’, *Tropics of Discourse*, pp. 51-80. Theorists of historical narrative basically agree on this point. See also: Louis O. Mink, ‘Narrative Form as a Cognitive Instrument’ in *The Writing of History*, eds.: Robert H. Canary and Henry Kozicki (Madison, 1978), pp. 143-4. Departing from this point Hayden White calls the narrative account an inherently figurative account that endows real events with meaning

Starting from 1959, the fortieth anniversary of the First Hungarian Soviet Republic in 1919, numerous narrative representations on the history of the first Hungarian communist state appeared in a richness of form and style. At that time the memory of the soviet system began to mushroom spectacularly in the public discourse on the past. Novels, scholarly publications and works of art were issued to the degree never experienced before. Only in the year of the anniversary ten memoirs, twelve collections of documents, twenty-five books concerning regional and local history, ten monographs on questions of detail, eight greater official pieces of appreciation, two books providing an overall view, approximately five fictions and hundreds of studies and minor articles came to the light.⁴²⁸

Starting from 1959, the Hungarian communist party began to pursue a characteristic politics of searching for compromise. By the beginning of 1959 the party leadership had already made the borders clear for any possible ideological and political discussions. The crucial element of these limitations concerned the exclusion of all alternative interpretations of the 1956 revolt, but the strictly taken official view of the ‘counterrevolution’. Nonetheless, the communist leadership made it also clear that its interest was directed rather towards the future, the building of socialism. These ideological-political frames provided the opportunity for those intellectuals who aspired to return to the public sphere to accomplish it in exchange of manifesting their loyalty to the cause of socialism. This concerned mostly literary authors, who traditionally remained dominant intellectual figures in Hungarian public life and usually played active roles in the revolution in 1956. Many of them, including first of all Gyula Illyés and László Németh, leading ‘populist’ writers, made public declaration in which they acclaimed the achievements of the Kádárist socialist system since 1956. In turn, the

by poetic means. White, ‘The Question of Narrative in Contemporary Historical Theory’ in his *The Content of The Form* (Baltimore, 1987), pp. 26-57. F. R. Ankersmit articulates this recognition by claiming that the historical narrative – like metaphors – is the birthplace of new meaning. Ankersmit, ‘Six Theses’, pp. 40-1. ‘...the writing of history is not something added from outside to historical knowledge but is one with it.’, writes also Paul Ricoeur. Ricoeur points out that this fictional information had at least the same value in the representation of the past than its factual counterparts. Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* Vol. 3 (Chicago – London, 1985), p. 185. There is no place here to recount the development of narrativist philosophy of history. Ricoeur provides its marvellous analysis in his *Time and Narrative* Vol. 1 (Chicago - London, 1984), pp.

⁴²⁸ András Siklós, *Az 1918-1919. évi magyarországi forradalmak* (The Revolutions of Hungary in 1918-1919)

authorities proved to be flexible and guaranteed vast publishing opportunities for them from the beginnings of the 1960s. The process of rapprochement and making compromise culminated in 1962 when the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party formally excluded Mátyás Rákosi, the symbolic figure of pre-1956 repressions, from its membership. The fundamental pre-condition of this mutual compromise was the mutual forgetting of 1956. On the one hand, literary authors and non-communist intellectuals in general remained withdrawn from politics and virtually did not raise the theme of the revolution. On the other hand, the communist party did not push public discussion towards opening the question of the counterrevolution.⁴²⁹ The politics of integration and compromise, initiated mostly by the pragmatist János Kádár, first secretary, while shaped and realized in the field of culture by the equally pragmatist György Aczél, found a genuine treasure chest in the already flourishing public memory of 1919. The theme of the First Hungarian Soviet Republic provided a perfect means to clarify basic ideological-political issues related to the interpretation of revolution and counterrevolution, communist revisionism, nationalism or socialist patriotism without the need to openly address the revolt in 1956. Via 1919 it was possible to talk about 1956 in a way of not talking about 1956.

The central committee of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party prepared an outline for ceremonial speeches in January 1959 that provided the keynote for further representation. The history of the revolution began with a positive representation as it contributed to the development of the country. 'By the declaration of the First Hungarian Soviet Republic the working people led by the working class came to power for the first time in the history of our people and by this our country came to the fore of international social progress.'⁴³⁰ This statement was followed by an enumeration of the 'historical' deeds of the Soviet Republic. The historical outline emphasized that the dictatorship of the proletariat had overthrown the oppressors of the Hungarian people, therefore it had created real democracy for the working masses, as they had been involved in governing the country through the system of councils. It was stressed that in spite of the extremely serious hardships the regime had made great efforts to improve

(Budapest, 1964), pp. 186-90.

⁴²⁹ On the compromise between public intellectuals and communist authorities orchestrated mostly by György Aczél, leading party official in cultural matters see Standeisky, *Az írók és a hatalom*, pp. 444-61., Révész, *Aczél*, pp. 113-32. On Rákosi's exclusion see also Huszár, *Kádár*. Vol. 2., p. 93.

⁴³⁰ Magyar Országos Levéltár (National Archives of Hungary) 288/22/1959/9

the living conditions of the people. The document pointed out that the Soviet Republic had been the only real power that had fought for national independence as the previous ruling classes had betrayed the country. In addition the proletarian state secured the right of self-determination for nationalities. To sum it up, the authors pronounced, 'The First Hungarian Soviet Republic was characterized primarily by - not the undoubtedly committed failures, but - great historical deeds.' The history of the Soviet Republic was presented as a glorious event that opened up a bright future for the whole society.

The editorial in the ceremonial issue of *Free Land* (weekly of the 'working peasantry') stated openly and undoubtedly that essentially the history of the first dictatorship of the proletariat had been glorious but also tragic,

We were the first to follow the glorious, great October socialist revolution. This fact could mean an eternal pride for the Hungarian working class and peasantry who could also be proud of gaining victories after victory while being surrounded by imperialist armed forces ready for attack and laying the grounds of a world in which, if it had been managed to build up, then worker and peasant and men of mind could have found their prosperity and happiness. Perfidy, vileness and treason hit the weapon and creative tools out of the hands of workers and peasants and the short, overall 133 days long dictatorship of the proletariat decayed. The rising, shining dawn was followed by a dark night full of tortures that lasted for 25 years. A sea of pain poured on the people. The rule of magnates with a thousand acres, of bankers, of capitalists returned together with the even crueller rule of the gendarmes. Tens of thousands were taken into prison and many more tens of thousands into internment camps: the best of workers and peasants, the bravest sons of the fatherland. An era of manslaughter followed, like after the peasant revolt of Dózsa in 1514. Gallow-trees were raised towards the sky to serve the death of workers and peasant heroes. A sea of blood covered the Hungarian land; the name of Orgovány and Siófok gained very bad reputation. Thousands of martyrs sacrificed their precious lives since they had the revolutionary courage of attempting to realize the idea of a new world order here in this land of the servants.⁴³¹

It is obvious that the glory of the First Hungarian Soviet Republic was inseparable from its tragic destiny: the history of the soviet regime was glorious to the extent as it was tragic. For communist observers the history of the dictatorship of the proletariat could be comprehended from the point of view of its horrific downfall. It seemed that the communist government committed the series of genuine great deeds even in an absolutely hopeless situation. 'In 1919 the international revolutionary movement was not powerful enough to provide considerable assistance for Soviet-Hungary encircled by enemies.', stated the outline for ceremonial speeches. It was exactly the fall shadowing itself backwards that made the deeds 'historical' and glorious. For communist interpreters the history of the First Soviet Hungarian Republic finished with the coming into power of the white terror. Virtually, its history meant the

sorrowful and tragic history of the birth of the counterrevolution. The perception and description in which the sequence of the happenings in 1919 appeared a contrast between a triumphant start and the subsequent fall was generated by the means of the catastrophic ending.⁴³² The end creates a narrative from a sequence of happenings ordered according to any principle. The essential element of a narrative is the capability to finish the happenings in a way or another. The finish is the culmination of the occurrences where the conflict is resolved and the moral lesson can be drawn. Therefore, the finish where these stories end determines their meaning conveyed as a narrative. The ability of narration derives from the capability of the definition of an ending.⁴³³

Actually, all interpretations on the history of the First Hungarian Soviet Republic that were produced during this period pointed ahead to the post-1956 present. For instance, Tibor Hetés's monograph on the worker regiments was finished by a quotation from Aurél Stromfeld's, the former chief of the general staff of the Hungarian Red Army, prison diary, 'if today nobody else thinks about you except your imprisoned leader, you died for progress and the wellness of the nation, and time will come when the grateful posterity offers you, just you the palm.'⁴³⁴ Then the author concluded, 'This time has come. Today our people thinks with love and appreciation about those who were fighting for our happy future, of whom many gave their lives for the power of the proletariat, but many others are still working among us, together with us to realize our common goals.' The existing communist power was conceived as the result of those past struggles. Liptai's work sheds light on this fact. The communist historian quoted Kun's final speech on the last pages of his book on the Hungarian Soviet Republic, 'to start a new struggle for the dictatorship of the proletariat, to start a new phase of international proletarian revolution with renewed effort, being richer of experience and in more realistic conditions, with more mature proletariat.'⁴³⁵ On the last page of the book, the author referred to the re-formation of communist power in Hungary and concluded that, 'Béla Kun was right: the best of the working class, the working people

⁴³¹ Árpád Szakasits, 'Felejtethetlen március' (Unforgettable March), *Szabad Föld* (22 March, 1959)

⁴³² On the concept of tragedy see Bernstein, *Foregone Conclusions*, p. 11. On the catastrophe cf. Hayden White, 'Catastrophe, Communal Memory and Mythic Discourse' in Strlth, *Myth and Memory*, p. 57.

⁴³³ Hayden White, 'The Value of Narrativity in Historical Representation' in his *The Content of the Form* (Baltimore, 1987), pp. 1-25. (133)

⁴³⁴ Hetés, *Munkásezredek előre!*, p. 141.

⁴³⁵ Liptai, *Magyar Tanácsköztársaság*, p. 457.

started a new struggle for the dictatorship of the proletariat in the <new phase> of the international proletarian revolution with <renewed effort, being richer of experience, in more realistic conditions, with more mature proletariat>.’ However, he also expounded that the new communist state was the result, the direct successor of the first one, ‘The experience and memory of the first Hungarian dictatorship of the proletariat, the Hungarian Soviet Republic that heated the hearts of the workers contributed to a great extent to the victorious completion of this struggle.’⁴³⁶

It is also apparent, however, that the fall of the first dictatorship of the proletariat as a conclusion that prescribed the meaning of its historical representation was born due to a specific political point of view in the present, namely the communist experience of the counterrevolution in 1956. The perspective of 1956 provided precisely a tragic end for the history of 1919. In the postscript the author expounded clearly that his motivations to write his novel came from the lessons of the counterrevolution in 1956, ‘Since I thought that I would try to demonstrate how the woeful alliance of bourgeois counterrevolution and the traitors of the working class, the inner and outer enemy laid mines incessantly on the way of Hungarian communists being victorious over struggles and heavy battles. Today, in the Hungary of 1959, this lesson is fresh and vivid again: after October 1956 it calls the attention to the white August of 1919 once more.’⁴³⁷ Communists saw their present determined by the conflict of revolution and counterrevolution. Historians, hence, began to search the historical origins of this struggle. They discovered its archetypal event in the history of the First Soviet Hungarian Republic. Communist historians were interested in the same questions as every other historian do: how the state of his or her point of view was formed. What is the historical process that led to the conditions of the present?⁴³⁸ In order to find answers for the question professional scholars used the method of investigation: they began to look for useful sources that might reveal the secrets of the past.

The structure of glory and downfall, thereby, managed to coherently account for a huge corpse of the available sources. This form of historical representation

⁴³⁶ *ibid.* p. 459.

⁴³⁷ Gárdos, *Két ősz*, p. 369.

⁴³⁸ The answer to such questions usually articulated in the form of historical narratives. That is one of the central arguments of Paul Ricoeur’s *Time and Narrative*, Vols. 1-3. (Chicago – London, 1984-85), esp. pp. 52-87. See also his ‘Narrative Time’, *Critical Inquiry* 7 (Vol. 1, 1980) and ‘The Narrative Function’ in his *Hermeneutics and The Human Sciences* (Cambridge – Paris, 1981), pp. 274-96. This last piece is basically a summary of the three volumes. See also Hayden White, ‘The Burden of History’, *History & Theory* 5 (1966), pp. 111-134.

incorporated these documents into a comprehensive and comprehensible narrative. Statements of the coherently organized narrative were proved by original historical documents. This fact rendered it authentic and loaded the interpretation with persuasive power. Since the historical construction was organized in the context of empirical evidence it appeared a report on the real. As a consequence it appeared also an account on reality, that is to say a true narrative. In spite of its coherent connection with the real or definitely due to it, this was a false representation of the past. The mendacious political perspective of the present – that is to say that the uprising of 1956 had been a counterrevolution – did not make it possible to raise a question that could report on *all* the available sources.⁴³⁹ The plot of triumph and downfall reported the heroic struggle for the liberation of the working class and the sorrowful suffering of communist fighters. These coherent and authentic life-narratives successfully covered and concealed the fact that the same communist fighters directly or indirectly contributed to the sufferings of those people who meant objections and obstructions for their program of political and social transformation. Therefore, the historical narrative failed to account for and incorporate those sources that gave voice for the victims of the Red Terror.⁴⁴⁰

⁴³⁹ It is important to make difference between false political perspectives and political perspectives in general. It is not meant to say that political reading in general leads to untrue historical representations. Communist historiography is usually described in which the political perspective of the historian distorts the original meaning of the sources. See e. g. Joachim Höslér, *Die Sowjetische Geschichtswissenschaft 1953 bis 1991: Studien zur Methodologie und Organisationsgeschichte* (Munich, 1995) Matthew P. Gallagher, *The Soviet History of World War II: Myths, Memories, and Realities* (Westport, 1976) *Contemporary History in the Soviet Mirror*, ed.: John Keep (London, 1964) Nancy Whittier Heer, *Politics and History in the Soviet Union* (Cambridge, MA – London, 1971) Michael J. Rura, *Reinterpretation of History As a Method of Furthering Communism in Rumania: A Study in Comparative Historiography* (Washington, 1961) *Windows on the Russian Past: Essays on Soviet Historiography since Stalin*, eds.: Samuel H. Barron – Nancy W. Heer (Columbus, 1977) Recently: *Halbherziger Revisionismus: Zum Postkommunistischen Geschichtsbild*, eds.: Rainer Eckert – Bernd Faulenbach (Munich – Landberg am Lech, 1996), esp.:pp. 11-23., 69-82. A characteristic formulation of this idea in the Hungarian scholarship is Romsics, Ignác, 'Bevezetés. A történetírás objektivitásának mítoszáról és a múlt mitizálásának elfogadhatatlanságáról' in *Mítoszok, legendák, tévhitek a 20. századi magyar történelemről*, ed. Ignác Romsics (Budapest, 2002), pp. 7-27. Communist historiography is often described the mythical version of historical reconstructions. This particular approach is embedded in a long and venerable tradition of political thought from Plato through Macchiavelli to Marx which considers myth a device of making people believe in false statements for certain political purpose. See Carlo Ginzburg, 'Myth: Distance and Deceit' in his *Wooden Eyes: Nine Reflections on Distance* (London – New York, 2002), pp. 25-61. For the concept of (historical) myth as an interpretive tool of reality see Bo Strlth, 'Introduction' in *Myth and Memory*, pp. 19-46.

⁴⁴⁰ Communist terror troops executed a few hundred people for 'counterrevolutionary' activity. Presently exact details are not available. Gosztonyi, Péter, *A magyar Golgota* (Budapest, 1993), pp. 24-30.

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BAZ ML – The Deposit Archives in Mezőcsát of the Archives of Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén

County Népügyészség 1038/1949 (Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén Megye Levéltára

Mezőcsáti Fióklevéltár)

BFL – City Archives of Budapest (Budapest Főváros Levéltára)

HL – Archives for Military History (Hadtörténelmi Levéltár) Video Records (Videótár)

MRA – Archives of the Hungarian Radio (Magyar Rádió Archivuma)

MOL – National Archives of Hungary (Magyar Országos Levéltár) Department of the

Records of the Hungarian Workers' Party and the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party

(MDP-MSZMP Iratok Osztálya)

MOL-M-BP – National Archives of Hungary Records of the Budapest Party Committee

(Budapesti Pártbizottság Iratai)

OSA – Open Society Archives at the Central European University

Printed Sources

Press

Abbreviated Newspapers

FN - Felvidéki Népszava

NSZ - Népszabadság

SZM - Szabad Magyarország

SZN - Szabad Nép

Other Newspapers

Daily Worker

Élet és Irodalom

Havi Magyar Fórum

Magyar Hírlap

Magyar Nemzet

Népakarat

Népszava

Österreichische Volkstimme

Pártélet

Pesti Hírlap

Társadalmi Szemle

Tolnai Népujság

Szabad Föld

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Books

Abbreviated Books

MSZMP – *A Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt ideiglenes vezető testületeinek jegyzőkönyvei,*

Vols. 1-4. ed.: Sándor Balogh (Budapest, 1993-94)

WB – ‘White Book’. *Ellenforradalmi erők a magyar októberi eseményekben*, Vols. 1-5.
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