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## HUNGARY'S COMMUNIST PARTY ÉLITE IN THE "LONG" FIFTIES (1948–1962)

Research conducted in the field of élites has long been a major concern of historiography in general and the study of social history in particular. It is always an interesting task for a historian to discover the rise, origins, mobility, makeup, internal stratification or, as it may be, the fall and disappearance of an "upper class". This article endeavours to analyse some characteristic segments of Hungary's communist party élite in the so-called long nineteen-fifties. Besides considering nationwide data, I intend to introduce, at least partially, through highlighting one or two major characteristics, some smaller geographical areas too. First of all, I will survey the distinguishing features of Hungary's capital Budapest, which is to be followed by an in-depth analysis of certain specific data characterising Zala County, a western region of Hungary.

The adjective "long" before the name of the decade in the title above is meant to suggest how the structural entities characterising sovietisation in its fully developed stage had in fact been in formation from the late forties and some of them had de facto been clearly observable in the formula of the power politics of the country as early as 1945. At the latter end of the period, several characteristics of exercising power that predated the Revolution of 1956 survived that revolution, and remained salient features of the early Kádár Era, which justifies the extension of our period beyond the fifties. Further, the Revolution of 1956 brought with it changes in the life of the party élite, beyond the merely external, such as the renaming of the state-party. These changes affected several layers of the élite from the person of the "prime mover" through the uppermost strata of the leadership all the way down to the lower echelon, even if such changes stopped short of deep structural reform. The chronological span of my study therefore extends from the conclusion of the war in 1945 at one end to the early sixties at the other.

It is difficult to provide an exact conceptual definition of social élites in the era, a task made complicated by several factors that add layers of complexity to the content-based demarcation of the concept. I regard the party élite an important component, but only *one* component, of the political élite and, similarly, I understand, in this context, the political élite itself as no more than one constituent of the power élite at large.

The expression party élite can be further relativized in a territorial approach too. That is because seen from a nationwide perspective, provincial, that is, county, subcounty, and municipal, party chiefs are not normally regarded as élites *per se*. In order to avoid terminological confusion, I therefore treat party leaders to be presented in my study as members of the élite only when discussing the conditions in particular areas such as the capital city or a given county.

In Hungary, as in most other formerly socialist countries, research into the issue at hand started in earnest in the early 1990s, with the appearance of modern methodologies in social historiography. A general characteristic of such historical approaches is that after offering an overview of the findings of the relevant literature published in the foregoing decades in the West, they discuss the emergence, stratification, and transformations of the communist/socialist elites in a primarily national context.<sup>1</sup> Compared to nationwide surveys of the topic, specific studies focussing on the provinces are as yet far from comprehensive. No significant advances have been made in research work endeavouring to offer the methodical analysis, even in a comparative approach, of the power élite, the political élite, or the party élite in a single geographical region – characteristically a county – a smaller area, or even a particular town or village, during the socialist era.<sup>2</sup>

It is not coincidental that the term “élite” often appears in quotation marks in discourses concerning dictatorial communist regimes. With such scare quotes the authors intend to suggest the dichotomy or self-contradiction induced by the use of this sociological or social-historical category in the given context. Such a self-contradiction may inherently contain several layers. György Gyarmati is one of those who have pointed out the fact that neither on account of the property held nor on the basis of education can representatives of the group in question be regarded as members of the traditionally understood élites (*Besitzbürgertum* and *Bildungsbürgertum*). In their self-legitimizing efforts during their emergence and later their functioning, the communist regimes deliberately severed all connections with the earlier élites, deriving their very existence

<sup>1</sup> In my work I relied most heavily on the findings of relevant research conducted in a nationwide context by the following authors and their articles: G. Gyarmati, “Hatalmi elit Magyarországon a 20. század második felében, 1945–1989”, *Korunk* (2009 március) pp. 75–88; T. Huszár, *Az elitől a nőmenklatúráig. Az intézményesített kádérpolitika kialakulása Magyarországon 1945–1989* (Budapest, 2007); I. Szakadát, “A nőmenklatúra, avagy az oszd be és uralkodj elve” in *A nőmenklatúra csúcán. Tanulmányok a pártállam uralmi viszonyairól*, ed. A. Nyíró (Budapest, 1990), pp. 5–8; I. Szakadát, G. Kelemen, “Karriertípusok és mobilitási csatornák a magyar kommunista pártban belül 1945–1989” in *A nőmenklatúra csúcán. Tanulmányok a pártállam uralmi viszonyairól*, ed. A. Nyíró (Budapest, 1990), pp. 41–52. On the findings of Budapest-related research: A. Rác, “A fővárosi hatalmi elit professionalizációja a Kádár-rendszerben”, *Múltunk*, vol. 58 (2013), pp. 178–217; *idem*, “A budapesti hatalmi elit prozopográfiai vizsgálata 1956–1989 között” PhD dissertation 2014 (manuscript available: [https://edit.elte.hu/xmlui/bitstream/handle/10831/22323/dissznm\\_racz\\_attila\\_tortenelemtud.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y](https://edit.elte.hu/xmlui/bitstream/handle/10831/22323/dissznm_racz_attila_tortenelemtud.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y) last download: 7 August 2018).

<sup>2</sup> For research in this field conducted into aspects of the Hungarian provinces see C. Káli, “A zalai kommunista pártelit a ’hosszú’ ötvenes években. Vezetők és vezető testületek 1946–1962” 2018 (manuscript); *idem*, “A zalai kommunista pártelit a hosszú ötvenes években. Az apparátus 1945–1963” 2018 (manuscript); B. Czetz, “Káder nem vész el csak átalakul. Elitváltások Fejér megyében 1945 és 1962 között” 2018 (manuscript); D. Cseh, “A jászberényi pártelit összetétele és belső irányítási mechanizmusa” 2018 (manuscript).

from renouncing the latter, and, what is more, their ideologies were deeply anti-élitist. Despite all of that, the party élite operated, in terms of its functional position and modus operandi in achieving its goals, undoubtedly as a power élite. A working-class or peasant background had in principle become the required pedigree. Those unable to produce such a background had to be justified by passing through the “purgatory” of the labour movement and thus to erase the stigmas of a “bourgeois descent” or *habitus*. For that reason the literature on the subject has also attempted to exclude the term élite from its conceptual apparatus using synonyms or paraphrases instead, such as “the uppermost circles of party leadership” or – not always felicitously or adequately used – the term *nomenklatura*. The latter word, also widely used in political journalism, will be seen to have referred to a different quality covering a broader circle as compared to the communist power or party élite.

Those belonging to the *nomenklatura* were individuals appointed to their positions by party forums at various levels according to a hierarchically arranged list of authority. This circle included all those who were members of the *Kaderverwaltung* or *Kaderbürokratie* – borrowed from the conceptual framework used by German political sociology – i.e., those who belonged to the cadre-management sector at some level. To cut it short, György Gyarmati explains the difference of status between the party élite and the *nomenklatura* with the following word-play: members of the communist power élite (party élite) were those who appointed those, who appointed the appointers of those to be appointed at lower levels. According to Gyarmati’s findings established in another approach, those can be regarded to have belonged to the communist party élite who occupied dual or, possibly, multiple positions due to the regime-specific “oversliding,” i.e., overlapping, or mutual assurance of power positions in the upper segments of the party or state administration. In its striving for a complete power-monopoly, the communist party élite eradicated private property in every substructure of society (the economic, the cultural, etc.), forcefully eliminated multiple values and the existing autonomies, thus getting rid of “competition” and effectively degrading into subjecthood (virtually) the whole of society. In the meantime, the communist élite treated the confiscated – “collectivised” – property as its own, later hoarding it up as its own personal treasure.<sup>3</sup>

In the half-decade following World War II between 1945 and 1950, two overlapping regime changes took place in Hungary, resulting in the almost entire elimination, often in a physical sense too, of the pre-war élites. In the period named after chief party secretary Mátyás Rákosi (1948–1956), the dimensions of the power élite – which was later to include a much wider circle – virtually coincided with those of the communist party élite. The latter included the Secretariat of the Hungarian Working People’s Party (Magyar Dolgozók Pártja, MDP), the party’s Politburo and a number of further high-ranking party chiefs, as well as the number one leader. The periodic changes in the ideological premises as suggested by Moscow can be seen as the motive force behind the contraselective mechanism whereby criteria of inclusion into-or exclusion from-the élite were

<sup>3</sup> G. Gyarmati, “Hatalmi elit Magyarországon a 20. század második felében...”, p. 76.

determined. As demonstrated by quotations from the works of fellow-historians cited below, this new élite can be segmented and described in several ways, depending on the historical and sociological approach employed. Of such interpretations, pride of place is to be given to the inner-party group-forming factor related to the location of activities exerted prior to 1944/1945. Those spending the period in question in Moscow as emigrants to the Soviet Union are known as the "Muscovites", including in their group the eternal second-fiddler Ernő Gerő and – in descending order of importance – Mihály Farkas, József Révai, Imre Nagy, Zoltán Vas and Ferenc Münnich as well as Mátyás Rákosi himself, after whom the era is named.

The other group was made up of the "domestic" or "illegal" communists, who had stayed in Hungary during and after the war. This group comprised, first and foremost, János Kádár, after whom the post-1956 period was to be named, then Antal Apró, Gyula Kállai, László Rajk, Ferenc Donáth, Gábor Péter, Márton Horváth, István Kovács, and György Aczél. It is an interesting fact, that characterised both factions, was that the majority of their members came from a bourgeois and/or intellectual background with only a smaller subgroup coming from the working class, whose rise to power they represented. Characteristic of their generational makeup is the fact that the average age of the Hungarian Communist Party's Politburo was 42 in the zero-year of 1945. It is a remarkable coincidence that the oldest of them was Mátyás Rákosi (aged 53), while the youngest was János Kádár (aged 33). The Communist Party incorporated the Social-Democratic Party in 1948, after which the previous leaders of the social democrats were only given junior positions of lesser weight in the Hungarian Working People's Party born from this merger. These social-democratic fellow-travellers were not admitted to the party élite, and a few years later they even lost their minor posts ending their political careers in prison or in totally marginalised positions.

Within the national party élite, the push-of-war continued and escalated on occasion even into deadly reckonings in the notorious show trials, where even the lighter verdicts meant heavy prison terms, often life sentences. In these battles it was invariably the "domestic" group whose members found themselves on the receiving end, as they were gradually pushed out of their positions of power by the "Muscovites." In the meantime, in addition to the aforementioned two groups, a third group emerged, or at least came to occupy a potentially ascending position, in the Rákosi era. That was a group of "home-grown" younger cadre including András Hegedüs, Béla Szalai, Béla Vég, László Piros, Sándor Gáspár, Zoltán Komócsin, and Lajos Czinege. These second and third rate party apparatchiks came into the limelight after the death of Stalin, when the Kremlin made the express wish that the party élite where the Muscovites were overrepresented, be refreshed with young, non-Jewish, party leaders of domestic roots. Rákosi was able to hold on to his position of first party secretary despite the changes of 1953, as he was only temporarily pushed into the background beside Imre Nagy, who had been elevated to the post of prime minister. Rákosi placed his confidence in these "greenhorns", expecting that he would find it easier to control such young and inexperienced people, a hope he was not to be disappointed in until his eventual downfall in 1956. The political purges resulted in a shortage of cadre by the mid-fifties – not that the regime had

earlier been faced with an oversupply of excellent, up and coming leaders representing an ideal type – which had its unwelcome consequence for the party élite in which increasingly inexperienced and uneducated people rose to the highest ranks of the leadership.

The new-old communist party named the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party (Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt, MSZMP) formed during the Hungarian Revolution, or immediately after the revolution, of 1956 displayed, at the time, several characteristics similar to those possessed in 1945 by the Hungarian Communist Party. In both formations, the party-chiefs gradually organised the membership under themselves; in other words, it was not by a grassroots process that the party élite emerged. The difference in 1956 was that there was no party élite to speak of, and János Kádár began to build up the party leadership almost all on his own, and as he went about the task, he had no choice but to rely on the second and third ranks of Rákosi's earlier cadre. One of the consequences was that the intellectual potentials of the party élite were diminished, and that the proportion of those of a bourgeois background around Kádár was significantly reduced in comparison with those who had risen to power in 1945.<sup>4</sup>

Tibor Huszár, another Hungarian social-historian, tried to delimit and differentiate the "élite" of the socialist era from earlier social élites through a content-based comparison of the élite and the *nomenklatura*. In Huszár's analysis, a salient feature of the élites, especially the power and political élites, is that they are selected under democratic conditions in the process of free elections. By contrast, the leadership of communist dictatorships, whose members were often conspiratorially – appointed, can be better described with the term *nomenklatura*. In such a political environment, there are no openly announced competitions, and making appointments to high-ranking positions and transferring or removing management personnel are the prerogatives of a designated body of the party or, what is more, of a narrower, informal clique within the given body, or even of a single individual.<sup>5</sup>

Sociologist István Szakadát, who immediately after the change of regime, was among the first, to study the problem of *nomenklatura*, placed the issue into a broader context in one of his first articles devoted to the phenomenon. What he thus found is that in the East European countries under dictatorial communist regimes, the elimination of private property and the concomitant, virtually mandatory, obligation of finding employment meant that workplace positions became all-important. Every employee seeking existential security had to integrate into some kind of economic or institutional organisation and there automatically assume a position. Obviously, the major specificity of the party-state or, more appropriately in our context, the state-party does not primarily manifest itself in the extension of "active or passive integration", which is a given in democratic models of statehood, too, but in the drastic curtailment of the autonomies enjoyed by the organisations in question. Such curtailment occurred most severely in the initial period, especially in the early 1950s, to be somewhat relaxed in later decades. However, even then this broadening of authorities did not follow from some new popular demand

<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 78–82.

<sup>5</sup> T. Huszár, *Az elittől a nomenklaturáig...*, p. 24.

for more democracy but as a compensation of sorts for the worsening economic conditions and thus was meant to help sustain the "social peace" of the Kádár regime. In the implementation of the communist *nomenklatura*, the organisations which would function autonomously under democratic circumstances all belonged to a single, huge, tangled and, most importantly, all-inclusive hierarchy.

The technique of *nomenklatura* is translated into practice as the theory of autarchy or of the monopoly on power. In practice, the system secured its wielders' control over the economy and its production and its hold on the monopoly of information. Co-opting the managerial positions of the widest variety of economic organisations and social institutions into the *nomenklatura*, that is, surrendering them to the appointing authority of one or another party organisation effectively prevented the formation of an uncontrollable power base outside the existing system of political government, and thus ensured that nothing could endanger the reigning party élite's exclusive and long-term hold on power.<sup>6</sup>

The systematic adaptation to Hungary of the *nomenklatura* was first put on the agenda in 1949; such a move may well have been preceded by something comparable, but no specific documents have emerged to reveal any such attempts. As it was customary, a delegation went on pilgrimage to the Soviet Union to study the issue at first hand. By the beginning of 1950, the system had been duly worked out and was, in its main structural components in place, where it remained until 1989. Under the Rákosi regime between 1948 and 1956, and then during the first six or seven years of the Kádár era approximately until 1962 (that is for the duration of the period under examination here), the lists enumerating the purviews of the various functionaries were concentrated in the hands of the central party élite, while from the early 1960s on, some degree of decentralisation can be observed. From that time on, the county politburos were increasingly involved in exercising that form of power; furthermore, the centre no longer had the prerogative, or at least the formal prerogative, of bypassing the county-level to interfere with the appointment of a subcounty or municipal party chief.

The pinnacle of the nationwide party élite, whose members appointed operatives to the vital leadership posts using the mechanism described above, can be seen to have comprised individuals occupying the uppermost positions of the highest ranking decision-making organizations, such as the Politburo and the Secretariat and, above all, the First Secretary himself. The various historical avatars of the communist party in Hungary had a structural makeup very similar to that of the other communist parties in Eastern Europe, which were all obliged to copy the Soviet model. In principle but as will be seen, *only* in principle, the highest-level decision-making body was the national party congress convened every four or five years. The congress, which was staged more and more like a theatrical performance, was attended by delegates elected likewise, in carefully choreographed ground-level party sessions. The congress then "elected" or rather rubber-stamped, the appointment of the Central Leadership (renamed Central

<sup>6</sup> I. Szakadát, "A nomenklatura, avagy az oszd be és uralkodj elve...", p. 6; G.T. Varga, I. Szakadát, "Íme, a nomenklaturáki!", *Társadalmi Szemle*, vol. 3 no. 73–95 (1992), pp. 73–95.

Committee after 1956). Following similarly painstaking “preparations”, the Central Leadership then, from its own members, elected the chief party secretary (the first secretary) together with his deputies, and the Politburo, which grew into the one most important leadership organisation wielding the greatest power right next to the chief secretary, thus being at the very top of the party élite.<sup>7</sup>

The Politburo continued in existence under the reign of the communist party between 1945 and 1989, using various different names.<sup>8</sup> Its membership count, which included alternates, fluctuated between six and twenty-one from 1945 – when it was formed with eleven founders – to 1962, which is the end of the period studied here. In fact, the Politburo played its most significant role when it had a smaller but more operative membership. Such loss of magnitude resulted from the general disintegration of the party on the one hand, as critical lows of five or six were reached at the time of the Revolution of 1956 and then again in 1989. On the other hand, during the periods critical for the party when pressure to take decisions was mounting, it was of vital importance to hold more frequent sessions, which could have paralysed the decision-making process, had the membership of the Politburo been larger. Increasing membership numbers could be as much of a political tactical ruse as decreasing them, especially on the part of the number-one leader, who might have wanted to increase the number of his own followers or, alternatively, to weaken operative efficiency and thus add to the weight of his personal leadership by employing the method in question.<sup>9</sup>

The makeup of the Politburo and the changes in its composition are among the most exciting issues that the examination of the party élite can throw up. One of the most important questions here is how the ratio and relationship of the recruited and the co-opted members varied in the long run. What is meant by the recruited in this context is such members as those who had moved along political career paths in virtually their whole adult lives, while the co-opted were those who had looked back on an extended career in the “civilian” sphere and who may therefore have been educated in state-run institutions at higher levels concurrently attending political schools. Understanding these binary terms within the temporal framework of this study, that is the period between (1945) 1948 and 1962, it can be established that the so-called recruited members were invariably in an absolutely dominant position, seen as the professional, “salaried revolutionaries” in another approach, whose hegemony could only be broken in the second half of the 1980s, specifically in the few years preceding the regime change, when the co-opted members finally gained ascendancy. As mentioned above, within the period under scrutiny, the description of the Politburo remains rather static and homogenous

<sup>7</sup> *A Magyar Dolgozók Pártja határozatai 1948–1956*, ed. L. Izsák (Budapest, 1998), pp. 36–37; *Segédkönyv a Politikai Bizottság tanulmányozásához*, ed. A. Nyírő (Budapest, 1989).

<sup>8</sup> 1945–1948: Magyar Kommunista Párt, MKP (Hungarian Communist Party), 1948–1956: Magyar Dolgozók Pártja, MDP (Hungarian Workers’ Party), 1956–1989: Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt MSZMP (Hungarian Socialist Workers’ Party).

<sup>9</sup> I. Szakadát, L. Szakadát, “A magyar kommunista párt Politikai Bizottságának és Titkárságának egymáshoz való viszonya” in *A nomenklatura csúcsán. Tanulmányok a pártállam uralmi viszonyairól*, ed. A. Nyírő (Budapest, 1990), p. 15.

in terms of the conceptual dichotomy introduced above, which is why further qualifying markers are required if the group dynamics are to be described in a more nuanced manner and if character types are to be adequately delineated.

Such markers came to be associated with a politician as determined by the turn his or her fate was to take, at any given moment; later the same markers may well have become factors in group formation, thus giving the individual politician a career boost. The movements, changes and the overall internal relationships of the communist power, the political and party élites, cannot be understood if certain markers are left out of consideration. Among the most important of these markers are labels such as muscovite communist, activist in the domestic or illegal movement, member of the resistance during World War II, the former social-democrat, the unflinching supporter of communism during the revolution of 1956, etc. These labels would often combine with one another, as for example both Imre Nagy and Mátyás Rákosi had been muscovites and yet they stood in the opposing corners of the fighting ring.

It is also worth examining through what career stations one's path could lead to the Politburo, that élite of élites. It is important to recognise that almost half of the full membership of the body in question was made up of secretaries, then came such topmost leaders of public administration as the prime minister and his deputies, the successive speakers of Parliament, the chairman of the Hungarian Presidential Council (the head of state), the ministers of some major departments, and the heads of the most important social organisations (such as the trades unions or the communist youth organisation). The most direct route into these posts typically led from the seats of those heading one or another department of the Central Committee, from the positions of the first county secretaries or, possibly, from that of a ministerial functionary. And the route to these latter positions in turn started from the deputy headship of a department in the Central Committee, the top ranks of the county committees, right below the local party chief, or from the managerial position topping a social organisation.

Comparing the Rákosi and the Kádár eras with regard to the Politburo, one will discover a salient difference, notably the overrepresentation of the armed law-enforcement bodies under the Rákosi regime; such presence spectacularly diminished in Kádár's Politburo. It is also to be noted that under Rákosi and in the early phase of János Kádár's reign, who together ruled in the period under scrutiny here, the hoarding of positions by the same functionary was a dominant characteristic (such as the same person acting as Politburo member, secretary, minister, or head of a Central Committee department).<sup>10</sup>

By examining the other, even more exclusive and therefore more operatively efficient, body, the Secretariat, it can be established that its membership was, on average in the period studied here, i.e., between (1945) 1948 and 1962, half the size of the Politburo, varying between three and nine persons, discounting the time of the 1956 revolution, during which the Secretariat suspended its operation, i.e., had a membership of zero.

<sup>10</sup> I. Szakadát, G. Kelemen, "Karriertípusok és mobilitási csatornák a magyar kommunista párton belül...", pp. 41–46.



Particularly over longer periods of time, the examination of the average age of the members acting in various leadership bodies enables the researcher to establish further interesting facts, from which important conclusions regarding social history and sociology can be drawn. What brought with it a caesura in that connection for the Politburo and the Secretariat alike was the year 1956, that is, the period of the communist party's disintegration and the organisation of the new-old state-party. Right after 1956, the average age of the members sitting in both bodies radically and abruptly rose, reaching a level significantly above even the age of the new first secretary of the re-organized communist party, the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party: János Kádár, the first secretary, himself, was 44 years old at the time. This had by no means been characteristic of the Rákosi era, marked by an inverse situation, in which Rákosi, who was in his sixties and was decades older than the average member of the top party organisations.<sup>11</sup>

In general terms, too, the state-party would have favoured a renewal of personnel after 1956 but that remained only, a vain hope. At the levels of the political bodies, the apparatus, and even that of the common membership the rejuvenation failed to happen; what is more, the tendencies characterising the personal makeup of the new-old state-party took an opposite direction. The leadership of the MSZMP in place at the time expected that new members would join the party to replace the membership of the old MDP. Instead, 95 percent of the MSZMP activists in Budapest had previously worked in the apparatus of the MDP. In the years 1956–1957, following the Revolution of 1956, the former MDP functionaries were not replaced by new personnel, but by those who had pushed their way in having joined the party after 1945. The positions of the “founding fathers” were thus taken over by members of a younger generation coming from the lower ranks of the party. A question worth asking is when those newcomers that joined the party after 1956, were admitted into the élite – that, however, occurred at a time outside the temporal limits of this study, as the newcomers' group was not to appear in the ranks of the Budapest party élite before the mid-1970s, according to the findings of research conducted by Attila Rácz.

Speaking of data concerning Budapest, it can be established concerning the post-1957 era that relatively few of the power and party élites of the capital city, altogether eight of them, had been members of the illegal communist party before 1944. Prior to the party unification of 1948, thirty-seven had been members of the social-democratic party, and fifty had belonged to the Hungarian Communist Party formed legally in 1944. Another sociometric feature of the Budapest power élite was the fact that the group of Budapest natives and of those coming from the provinces accounted for fifty per cent each, but 99 per cent of their combined population had already worked in Budapest. Most of them started their party careers in their second job, and they had already held their sixth or seventh position when they joined the élite. The average age of the party élite at the time they first joined the party was 21, and only after 20 more years were after 1957, they admitted into the élite. In terms of descent, 78 percent of Budapest's power élite came from a working-class background after 1957, and 15 percent of them had been

<sup>11</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 19–21.

born into peasant families, which meant that those with a working-class background were overrepresented in this group as compared to the national party élite. Most of those coming from the working class had joined the party élite in 1956–1957, after which their proportional representation dropped in favour of those with a university degree.<sup>12</sup>

The Budapest-level equivalent of the national Politburo was the executive committee of the party (VB for short), which had a membership of the same size, comprising about a dozen persons, functioning as a chief executive body. The composition of its membership was characterised by the fact that persons in certain key positions were raised into the committee expressly on account of their existing functions, even though it was hard to say whether they had been appointed into a given function in the first place so that they could subsequently be admitted to the committee. Therefore the executive committee, that is the party élite in Budapest, had as its natural members in the post-1957 period such personages as the secretary of the Hungarian Young Communist League (Kommunista Ifjúsági Szövetség, KISZ), the youth organisation of the party), the chairman of the capital-city council, the first secretary of one Budapest district, the first secretary of the party committee of the Csepel Steel and Metal Works (the largest factory in Budapest), and a deputy minister of industry, as well as the committee's own secretaries. That model was presumably patterned on practices within the MDP pre-dating 1956, as it bore a ghostly resemblance to the composition of the executive committee of the MDP in 1955.<sup>13</sup>

Returning to the national context after the above detour to the capital, we can cite the findings of György Gyarmati's research which shows that the MSZMP, reorganised after the revolution of 1956 had to recruit its members from the second and third ranks of the former MDP.<sup>14</sup> In the words of Tibor Huszár, "Kádár's consolidating regime did not look for new human resources but preferred to regroup the existing ones," which was largely due to the fact that there were simply no new resources.<sup>15</sup>

In a 2005 László Huszár represented the process in an article of his, even more graphically. The author derived his data from a sample of 4120 names in the central purview lists (*nomenklatura*) of the post-1957 era. In the focus of his research were the major stations along the career paths, notably the question when the given functionary appearing in the *nomenklatura* reached his or her first, second, and third career stations. Based on his findings, Huszár concluded that there were two major boom periods of the first career stops: in 1945 and then in 1949, in other words, a determinant majority of the functionaries joined the apparatus in those two years. The second and third career stations were reached by the largest numbers by far in 1957, from which the author observed that there were no great numbers of new functionaries elevated to the various top positions after the revolution, but the existing ones were regrouped, either

<sup>12</sup> A. Rácz, "A budapesti hatalmi elit prozopográfiai vizsgálata 1956–1989..."

<sup>13</sup> P. Gerhardt, G. Koltai, Z.V. László, A. Rácz, "A Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt fővárosi vezetése 1957–1989 között", *Levéltári Közlemények*, vol. 83 (2012), p. 247.

<sup>14</sup> G. Gyarmati, "Hatalmi elit Magyarországon a 20. század második felében...", p. 82.

<sup>15</sup> T. Huszár, *Az elitől a nomenklaturáig. Az intézményesített káderpolitika kialakulása Magyarországon 1945–1989* (Budapest, 2007), p. 68.

replacing the compromised followers of Rákosi or those who “wavered” in their loyalty during 1956.<sup>16</sup>

If we once again detach ourselves briefly from the nationwide context to have a look at figures derived from the provinces as indicated above, then we will see similar tendencies by analysing data from Zala County located in the west of Hungary. To begin with, it must be noted that the structuring of the county committees replicated that of the national bodies of the party, though on a smaller scale. Formally, the prime decision-making body was the party meeting of the county, which was the local equivalent of the party congress at the national level. That was followed in the hierarchy by the party committee elected by the meeting, which was a provincial scale model of the national Politburo. Then there was a concomitantly meeting but still existing county-level Secretariat with a reduced purview as compared to its national equivalent. The table below contains a few sociological markers characterising the membership of the Zala County executive committee, i.e., the equivalent of the national Politburo, of the communist party between 1946 and 1962.

**Table 1. Selected sociological markers of members in the Zala County executive committees of the MKP, the MDP, and the MSZMP between 1946–1962<sup>17</sup>**

	03.03.1946	31.05.1948	01.01.1952	25.03.1957	01.11.1959	25.10.1962
Number of board members	9	11	13	14	13	11
Number of women	1	1	1	0	1	0
Average age in years <sup>18</sup>	33	32	33	35	42	38
Birthdate extremes (difference in years)	1902–1921 (19)	1902–1927 (25)	1911–1927 (16)	1897–1931 (34)	1897–1929 (32)	1917–1932 (15)

<sup>16</sup> L. Huszár, “A nomenklatúrában szereplő posztokra kerülők személyzeti előterjesztéseinek empirikus vizsgálata 1957–1963 (és után)” in *Nomenklatúra Magyarországon 1957–1989*, ed. L. Kiss (Budapest, 2005), pp. 135–138.

<sup>17</sup> Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár Zala Megyei Levéltára [The Zala County Archives of the Hungarian National Archives] (later: MNL ZML) XXXV. 101. The personnel files of the political employees and activists working for the Zala County organisations of the Hungarian Working People’s Party (personnel folders) 1948–1956; XXXV. 111. The personal files of the political employees and activists working for the Zala County organisations of the Hungarian Socialist Workers’ Party (personnel folders) 1948–1956; XXXV. 121. The personal files of the political employees and activists working for the Zala County organisations of the Hungarian Socialist Workers’ Party on microfilm (personnel folders); K. Petrák, L. Tóth, *Sorsfordító évek Zalában. Visszaemlékezések az 1945–1948-as évekre* (Zalaegerszeg, 1985).

<sup>18</sup> When average ages were calculated, the number of those whose date of birth was unknown was subtracted from the divisor. The number of those with an unknown birth date was 2 in 1946; 2 in 1948; 3 in 1952; 2 in 1957.

	03.03.1946	31.05.1948	01.01.1952	25.03.1957	01.11.1959	25.10.1962
Number of Zala natives <sup>19</sup> (%)	2 (29%)	2 (25%)	4 (40%)	7 (64%)	6 (46%)	5 (50%)
Number of those staying in Zala after end of membership <sup>20</sup> (%)	0 (0%)	1 (13%)	3 (43%)	9 (90%)	11 (85%)	10 (100%)

The number of members in the county committee in itself demonstrates the extent to which the structure is relatable to that of the national Politburo in view of the fact that membership figures for both are in the same order of magnitude. The committee was the most important party organisation in the county embodying the local party élite. By the early fifties another two characteristics of this body had emerged. One was that the person of the given candidate began to account for less and less, as it was the function he or she currently held that really mattered when elected to the committee. Accordingly, if for example somebody was removed from the committee for whatever reason – often enough losing their original position that had initially secured them a place on the committee – then the new committee member was the person who had occupied the post which had secured his predecessor a seat on the committee. The most important of such functions fell into one of the following three categories. One was the administrative position of those working in the party apparatus, which in practice meant the posts of county-level heads of department on the one hand and those of municipal party secretaries on the other. The second group comprised the leaders of the most important mass organisations, especially those of the Alliance of Working Youth (*Dolgozó Ifjúság Szövetsége, DISZ*) – which was the party's youth organisation until 1956, and which provided the party with replacement members – the County Council of Trades Unions, from where one could be admitted to the party committee, but certain state functionaries also belonged here, above all the chairman of the County Council. The third relevant group was made up by the commanders of the armed law-enforcement organisations, first of all that of the State Defence Authority (*Államvédelmi Hatóság, ÁVH*), that is, the county chief of the much-feared security police, who had a "reserved seat" on the executive committee, which seat was later occupied by the chief police commissioner of the county after the reorganisations of 1953.<sup>21</sup> There

<sup>19</sup> The number of those whose place of birth was unknown was subtracted from the divisor. The number of those with an unknown place of birth was 2 in 1946; 3 in 1948; 3 in 1952; 3 in 1957; 0 in 1959; 1 in 1962.

<sup>20</sup> The number of those unknown in that respect was 1 in 1946; 2 in 1948; 6 in 1952; 4 in 1957; 0 in 1959; 1 in 1962. (The number of those whose further lives after the expiry of their membership is unknown was subtracted from the divisor.)

<sup>21</sup> MNL ZML XXXV.57.ac. Documents of the Zala County Committee of the MDP. Minutes of the sessions of the Party Committee.

was a fault line within the hierarchy of the organisation, which set those working in the apparatus apart from the others. That of course was chiefly detrimental to the latter groups, with the possible exception of the chief AVH commander.<sup>22</sup>

The data above clearly shows the marginal part played by women in the permanently most important party organisation of Zala County. The validity of this observation can be extended to other regions, too, as the political empowerment of women took rather modest proportions in reality despite the much publicised official party line. The admittance of women into the party élite and, with it, into the larger political and power élites, mostly occurred at the level of tokenism only. In Zala County, for example, the highest position held by a woman in 1952 was occupied by Katalin Harasta, who was in charge of the agricultural department within the county apparatus.

The average age of the members in the committees introduced in the table above displayed a surprising initial stability, of which the trend was significantly disturbed by the turbulence of the post-1956 party (re)building. As discussed above in a nationwide context, the phenomenon behind such developments was the transfer of power into the hands of the older communists, who had proved their reliability earlier – especially in 1956 – instead of the influx of younger generations, which phenomenon failed to transpire despite all expectations to the contrary. However, the party leadership, which had stabilised its position by the early sixties, could later count on the party's rejuvenation, which is why the average age of the organisation once again began to diminish in 1962. That sociological factor smoothly replicates the trends observed at the national level, verifying them as it were. What is more, a careful scrutiny of the fourth line in the table above reveals the fact that the gap between the extremes of the committee members' birth dates also gradually narrows, which indicates the homogenisation of the membership in that respect.

The last two lines of Table 1 above are also interesting, but they demonstrate a process of an equally nationwide significance from two slightly different aspects. It was in the first half of the fifties that fluctuation in the uppermost ranks of party leadership was especially significant, in other words, the party élite was rather brittle, being subject to a rapid turnover or, in another context, it eroded at a fast rate. The frequent replacement of party and state leaders, their transfer from one end of the country to another tended to happen even if those involved had done nothing wrong which could have entailed such a form of (party) disciplinary action. The state-party took over the technique of party bureaucracy tried and tested in the Soviet world, which constituted a personnel policy related to the vision of a permanent revolution. Leaders who had no family or friendly relationships whatsoever to induce loyalty in them for the given town or region found it far less of a psychological strain to implement the merciless decrees cutting into the quick, such as those pertaining to the obligatory surrender of agricultural produce, the collectivisation of land, the collection of taxes or of "peace loans", than it would have been to those who, as natives of the given region, could have felt the dire consequences of these measures affecting their own families (too).

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<sup>22</sup> MNL ZML XXXV.57.ac. Documents of the Zala County Committee of the MDP. Minutes of the sessions of the Party Committee, 36. ó. e., 19 August 1953.

However, such a form of rotation caused severe damages in terms of practical government as close familiarity with local conditions, recognition by the local community, and reliance on social connections are essential criteria of efficient managerial work. The political demands of the dictatorship counteracted all that, as the "domestication" of an appointed leader, the friendly or even human relations with the locals, not to speak of the formation of corrupting networks, i.e., the practice of "turning a blind eye", could endanger the achievement of the political objectives explained above.<sup>23</sup>

Even a term of a few years served in the same position and the same location during this period of "functionaries on the turnstile", can be seen as a relatively long stretch, especially in the context of the early 1950s. In several cases, the newly appointed leader had hardly unpacked his suitcase in his newly held post when he found himself only after a few months, reassigned to another town, county, or region, filling another position in rank that could be either higher or lower than the one before. Such a way of life was very taxing to body and soul, leading to the rapid erosion of individual leaders. That is why a young, energetic, pliable, single man represented the ideal type of leader during the period of the new system of quick and frequent replacements in the élite – the time of "functionaries on the turnstile". That, too, is one of the explanations of the overrepresentation of relatively or even absolutely young (male) generations in the party organisations. It is also to be noted that the characteristics of the ideal type of agents as described above conflicted somewhat with the idealised family model hammered home even visually by the communist propaganda, in which father, mother and children (two at least of the latter) always look into the future merrily.

Obviously not because of the dichotomy of reality and the family ideal, but the victims of the era of "functionaries on the turnstile" often became antisocial, psychologically traumatised, burnt-out individuals – if they had not been like that to begin with. Long-term separation from the family or the absence of family, and the hopelessness of starting a family worsened by the nerve-racking nature of the job in politics frequently led, in itself, to the appearance or solidification of deviant behaviour patterns, which in turn resulted in the distortion of the personality or other psychic and later, somatic ailments. This mode of existence had two characteristic symptoms: one was alcoholism, the other the sexual exploitation of women – or of men in the case of female functionaries. The communist dictatorship mounted a major campaign against such "cultural traditions", recognising the detrimental effect of such deviances on peaceful economic production and political credibility.

For that reason, after the revolution of 1956 the party leadership aimed at reducing this universally pernicious fluctuation of personnel, which was one of the major generators of conflicts between the party élite and the masses it governed. The table showing the example of Zala County clearly demonstrates that the national trend of rapid rotation of party chiefs was terminated soon after 1956. That manifested itself, among other

<sup>23</sup> I. Szakadát, "A káderforgó: A hatásköri listák elemzése", *Társadalmi Szemle*, vol. 8–9, no. 97–120 (1992), pp. 8–9 and pp. 97–120; G. Gyarmati, *A Rákosi-korszak: Rendszerváltó fordulatok évtizede Magyarországon, 1945–1956* (Budapest, 2011), pp. 215–216.

things, in the practice whereby the recruitment of members for the county committee increasingly drew on local resources. Together with that, the outward migration of individuals whose membership in the committees examined above had expired almost entirely and ceased after 1956. If they were transferred to another post, or they retired or died, this occurred within the Zala County.

In the élite relegated to the rank of *nomenklatura* under the dictatorial regime, everybody was an appointer and an appointee in one. The functionaries making up the party élite were interchangeably moved from one leadership position into another. The major criterion of selection was loyalty to the regime.<sup>24</sup> The system of *nomenklatura* opened a new channel of upward mobility by establishing schools of party training, which, if attended could also serve as a substitute for obtaining a certificate of standard, state-run education. The topmost leaders were not expected to be well-trained specialists in the first place; instead, they had to be politically loyal operatives. A major means of deepening such loyalties was the party school, which, in another context, can be seen as the medium of indoctrination, brain-washing, and radical re-education. Together with that, a new career pattern was also born.

Virtually the same conclusion was reached by Attila Rácz, who studied the party élite of the capital city as part of the power élite using the method of prosopography. The findings of his research verified the assumption that the local, in our case the Budapest-based, power élite possesses no clear-cut definition in the terms of political science, history or sociology, with the individuals examined forming a constructed group. The researcher classified as members of the power élite the following: the first secretary of the Budapest Politburo, together with the other secretaries, the members of the party's local executive committee, as well as the first secretaries of the district party committees. That was then the group regarded by Rácz as the party élite, to which he added the chairmen of the Municipal Council of Budapest and the police commissioners when determining the constituents of the power élite at large. He established that the most important criterion of being elevated to a leading position was, alongside loyalty and reliability, the appropriate political training. A concomitant of the system of appointments was the interdependence of persons, in which everybody was master and servant in one.<sup>25</sup> At the level of ideology, the regime's ideal of an apparatchik was a skilled factory worker with the appropriate political education.<sup>26</sup> After 1956, a new factor appe-

<sup>24</sup> G. Gyarmati, "Hatalmi elit Magyarországon a 20. század második felében...", pp. 77–78.

<sup>25</sup> A. Rácz, "A fővárosi hatalmi elit professzionalizációja a Kádár-rendszerben...", pp. 186–190. The examination of education led the author to the conclusion that a distinction should be made between such members of the élite who had joined the ranks of the party élite as university or college graduates and professionals on the one hand and those whose degrees were obtained as party functionaries but could not function as specialised professionals. It was especially the latter type of the new élite who lacked the self-awareness of the genuine élites, which they did not regard themselves to be. Cf. Majtényi 2005, 80–85. Attila Rácz's prosopographic approach well exemplifies that the summary but often imprecise surveys of quantitative contemporaneous sources can be successfully rectified with such a method whereby the data can be restructured.

<sup>26</sup> G. Gyarmati, "Hatalmi elit Magyarországon a 20. század második felében...", p. 80. That was more characteristic of the Rákosi era, but the practical implementation of the ideal ran into serious difficulties in the provinces, notably in Zala County.

ared in the matter of inclusion into the élite alongside the ones discussed above. The factor which remained salient throughout the entire Kádár period was the part played by the given individual in 1956, or his attitude to the events that had then transpired. The absence of legitimisation and the democracy deficit did not, however, change at all in that, similarly to the post-1945 era, nobody elected the members of the party élite after 1956 either – if some empty formalities are discounted.

Beside the one-person leadership and the network of the essential leadership bodies, an indispensable component of the communist party élite was the party apparatus, an increasingly bureaucratised and expanding machinery comprising professional party operatives. In general terms, too, the parties and their technical as well as political apparatuses had undergone significant transformations in Hungary in the first part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This change is fairly well known in terms of its components, which displayed a wide spatial and temporal variety in relative weight and, what is more, these components were shaped in their interaction thus inducing structural modifications. The various political impacts and other phenomena, such as the changing number and quality of the electorate, the ebb and flow of international politics – especially after World War I and even more so from the thirties onward – played an increasing role in shaping this segment of power politics. The organisational systems of the state-party growing into the sovereignty of the national government and intending, in time, to control every square inch of the social and political arena, was patterned on foreign prototypes as they appeared in Hungary's political life from the early 1930s on. With the rapid sovietisation of the country after World War II, the bourgeois democratic model together with its party structure was soon abandoned, which resulted in a new system of wielding power, in which the apparatus and the functionaries working in it gained a scope of operations of unprecedented dimensions.

As suggested above, the organisational frameworks of the political parties and their integration into the reigning system of state governance, displayed for example in terms of the electoral systems, a pattern very different in the Hungary of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century from that seen fifty years later. At the beginning of the last century, which period can be expanded back to the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century without any serious reservations, the political parties of Hungary were organised internally, which means that it was only when the new parliament adjourned that the elected members organised themselves into parties or, as seen from today, into no more than quasi-parties, which operated in a narrow circle in the manner of many clubs.

It is at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that one meets the first attempts at party organisation in Hungary whose starting point was not, or not only, the parliament. A good example of that could be the Catholic People's Party, which used political Catholicism as its mascot, or the various agrarian and landholders' parties. Mainly the parties in opposition availed themselves of such an organisational option as the governing parties, due to the key positions they occupied in public administration, possessed a background apparatus that they could rely on even in party-related matters. Alongside that, the social relations and infrastructural resources possessed by the various alliances and associations (such as their head offices) could also be exploited in the active (i.e., election) periods in the party's life.



Especially opposition parties offering a programme based on the idea of a (re)organised society – such as the above-mentioned Catholic People’s Party relying on the principles of political Catholicism – strove to conduct (thought) experiments to create a nationwide organisational network. In that connection, mention is to be made of the nascent Social Democratic Party, in whose programme the demand of universal suffrage and the idea of a comprehensive party network are clearly interrelated.<sup>27</sup>

Following World War I, the foremost Hungarian politicians of the era – first of all, István Bethlen, the later prime minister (1921–1931) – still thought in terms of the old structure of power model where the governing party was concerned. They needed the support given to them by relatively larger segments of the electorate than earlier, but only with their votes. These politicians felt no desire to turn the governing party into a total machinery or to politically activate the lower social strata at all times – especially not immediately after experiencing the communist dictatorship of the Hungarian Republic of Soviets reigning for a few months in 1919; at that time the conservative politicians perceived more danger in such popular activation than any profit derivable from it.

With his entrance into the political arena as prime minister in 1932, Gyula Gömbös proclaimed a radical change in this area, too. He had already conceived of the demand for society to be organised by a strong central power earlier; in such a system a mass political party would be capable of reaching down to every group, every jointure, and indeed every individual of society was to play a key part.<sup>28</sup> In that regard, the German and Italian models confirmed his belief in the appropriateness of his own ideas, but it was not at the time of being advanced to prime ministership that he came up with the vision of a full-fledged state-party.

Gömbös’s intentions to pattern the construction of his National Unity Party (Nemzeti Egység Pártja, NEP) on the hierarchy of the public administration had as its immediate political purpose the pre-empting of the organisational tasks of public administration precisely in the area affecting the governing party. The weakening of the tasks of public administration in that regard was a natural ambition on the part of Gömbös and his followers in his time, as supporters of Bethlen’s system of government were in an overwhelmingly dominant position in public administration, and could efficiently hinder the actualisation of Gömbös’s vision for a total society.<sup>29</sup> Later, after 1945, it was impossible to overlook the related aspirations of the Hungarian Communist Party (Magyar Kommunisták Pártja, MKP) to weaken and to shape in its own image the system of public administration for partly similar reasons.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>27</sup> D. Szabó, “A magyar társadalom politikai szerveződése a dualizmus korában”, *Történelmi Szemle*, vol. 34, no. 3–4 (1992), pp. 199–215.

<sup>28</sup> J. Vonyó, “Egy állampárti kísérlet és kudarca Magyarországon 1932–1939” in *Gömbös pártja. A Nemzeti Egység Pártja dokumentumai*, ed. József Vonyó (Budapest–Pécs, 1998), pp. 13–15.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 22.

<sup>30</sup> For the ramifications of the process in Zala County see C. Káli, “Pártok és közigazgatás. Zala megye közigazgatási átalakítása 1945–1946-ban” in *Váltóállás. Diktatúrák a vidéki Magyarországon 1945-ben*, ed. G. Csikós, R. Kiss, J.Ó. Kovács (Budapest, 2017), pp. 165–194.

The National Unity Party as a prototype displayed almost every symptom that was later to characterise the Bolshevik mass parties. The two most important tendencies of political massification were the construction of total organisational frameworks and then the filling of those frameworks with an active membership unprecedented in its numbers. There was, however, a significant difference between Gömbös's party and these later developments. Aside from the existence of a national centre and the *comitatus* secretaries in Gömbös's NEP, the difference was that there were no independent, i.e., salaried, party apparatchiks in it as the work of party organisation was undertaken by "voluntary" operatives instead. And yet, the apparatus of Gömbös's party, especially after the electoral victory of 1935, attempted to compete with the parallel public administration in matters related to power and dominance. That competition finally resulted in the defeat of NEP – due, in part, to Gömbös's death in the meantime – and the new prime minister, Kálmán Darányi set about to weaken the power of NEP and gradually to cut back its state-party pretensions.<sup>31</sup>

Gömbös's experiments with organising his party and, closely related to that, transforming society had their ideational followers during World War II – Béla Imrédy and Ferenc Szálasi can primarily be thought of here – but the brevity of time spent in power prevented them from systematically implementing their ideas in practice.

After World War II, Hungary found itself in a new geopolitical force field, in which visions of a radical reorganisation of society could once again emerge. One instrument, and in a way one result, of that was the change of élites. Within the new power élite headed by the communists, the political élite and, inside that, the party élite could not be regarded as a monolith on account of its structure, if for no other reason.<sup>32</sup> In the Hungarian Working People's Party, which adopted the organisational policy and, with it, the essence of the organisational framework of the Hungarian Communist Party, and then in the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party, the role of the executive apparatus composed of independent party functionaries gained in significance both declaratively and informally.<sup>33</sup>

Alongside the openly visible chain of command underlying the system of public administration (at national, county, subcounty, municipal, suburban, and village levels) and the common boss vs. employee hierarchy, several hierarchic networks, visible or transparent for the insiders only, were interwoven into the party apparatus. One of the most important of these was the relationship among the various central authorities and departments working alongside the Central Committee of the variously named communist party. As a result, there were even more "élite" formations within what could appear, at a distance, to be a monolithic élite of the central apparatus.

The most important department was the Department of Party and Mass Organisations (Párt-és Tömegszervezetek Osztálya PTO) followed by the Department of Agitation and

<sup>31</sup> J. Vonyó, "Egy állampárti kísérlet és kudarca Magyarországon...", pp. 26–29.

<sup>32</sup> For other, provincial analogies see B. Czetz, "Káder nem vész el csak átalakul..."; D. Cseh, "A jászberényi pártelit összetétele és belső irányítási mechanizmusai..."

<sup>33</sup> *A Magyar Dolgozók Pártja határozatai...*, pp. 33–41.

Propaganda (Agitációs és Propaganda Osztály, APO). The heads and the employees of these departments constituted the élite of the élite within the apparatus. There were external signs of that distinction, for example the fact that regardless of the alphabet, any list was topped by these two departments. Of course there were more substantial facts indicating the prime importance of these two organisational units. The secretary in the Central Committee to whom the Department of Party and Mass Organisations reported was usually the deputy first secretary, and the secretaries supervising both departments were normally members of the Politburo and the heads of these departments sat on the Central Committee, too. Formally, these departments had different spheres of responsibility, with the first tending to the internal organisational affairs of the party and the latter being in charge of obtaining information. In reality, both had the same task of managing the information flow within the party. For that reason they were locked in a constant state of rivalry, which kept them on their toes assuring the top management that neither of the two could monopolize information nor keep it to themselves.

Their importance within the central apparatus was further attested by the fact that, beside their exceptionally large staffs, these two departments submitted the greatest number of draft decrees to the uppermost decision-making bodies, in which area the Department of Party and Mass Organisations was the more active. The other sections, such as the Department of Public Administration and Records, the Department of Economic Policies, the Department of Public Education, Science and Culture, and the Department of International Relations (the Foreign Department) had a far smaller weight in every respect within the central apparatus.<sup>34</sup>

The county and subcounty apparatuses below the level of the national party apparatus were built up according to the same formula of power relations. The head of the Department of Party and Mass Organisations was the heir apparent to the seat occupied by the first secretary of the county in the event it was vacated, which means that appointment as head of that department implicitly identified the successor to the most important position. Furthermore, the head of the department in question, who often supervised his department in the capacity of vice first secretary rather than simple head of department, acted as deputy of the first secretary in the temporary absence of the latter.<sup>35</sup>

Hungarian historiography has as yet to offer a detailed sociological, archontological, and prosopographical, analysis of the central, national personnel of the party apparatus. For that reason it is through the example of a smaller Hungarian region, that of the already introduced Zala County, that I can now endeavour to present the emergence, metamorphoses, pulsations, i.e., burgeoning and intermittent shrinkage, and other sociological indicators of that apparatus in the period of 1948–1962. Due to limitations of space, I cannot offer a detailed survey here; instead, a comprehensive table is meant to highlight the essential information, graphically indicating the movements of the apparatus.

<sup>34</sup> A. Nyírő, "A párt vezető testületei a határozatok tükrében" in *A nomenklatúra csúcsán. Tanulmányok a pártállam uralmi viszonyairól*, ed. András Nyírő (Budapest, 1990), pp. 34–35.

<sup>35</sup> C. Káli, "A zalai kommunista pártelit a 'hosszú' ötvenes években. Vezetők...", p. 10.

Table 2. Changes in personnel statistics concerning the number of political and administrative employees working at county, subcounty and municipal levels in Zala County for the Hungarian Working People's Party and the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party in 1948–1963<sup>36</sup>

	June 1948	March 1950	September 1950	June 1951	December 1952	1 September 1954	2 September 1954	1 May 1956	September 1957	31 December 1963
County political employee	8	26	28	22				33	17	26
Subcounty political employee	10	26	30	49				129		
Municipal political employee	2	4		6				14	49	90
All political employees	20	56		111	149	182	161	179		
Altogether <sup>37</sup>				146 (131)	178 (148)	265	224	244		

<sup>36</sup> MNL ZML XXXV.57.bg. Files of the Zala County Committee of the Hungarian Working People's Party. Files of the Personnel Department, 4, 14, 19. ó. e.; XXXV.1.ad. Files of the Zala County Committee of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party. Minutes of the sessions held by the Party Executive Committee 9 September 1957; XXXV.1.ba. Files of the Zala County Committee of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party. Files of the Department of Party and Mass Organisations, 88. ó. e.

There are no data available in relation to every temporal cross-section or to every data-component, which is why some rubrics are left empty in the table. The closing year of this study is 1962 but there are no relevant data available for that particular year, which is why the table concludes with the year 1963. From that year and from the year 1957, our sources provide no breakdown of employee data for the subcounty and the municipality, which is why these data are given in a single rubric.

<sup>37</sup> To the numbers in the rubric titled "altogether" are added the administrative and the technical staff as well as the political employees. Figures in parentheses next to these figures refer to the number of positions actually filled at the time.

Directly after the merger of the Hungarian Communist Party and the Social Democratic Party in June 1948 and, with it, the establishment of the Hungarian Working People's Party, a modest apparatus was formed at the county level – especially as compared to later developments – and proportionately the same can be said for the country as a whole. The burgeoning of the apparatus started almost immediately, and what can be seen even from the discontinuous data is that by the summer of 1954 the number of employees had grown more than tenfold. At the beginning, the party bureaucracy was almost exclusively made up of political operatives but later the number of administrative and technical staff (typists, postmen and couriers here, janitors, chauffeurs, and cleaners there) also grew by degrees. A centrally issued deregulatory decree aiming at a reduction by 15 per cent was passed in September 1954, which concerned the ministries, i.e., public administration, as well as the party apparatus, and led to a slight temporary decrease in staff, but that was followed by yet another increase almost immediately.

During the revolution of 1956, the provincial apparatuses as well as the central organisation of the Hungarian Working People's Party (MDP) fell apart. The apparatus of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party (MSZMP) built upon the ruins of the MDP started off on a course of rapid growth from the late fifties, and after the period examined here, i.e., following 1962, it reached and then even exceeded the size of the apparatus of the former MDP. My research has highlighted a fault line in terms of the ideal party operative, too, as regards the periods before and after the revolution of 1956, which will be described in the following.

In the second half of the 1940s, a generation in their twenties to thirties seized control over politics within the MKP-MDP apparatus, and the same generation – changing only in terms of the individuals it comprised – retained its hold on power. It is partly for that reason that, after the revolution was crushed in 1956, the reconstructed party now named MSZMP was not simply built upon the membership of the old MDP but on its former staff of apparatchiks. While in the late forties a young and hardy individual unencumbered with personal loyalties represented the ideal type of party operative, after 1956, the experienced, reliable activist embodied the most desirable paid party apparatchik. It was an activist who had proved his loyalty during the perceived watershed year of 1956, so he or she belonged to the aforementioned generation, and therefore was obviously older.

As mentioned above, the issue has never before been examined in similar detail in the context of other smaller regions of Hungary, and nationwide studies of this segment of the party élite have especially not been conducted, but on the basis of the available sporadic data I can risk the conclusion, based on analogy, that in terms of the party apparatus the tendency is likely to have been very similar in party committees in other counties and at a national level, too.

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## Hungary’s Communist Party Élite in the “Long” Fifties (1948–1962)

This article endeavours to analyse some characteristic segments of Hungary’s communist party élite between 1948 and 1962. Besides considering nationwide data, I introduce, at least partially, through highlighting one or two major characteristics, some smaller geographical areas, too. First of all, I survey the distinguishing features of Hungary’s capital Budapest, which is followed by an in-depth analysis of certain specific data characterising Zala County, a western region of Hungary. In the second half of the 1940s, a generation in their twenties to thirties seized control over politics within the MKP-MDP apparatus, and the same generation – changing only in terms of the individuals it comprised – retained its hold on power. It is partly for that reason that, after the revolution was crushed in 1956, the reconstructed party now named MSZMP was not simply built upon the membership of the old MDP but on its former staff of apparatchiks. While in the late forties a young and hardy individual unencumbered with personal loyalties represented the ideal type of party operative, after 1956, the experienced, reliable activist embodied the most desirable paid party apparatchik. It was an activist who had proved his loyalty during the perceived watershed year of 1956, so he or she belonged to the aforementioned generation, and therefore was obviously older.

### KEYWORDS

Hungary’s communist party élite 1948–1962, Hungarian Working People’s Party, Hungarian Socialist Workers’ Party

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