

BALINT MAGYAR

HUNGARY: A STUBBORN MARCH FOR DEMOCRACY

I. The period of negotiations

(May 1988 - September 1989)

INTRODUCTION

There have been dramatic changes in Hungary in the last one, one-and-a-half year but these changes had no dramatic form so as to harden the job those of the western media and western policy-makers to grasp the significance and importance of these changes.

Social and political changes in Eastern Europe which cannot be transformed into a kind of story and therefore to put as cover stories to nationwide daily papers will not draw significant attention. This was one of the main reason why Hungary got into delay comparing to Poland and the Soviet Union in the western media.

As Hungary is lacking that kind of story what the Poles have, the case of Hungary could not be dealt with on a similar way. So, what was the "Polish story" then?

THE POLISH STORY

The "Polish story" sound and structured into that of a folk tale is as follows:

There have been good guys on the one side and the bad guys on the other. The good guys belong to the Solidarity, and the bad guys belong to the Polish Communist Party. Their struggle they have been fighting with each other is clear. Both sides had their heroes: Walesa from the good guys and Jaruzelski from the bad guys. The whole story seemed to be at first very clear and could be followed easily; it became more complicated only after the victory of the Solidarity at the general elections. With the formation of the new government, a kind of half-coalition government the tale is over by now. And so the romantic upheval of the western audience has been cooled down as well.

Media people from the West could easily recognize that in Hungary no such a broad "fighting" opposition would be present as it was in Poland. It also helped to realise for

them that no similar stories can be applied for the Hungarian circumstances. Therefore they tried to fit the events in Hungary and their experiences to another type of "folk tale".

THE HUNGARIAN STORY

The "Hungarian tale" sounds the next:

There have been a communist devil with a large family: lots of sons, brothers all around and put into different power positions in the country like county and district party chiefs, party secretaries at large state-owned companies etc. All the sons and brothers were communists of course and behaved like communists. However the youngest son was somehow different; he was not like the others, he was something a special kind. This youngest son had a dream about a pluralistic, democratic, multi-party system based Hungary. Of course he had to hide his emotions and dreams. He had to comply with everything in order to be able to climb all ladders of bureaucracy and communist party hierarchy and so to reach such a position from where he could implement and realise his dreams.

For the western media the question was: who is this youngest son, the hidden prince?

First the western media people thought: it was Mr. Grosz. When Mr. Grosz visited the US in 1988 he was celebrated as the person casting the above role in spite of that in Hungary it was well known that Mr. Grosz is not a reform-type communist at all. Everybody knew in Hungary the major difference between the Soviet Union and Hungary being as follows: in the Soviet Union the leader of the country was much more liberal than the regime itself, while in Hungary the regime was already in 1988 much more liberal than its leader.

After realising this the media had to look for a new hero. At last it was found in the person of Mr. Pozsgai. He was much more close to the possibility to play the above role more accurately.

The media and the politicians did not understand for a long time: not this is the story of the Hungarian development; the Hungarian development cannot be described as a reform planned and implemented by the reformist wing of the communist party stage by stage deliberately.

THE NEW HUNGARIAN DEVELOPMENT

The historical merit of the communist party in Hungary was not that they realised a reform, introduced democracy in Hungary. Their historical merit is the way how they reacted to the challenge of the society namely that they did not shoot, but retreated permanently.

FIRST QUESTION:
WHAT MADE THIS HUNGARIAN DEVELOPMENT POSSIBLE?

In general terms it can be said that the overall crisis of the Soviet-type societies made the recent Hungarian change possible. As this statement being true on the one hand, one must admit on the other hand: such a crisis itself does not generate a change in the system.

1. PEOPLE

In the 1980s it could be witnessed in Hungary the end of an epoch when private life-strategies built on the second economy could counterbalance the deterioration of the general economic conditions.

A comparison between the Hungarian and the Polish development shows that while in Poland workers became really politicised, the Hungarians can be described in general as a de-politicised population.

Why is it so?

In Poland from the 1970s workers were closed into large state-owned enterprises. They had no way "to escape"; there was not built out an overall system of the second economy where they could go and avoid, or at least diminish the effects of the so called first, socialist economy. This led to their overall politicisation and the emerge of Solidarity movement.

In Hungary the situation was completely different. There was the development what could be called the 'Kadarian compromise'. During the Kadarian regime policy-making was the monopoly of the party-state on the one hand. But on the other hand it left some space for people manouvering in their private life: people were allowed to build up although a restricted but private economic life having second economy activities.

For example in the agricultural sphere people were allowed not only to produce on their small plots, but also to market their agricultural products. (About eighty percent of the rural families are doing so.) Since the middle of the 1970s about three quarter of houses and apartments have been built by private efforts because of the collapse of the state-run construction system. Besides a whole system of private-sector based services have been developed in the last 15 to 20 years. This made possible for a large part of the Hungarian population to seek for its livelyhood partly in the second economy, and resulted in a kind of de-politicisation of the people. This formed the base for the 'Kadarian compromise'; meanwhile the development strengthened the system through stabilising it and made possible the maintenance of the socialist economic sector even in its unefficient form. Large part of the society had also created some enterpreneurial behaviour, developing themselves into a kind of self-consciences independentness at least meaning it in economic terms.

The above described development came to an end in about the mid-1980s. From that time on the inefficiency of the state sector could not been counterbalanced by private efforts in the second economy. While it was not rare to see people working 12 to 16 hours a day, they could not accumulate more money. Especially at the time of introducing the new personal income tax system (starting from 1 January, 1988), and even before since the second half of 1987 through public media (TV) educating and training people what is the income tax system about, how to handle it etc. has created a situation in which people could realise that the general economic situation of the country, the inefficient, odd economic institutions and also the political institutions were not allow for them to be seperated clearly and totally in their private economic carreer. The two factors collaterate: the large, inefficient state economic sector could hamper the future moderate personal enrichment of the people.

Public opinion polls show how people think about the change of the personal status very expressly:
(see Figure 1)

While from the mid-1970s to the mid-1980s there was a steady gap between the individual evaluation of the people how their personal situation developed and how that of the country's, and this gap was gradually narrowing, from the mid-1980s it disappeared practically. Ironically this gap was called by Hungarian sociologists as a 'success propaganda coefficient'.

In general people knew their individual economic situation not being significantly good, but from the media they got the message that the situation of the country was

fine. That made possible for us to see the difference between the two evaluations.

Especially as a result of all educative and training material and courses due to the introduction of the new personal income tax helped people to realise: they are surrounded; there is no way "to escape" from large organisations, the state bureaucracy; there are no more ways to improve their quasi-independent life strategy. This was the time to realise that the fate of their country cannot be separated from their own lives.

All this resulted in the erosion of the so called 'Kadarian compromise' or 'Kadarian conciliation' and led to a kind of civil disobedience. This cannot be seen as a "revolt" of the poor, but rather than as of the middle classes. The confidence of the middle classes has been shaken, leading to a real challenge for the system, a challenge for change. Those turned against the system, on whom the system has been built. Those looked at the system as being inappropriate for further development who played leading role in cooperating with it for a long time.

2. COMMUNIST PARTY

Beside the above facts and factors led to the new development in Hungary, the answer of the communist party to the challenge of the society was different from that of the old, stalinist way.

As opposed to the Polish communist party, the Hungarian was never a monolithic type one in the last three decades.

In the last one, two years one could witness a growing instability within the party. This instability was the result of Mr. Kadar's unwillingness to resign. This fact pushed on the same side of the table his left (conservative, fundamentalist) and right (reformist) opposition within the party.

Mr. Kadar's unwillingness to resign led to a non-precedented coup d'etat within the party in May, 1988 at the party convention. There Mr. Kadar was ousted, and the forces of Mr.s Grosz and Pozsgai took over the power. This unplanned and uncontrolled way of succession within the communist party led to an open, and unusual-before fight for power.

What were the stages of this fight?

A.) May 1988 - November 1988

The first period was won by Mr. Grósz and the so called 'neo-conservative' politicians as having absolute majority in the party hierarchy, while the reformist wing led by Mr.s Pozsgai and Nyers got into a minority position, not having positions in the apparatus itself.

B.) November 1988 - April 1989

The movement of the so called Reform Circles was announced. These horizontal organizations within the party structure were aimed to challenge the rigid, conservatives dominated party apparatus. Their task should have been - as viruses - to destroy from below the party structure and to give an impetus for the inflow of reform-minded party activists into the lower ranks of the hierarchy as well.

C.) April 1989 - June 1989

Miklós Németh prime minister joins the reformist fraction, thus creating the possibility of the reformcommunist forces to transform the government into a kind of bridgehead in the fight for power. Now - beyond the two reformcommunist ministers (Mr.s Nyers and Pozsgai) - Mr.s Németh (prime minister) and Horváth (minister of interior affairs) belong to the core of reformcommunist fraction. Since that time is heard that the government must be and is independent from the party.

But the negotiations about the conditions of future formalized talks between the communist party and the opposition on behalf of the communist party are still led by the conservative Grósz - Fejti line.

D.) June 1989 - September 1989

The government is present on the funeral of Imre Nagy and Mr.s Nyers and Pozsgai are appointed to negotiate with the parties of the Opposition Roundtable. As a result of the reformcommunist offensive within the party on one hand and the subsequent victories of the Hungarian Democratic Forum on the four byelections in the summer, the centre of the negotiations from between the communist party and the Opposition Roundtable is shifted to between the Pozsgai wing and the Hungarian Democratic Forum. The deal is made for September.

F.) September 1989 - November 1989

The reformcommunist wing wins at the party-congress and the party is renamed as Hungarian Socialist Party, but at the same time collapses: only 30-35.000 members out of the sevenhundredthousands join the "new" party in the following one and a half month. At the same time the conservative wing

of the "old" party tries to reorganise itself under the old name (Hungarian Socialist Worker's Party).

3. DEMOCRATIC OPPOSITION

The democratic opposition in Hungary in the last ten years was a classic human rights movement of a few hundred people. They provocatively exercised individual rights set in the Hungarian constitution but prohibited in practice. they showed personal courage for people, they gave ideology and patterns of individual dignity, but did not create par excellence political organisations for confronting the power. The democratic opposition exercised more a moral pressure on the intellectuals of the officialdom.

As people in Hungary were not "closed" exclusively into large enterprises and so did not become politicised to such an extent as it happened in Poland, there was no possibility for a small intellectual group of democratic opposition to have political contacts to people to build over bridges between them and the workers of the factories. This movement always remained a small one, "closed" into the circle of intellectuals. People in general could gather informations about the activity of the democratic opposition mainly through western medias.

The democratic opposition was a kind of way of life. It consisted of two strata:

- high intellectuals as professors at universities, research fellows at academic institutions (like the Institutes of Economy, Sociology, Financial Research, World Economics, Cooperative Research etc.),

- few hundred people being in a marginal position between intellectual and non-intellectual careers.

Books and journals were published, seminars were held with audience ranging between 10 and 150 people in private apartments. These seminars had similar characteristics to those of the "Flying universities" in Poland.

Direct political organisations were not created by the democratic opposition in Hungary because there was no ground for them at that time.

SECOND QUESTION:

WHO ARE THE ACTORS OF THIS POLITICAL GAME ?

1. PEOPLE

As it was mentioned before the middle classes in Hungary became undermined by the crisis of the Soviet-type societies, disillusioned of the regime, apathetic concerning any kind of political activity, sceptic in regards to the new political organisations. They leave the communist party if they were members therein before, but do not enter new parties.

People in Hungary want changes but not instability. They want changes, but they do not want to fight for the changes. They want maximum changes at the minimum risk. This facts must be taken into consideration by each political organisation in Hungary nowadays.

Concerning the forthcoming parliamentary elections, people will not vote for personalities and political organisations which are either expected to shoot, or to be shot.

2. COMMUNIST PARTY

As it was mentioned already in a comparison to Poland, the Polish communist party was more monolithic, rigid and even awkward than the Hungarian party in the last 20 years. The Hungarian communist party - partly because of the gradual reform steps it had taken partially since 1968 - was always more ready to accept or absorb new techniques of governing and dominating.

Especially looking at the developments of the last 2 years it can be seen that the Hungarian communist party showed a complete arsenal of new techniques serving its survival a summary of which follows as:

A.) allies beyond the communist party;

In the last two years it was the novelty and an achievement of Mr. Pozsgai as he realised, that in his fight with the parties' conservatives it is a real weapon to have allies beyond the ranks of the communist party. So the reform communist wing wanted to seek allies for itself not only within the party bureaucracy and not only within the party membership, but tried to find allies beyond party circles as well. According to the reform communist scenario, the party wanted to change not only itself, but wanted to create even its own opposition. A reliable opposition with what it could maintain a dialogue. This is like creating a

situation in which someone plays chess with himself - with all of its contradictions.

In 1987 Mr. Pozsgai attended the summer constitutive meeting of the Hungarian Democratic Forum (emerged from the movement of the populist writers earlier). It was really a delicate event. Mr. Pozsgai wanted to show to the conservative forces of the communist party that he was the man who could find the way to the so called "constructive" critical intelligencia in Hungary while he could separate them from the so called "destructive" oppositionist guys. The Hungarian Democratic Forum at that time declared itself to be a non-governmental and non-opposition group (something between the two). At that time Mr. Pozsgai saluted the meeting in the name of Mr. Grosz. This is another question, that the Hungarian Democratic Forum became more radical that it could have been acceptable for the bulk of the communist party. Therefore Mr. Pozsgai's idea to have the Forum as an ally was dropped for that time also shaking the position of Mr. Pozsgai for a while.

Another attempt was made after: Mr. Nyers tried to create a more acceptable, more reliable ally beyond the party. That was the so called 'New March Front' to be established in March, 1988 (to commemorate its 1938 predecessor). At that time Mr. Nyers asked a permission to create the Front from Mr. Kadar who refused. So, the movement was cooled down, and at last formed in late summer, 1988 after the fall of Mr. Kadar.

The 'New March Front' could never turn itself into a significant, important political force. It wanted to act as a kind of intermediary between the party and the opposition groups. But as the Front hesitated to accept even the reform communist ideology as a whole, practically all types of new political organisations held the Front to be suspicious. The Front practically disappeared from the Hungarian political stage after about three quarter of a year it was created.

B.) special relation to the organisations served as a 'transmission belt' during the last decades;

The Hungarian communist party maintained special relations to those organisations which were created in the last decades by itself and served as a kind of 'transmission belt' from the power to the people, like the official trade unions, the People's Patriotic Front (being a kind of umbrella organisation of coalition parties from the post-war period when the coalition parties were to be ceased already).

These organisations and especially the bureaucracy of these organisations are fighting now for survival similarly to those of the communist party. Presently their main

attempt to show their independence from the communist party creates a special relationship with the communists. (For example Mr. Sándor Nagy, the head of the official trade unions resigned from his communist central committee membership; Mr. Kálmán Kulcsár - a close ally of Mr. Pozsgai - became the chairman of the Patriotic Peoples' Front and its presidential candidate at the same time.) Although they are fighting for showing their independence, they lack credibility to make people to believe their new attempts.

C.) party property;

The communist party knew that it was only a question of time when its assets - served as infrastructure for all communist-based organisations as well as the party itself - became a target for redistribution among the new political organisations. It was also known for them that the principles for the redistribution would be decided upon after the general elections by the newly elected parliament.

The party tried its best in saving the property. An example for attempting it became known as the public scandal of the case of "Next 2000 Co.Inc.". The "Next 2000 Co. Inc." is a corporation established by the communist party being the sole shareholder of the corporation for holding back the real estates, holiday resorts, party headquarter buildings etc. of the party in the name of a corporation, through privatisation, where the sole proprietor is the communist party. To hold back the assets this way served the aim of trying to avoid a future redistribution. Beside this attempt the party established 5 or 6 similar type corporations on county level which were revealed until now also taking over certain assets belonged to the party before.

All these attempts show the goal of the communist party in such transactions: to acquire legal title as owner over those assets which were administered by the party but formally and legally formed a part of the state property.

The scandal of the "Next 2000 Co. Inc." resulted in further loss of credibility of the party in the eyes of the people.

D.) media;

The communist party is aware of the fact that the traditional administrative way of censorship cannot be maintained on the long run. The censorship applies not only to dailies, journals and especially to general publishing activity, but even to the radio and television (which are also on the way being more and more liberal).

It became clear that the dominance of the party could not be maintained through conservative censorship measures.

The new technique on this field shows some similarities to the above mentioned field: privatising.

The communist party takes a pioneer role in privatising the national media, and so becoming the major shareholder, the main owner of the privatised part of the media. The case of the weekly called 'Reform' may be served as one of the examples on this field. The corporation 'Reform' (which publishes the weekly) was established by the official publishing house of the communist party ('Kossuth Kiadó') and by the Hungarian Credit Bank. Otherwise the 'Reform' follows the patterns of the West German weekly 'Bild Zeitung' in typography and style, too. 'Reform' very shortly after its start became one of the most popular bulvare weekly in Hungary being published in about 300 000 copies per week.

One of the national channels of the Hungarian Radio became partly privatised under the name 'Calypso'. The communist party is also involved in this business transaction as a shareholder.

Using the privatisation and shareholder's rights as useful weapon in the fight, the communist party may turn this weapon against the opposition: as the opposition demands and fights for privatisation of the economy, now the communist party plays the role of the owner; the oppositionist parties may also buy in principle, if they had money for it. As the communist party being a (or major) shareholder in the newly formulated media, it can decide upon what shall be published by the force of being an owner.

This will create a situation when the country is still between an official censorship and a totally free, marketised media. Today the situation may be characterised as the media is liberal but not free. Meaning, that one can see and read continuously more and more what was allowed to publish a year, a half year, or a few months before. But there are no institutional guarantees that these trends cannot or will not be changed. But even if these trends will not be changed, the financial inequality between the different political forces in Hungary can result in a kind of "oligopolistic" situation of the communist party (or its successor) on the market of the media.

E.) spontaneous withdrawal of the party units from the working places;

Regarding the withdrawal of the party units from the working places one could witness a process, during what communist party officials at large enterprises try to transform their positions into those of economic-business experts. Communist party cells were voluntarily given up at a lot of places, while the personnel (apparatchiks) working

there was looking for and found other possibilities at the same enterprise.

F.) attempt to create constitutional bunkers for the communist party;

The communist party considered the creation of two new constitutional institutions to be crucial for maintaining and transforming their power. One of them is the institution of Presidency, the other is the Constitutional Court.

According to the original draft of the Constitution - delivered in January 1989 - the communist party wanted to establish a system of strong president in the future. This institution of Presidency would have included the power to declare martial law, to call and dissolve the Parliament, to veto laws passed already by the Parliament, and also to be the head of the Armed Forces.

The opposition parties, especially the Alliance of the Free Democrats and the Federation of Young Democrats opposed such a strong presidential power, and were fighting for the restriction of the originally drafted power. They also wanted to avoid the President being elected directly by the population, and so wanted the institution of a weak Presidency, a more or less ceremonial-type one elected not by the population but the Parliament. Simultaneously with the discussion of the President being a weak or strong, these parties want to have a strong Government and a strong Prime Minister under the control of the Parliament.

According to the original ideas of the communist party the Constitutional Court should have been an organisation for registering political parties and supervising their political programs. During the negotiations with the communist party the opposition parties (Opposition Roundtable) could reach that the political parties would be register by ordinary courts and not the Constitutional Court. The communist party also wanted to fill all seats of the Constitutional Court immediately and with life-time nominations looking for persons considered to be reliable for the communist party. The opposition parties could stop this attempt of the communist party and could reach that out of the 11 member Constitutional Court only 5 members would be elected presently, and even two of them would belong to the opposition parties.

3. OPPOSITION

The already mentioned differences between Poland and Hungary apply to this section as well. While in Poland as a reflection to the fact that the Polish communist party is a

monolithic, rigid unit, the opposition also became a monolithic, united one. Different ideologies and ways to reach these ideologies were pressed into one organisation namely into the Solidarity.

In Hungary the opposition is fragmented. Trying to fit the different opposition groups into categories, three dimensions can be chosen:

the origins of these organisations, their structures, and their politics and ideological values.

A.) origins

In this respect there are only two opposition movements having a continuity in their history:

The Alliance of Free Democrats (Szabad Demokraták Szövetsége, SZDSZ) is the political party which is the successor of the so called classic 'democratic opposition'. This 'democratic opposition' was established around the end of the 1970s and transformed itself into a political party at the end of 1988 with the formation of the Alliance of Free Democrats.

The other opposition organisation being the largest one in Hungary is the Hungarian Democratic Forum (Magyar Demokrata Fórum, MDF). It grew up of the movement of the so called 'populist writers'. The first steps were made at the second half of 1987 at the Lakitelek Meeting, transformed itself into an organisation on the fall of 1988, and declared itself being an opposition organisation in March, 1989.

All other opposition organisations are newly established ones in spite of the fact that more opposition organisations declare themselves followers or successors of such historical parties which operated in the postwar coalition times between 1945 and 1948. These are for example the Smallholders Party, the Christian Democratic Party, the Social Democratic Party etc.

B.) structure

Concerning the structure and the circumstances of the establishment of the opposition organisations, the Alliance of Free Democrats, the Federation of Young Democrats, and the Hungarian Democratic Forum are those organisations which could be called with the much credibility as 'grassroot organisations'. These organisations have built out their local branches until the middle of 1989 and could recruit a large number of registered members. The largest opposition organisation, the Hungarian Democratic Forum has about 20.000 registered members and about 250-270 local

organisations. The Alliance of the Free Democrats has about 7000 registered members and local organisations in each districts of Budapest (22) and another 100 throughout the country. The Federation of Young Democrats has about 3500 registered members and also around a hundred of local organisations.

The "historical parties" (sometimes ironically called nostalgia parties or archaeological parties) were organised on a completely different way: they did not grow up of an existing movement, but they are organisations built around a few persons who had connections to the party in the coalition times or in 1956. They try to create an existing political organisation through using the name, the "trade mark" of a once existed, well-known political party.

B.) ideology

Two major groups can be distinguished concerning the ideology of the opposition parties:

One being the group of parties characterised by themselves as well as christian-national center. The leading force of this group is the Hungarian Democratic Forum. Other, mainly historical parties such as the Smallholders' Party, the Christian Democratic Party and a non-party organisation, the Bajcsy-Zsilinszki Society are close to the Forum.

The other group of the opposition is the so called social-liberal wing. The leading force of this group is the Alliance of Free Democrats and also the Federation of Young Democrats. The League of the Independent Trade Unions belongs to this group as well.

The Social Democratic Party had a special place among the opposition parties from the point of ideology because traditionally it should belong to the second group, but in practice it was half way between the reformist wing of the communist party (Mr. Nyers) and the Alliance of Free Democrats, different fractions were fighting each other within the social democrats and it was not yet decided to which group they should belong.

A similar situation can be witnessed in the case of the Peoples' Party, with the difference that they are somewhere between the Hungarian Democratic Forum and the reform communists (Mr. Pozsgai).

If one would like to draw the line between the main differences of the two abovementioned groups of parties, those of the Hungarian Democratic Forum and the Alliance of Free Democrats are the most significant.

A major difference is that the Alliance of Free Democrats denies the possibilities of a 'third-way' solution for Hungary; it does not believe a certain midway existing between the socialist or Soviet-type societies and the western democracies. On the other hand the Hungarian Democratic Forum seeks for a special Hungarian-type development, a 'third way', not copying either the Soviet-type societies or the western ones. Politically expressed this means that the Alliance of Free Democrats denies the development based on a specific Central European notion, on a Central Europe being politically and economically distinguished from the Common Market, from Western Europe.

Another difference being that the Alliance of Free Democrats is that party which seeks for free enterprises and free market in the economy on the most open way.

The two parties differ from each other also concerning their relationship to the communist party. These differences are going back to the past as well. The predecessor of the Alliance of Free Democrats was the democratic opposition, a human rights movement, provocatively exercising basic human rights not waiting special permission to do so. On the other hand the Hungarian Democratic Forum originating basically from the movement of the populist writers has different roots: these writers have been in a bargaining position with the power for the last 10 years. They tried to achieve their goals not through confronting the power, but using the bargains with the representatives of the power. The democratic opposition was thinking much more in legal, institutional guarantees, solutions, while the representatives of the populist writers were thinking much more in personal policy-makings. These differences of the past have been reflected in the present standpoints as well concerning the relation of these parties to the communist party (or any successor).

The Alliance of Free Democrats declared in its program that it would not form coalition with the communist party or successor of it either before or after the general elections. Meanwhile the Hungarian Democratic Forum does not want to give a clear answer to this question. It thinks that to have a kind of coalition with the communist party being such a requirement of real policy-making which can be avoided only through difficulties.

Further difference between the two parties that the Alliance of Free Democrats is a kind of secular organisation: it wants to defend the right of any person to believe and practice any kind of religion or to be a non-believer. The Hungarian Democratic Forum declares itself to be a christian organisation giving priority to christian values over others.

THIRD QUESTION:

WHAT MEANS OF POLITICAL STRUGGLE WERE USED IN THE LAST ONE YEAR ?

Compared to Poland Hungary faced a paradox situation: as the opposition was much less institutionalised and organized than in Poland, it had no real means of exercising permanent pressure on the government and on the communist party. Therefore whenever contacts between them and the communist party arose, the opposition had to be much more firm in sticking to its political views and principles than it was necessary in Poland.

In Poland Solidarity was strong in the large enterprises, and as an organisation being half-way between a huge trade union and a political party, it could use the weapon of strike whenever wanted. The possibility of using the strikes as a weapon led to an easier negotiating position with the power; they could count on the possibility of some kind of "counter-actions" in the case of non-fulfilling obligations accepted by the communist party at the negotiations. In Hungary the opposition was and is not in similar situation. The opposition not being present in the factories, cannot use the weapon of strike, cannot put under a pressure the government this way.

The Hungarian opposition consisting of a lot of parties, and having a registered membership only up to a few ten thousands could show up its 'popularity' at special occasions, national holidays or some major demonstrations like the demonstration held on 15 March, 1989 to celebrate the anniversary of the Hungarian Revolution and War of Independence, the demonstration held in June, 1988 against the violation of the Hungarian national minority rights in Rumania (Transsylvania), the demonstration held in June, 1989 against the construction of the dam on the Danube, or as the last one, the demonstration of the funeral of Imre Nagy. But the Hungarian opposition cannot organise a funeral every week when feeling to exercise pressure on the government.

The Hungarian opposition tried to initiate negotiations with the party ensuring at the same time that these negotiations are held on very firm and clear conditions.

The program of the Alliance of Free Democrats published for the congress held in March 1989 already contains a chapter dealing with the immediate tasks of the political transition. The desirable way for the discussions with the communist party is described there. Three major conditions were set there:

A.) formation of a temporary coalition among the opposition organisations and its recognition by the communist party as a common negotiating organ for the opposition

Before the negotiations the communist party wanted to create a large roundtable seated around by all the opposition parties and non-opposition organisations. This would have meant an absolutely non-operating type of negotiations with the participation of about 15 organisations without a real possibility of creating consensus.

B.) topics of the negotiations

The program declared that the Alliance of Free Democrats did not want to negotiate about sharing the power and new constitution or constitutional solutions not enabling the members of the new parliament to act freely. The Alliance of Free Democrats wanted to negotiate about the "rules of the game", such basic laws - culminating in the negotiations on the election law - which could result to hold fair and free elections in Hungary.

C. competence of the negotiations

The main goal was to reach really competent roundtable discussions instead of negotiations serving only as consultations. This meant a certain kind of restriction in the right of the Parliament: the Parliament should have dealt with such drafts (related to the above mentioned topics) which would have been the results of consensus had reached at the negotiations. This means that the negotiations were planned to have a parliament substituting role to a certain extent. (Also the choice for the place of the negotiations shows similar tendency: the communist party wanted to hold the negotiations at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, the opposition parties insisted on having the negotiations in the parliament.)

The above mentioned possible solutions solved as probabilities to overcome the legitimacy crisis what the government had already faced to. On the other hand the new political organisations, the opposition parties also did not have clear legitimacy from the society.

The Opposition Roundtable of eight opposition organisations was formed just after the congress of the Alliance of Free Democrats. The formation of the Opposition Roundtable became possible due to the temporary alliance of the Hungarian Democratic Forum and the Alliance of Free Democrats. There have been a change in the behaviour of the Hungarian Democratic Forum during spring. Before the

formation of the Opposition Roundtable they believed they could represent the nation as a whole, and be the sole political organisation representing everybody beyond the communist party. The membership of the Forum increased very rapidly in the second half of 1988, but faced stagnation in the first months of 1989. Meanwhile some other opposition parties were able to organise themselves and expand their membership. So the Forum gave up its notion being the only non-communist popular organization and agreed to form a united bloc of the opposition groups so enabling it to have enough 'weight' to reach a good bargaining position with the communist party on any type of negotiations. On the other hand the Hungarian Democratic Forum gave up its position held for one and a half year regarding itself neither governmental, nor opposition organisation, and declared itself to be an opposition organisation. The Alliance of Free Democrats declared itself to be an opposition organisation from its formation. These changes could create ground for the formation of the Opposition Roundtable.

A few months were needed before the communist party accepted the above mentioned conditions of the opposition. The opposition had to make "concessions" only on two fields:

One being the extension of the negotiations from the two sides to three sides; the third side composed of so called 'satellite' organisations of the communist party namely the official trade unions, the Patriotic People's Front, the Münnich Ferenc Society, the Association of War Veterans (Partisans), the Association of Women etc.

The other "concession" was that the communist party wanted to negotiate above economic questions as well. The argument of the Opposition Roundtable against the intention the communist party was: the negotiations over economic questions do not belong to the 'legislative' tasks but rather to the 'governing-governmental' ones. The political negotiations were intended to cover negotiations over the political transition and not over the possibility of forming a coalition government, so the opposition Roundtable rejected the proposal made by the communist party. However later during the negotiations the Opposition Roundtable gave up its positions and entered into negotiations over economic matters as well. As it turned out by the end of the negotiations, none of the above two "concessions" formed significant part of the whole process.

The third side practically did not exist. The frustration of some of them being "neglected" by the serious guys was expressed by the official trade union when they left the negotiating table. Even the media did not accept them being real partners during the negotiations.

Six working groups were dealing with political issues and six with economic issues.

The political groups formulated as the followings:

- the first group negotiated the immediately necessary modification of the Constitution, the institution of Presidency, and the Constitutional Court;

- the second group negotiated the regulation of the political parties;

- the third group negotiated the election law;

- the fourth group negotiated the modifications of the Criminal Code;

- the fifth group negotiated the new legislation on information and media;

- the sixth group negotiated the possible guarantees against using coercive methods by the communist party during the transition period.

First working group:

The Opposition Roundtable rejected to have a totally new Constitution before the general elections; instead it proposed the new Constitution should be formulated by the new Parliament. In spite of this standpoint there have been some changes which turned to be essential ones being necessary even during the short transition period to insure the legality and the security of the new opposition forces operating before the elections.

The Opposition Roundtable could reach several modifications in the Constitution, like the abolition of the expression "People's Republic" and being substituted by "Republic", the abolition of the term "socialism" twentyone times in the Constitution leaving it only at one place with the "recognition of both bourgeois and democratic socialist values", the abolition of the leading role of the communist party, and the Opposition Roundtable could reach the declaration of a multi-party system etc.

The main question remained that of the institution of the Presidency. The communist party wanted a President elected by direct votes of the population before the general elections would be held, and a strong President.

There have been lots of contradictions within the Opposition Roundtable concerning this point. The so called 'national christian center' supported the idea as a real

political necessity to have the presidential elections in advance, in spite of the fact that to everybody's knowledge the highest chance to reach this position belonged to Mr. Pozsgai from the communist party.

What the Opposition Roundtable reached after a lot of inner debates as well was the reduction in the power of the future President resulting a medium-powered presidential institution.

During the negotiations the communist party did not give up its original idea of electing the President before the general elections and by the population.

Second working group:

The Opposition Roundtable could reach that the political parties should be registered not by the Constitutional Court but by regular courts; that political parties should be required to have for formation a minimum of only 10 persons as registered members, a constitutive meeting and Statutes.

What the Opposition Roundtable could not reach and the communist party - after some hesitations - remained firm on it, were the prohibition for any political party to operate at working places, and to give public account of the assets of the communist party.

Third working group:

The negotiations resulted in a kind of compromise: the new election law to be used at the first free elections in Hungary is based partly on voting for individual candidates and for different political parties. The new election law resembles somehow to the French, and the West German solution. It is not complicated for the voters as everyone will have two votes: one for a person and one for a party. However the system itself and the counting of votes is complicated.

To be a candidate each person is required to have 750 supporting signatures by persons living in the district where he is entitled to vote. Each political party has to be able to run candidates at least in one quarter of the single-member electorates of a county in order to have the right to be registered on the so called county lists of political parties and it is required to be registered at least on seven county lists out of the twenty to have the right to be registered on the national list of political parties.

This will result in Hungary that no more than eight or nine political parties (out of the more than twenty existing) will be able to run candidates at so much places to be able to be registered at the national list or county lists.

Fourth working group:

The best results were reached in this group for the Opposition Roundtable. Several crimes and offenses were changed and abolished which reflected crimes against the state and so served as legal base for prosecutions of dissidents or those involved in opposition activities.

Sixth working group:

The Opposition Roundtable could not reach that the communist party abolished the workers' militia (the private army of the communist party) without successor.

THE COURSE OF NEGOTIATIONS

During the few months negotiations with the communist party the center of negotiations from between the communist party and the Opposition Roundtable moved towards between the reformist wing of the communist party led by Mr. Pozsgai and the Hungarian Democratic Forum. The delicate balance within the Opposition Roundtable, the temporary agreement between the Alliance of Free Democrats and the Hungarian Democratic Forum was ended. It was a result of a two-way development, one being that the firm politics of the Opposition Roundtable ended in leading the negotiations from the side of the communist party by the reform communist wing (under the leadership of Mr. Pozsgai, and partly by Mr. Nyers) instead of the conservative wing (represented by Mr. Fejti, a follower of Mr. Grosz); the other being the results of by-elections in Hungary (in four electoral districts) all ended up with new representatives to the Parliament being the candidates of the Hungarian Democratic Forum. This created such a psychological situation for the Hungarian Democratic Forum in which they could think to represent a force not needing any allies within the opposition (or which can bare allies behaving cordially towards the Forum). The conclusion the Forum reached: they can win the parliamentary elections within any circumstances, and so it is more favourable for them that the parliamentary elections should be held soon. At the same time the Forum had the opinion that to have a coalition government with the reformist wing of the communist party or a government led by the Hungarian Democratic Forum would be unimaginable within the present political situation if the communist party will not get some sort of satisfaction for future power distribution.

The communist party also recognised as a result of the by-elections that it could lose everything on the free parliamentary elections. Therefore they were much more stubborn in sticking to their original demand to have the presidential elections before. Their concern was to save some of their power by extra-parliamentary means having a winning candidate for this post.

This served as base for the bargain between Mr. Pozsgai and the Hungarian Democratic Forum.

The Alliance of Free Democrats did not want to assist to such a bargain with which it did not agree. It chose not to sign the Opposition Roundtable resolutions instead of vetoing it (although it would have the right to do it). In not signing the resolutions of the Opposition Roundtable, the Alliance of Free Democrats was accompanied by the Federation of Young Democrats and the League of Independent Trade Unions. Meanwhile six other opposition organisations led by the Hungarian Democratic Forum (Smallholders' Party, Christian Democratic Party, Bajcsy-Zsilinszki Society, People's Party and Social Democratic Party) signed the agreement with the communist party.

The Alliance of Free Democrats did not want to hamper such a bargain; it thought that any alliance or coalition could be maintained with the mutual will of the participants. Lacking this mutual interest a simple exercise of veto voting cannot hold together a coalition.

The Alliance of Free Democrats did not sign the agreement and initiated a petition campaign calling for referendum on four questions being the major issues of the outcome of the agreement with which the Alliance did not agree:

- whether to have presidential elections only after the general elections;

- whether to prohibit the operation of party organisations at the working place;

- whether to compel the communist party to give a public account of its assets;

- whether to dissolve the workers' militia.

Unexpectedly the Alliance of Free Democrats could gather within three and a half weeks 200.000 signatures during the petition campaign. According to the law on referendum accepted by the Hungarian parliament this spring, 10.000 valid signatures transmitted to the parliament must be considered as 'popular initiative' and must be decided

upon delain with it or not by the parliament; 50.000 valid signatures transmitted to the parliament means that the representatives have to deal with the question on the parliamentary session; upon 100.000 valid signatures transmitted to the parliament the referendum must be held.

So it happened: though reluctantly but the parliament announced the referendum for the 26th of November.

But this is a new story.

Figure 1.

Public opinion polls about people's evaluation of the country's and their own economic situation (1976 - 1988)

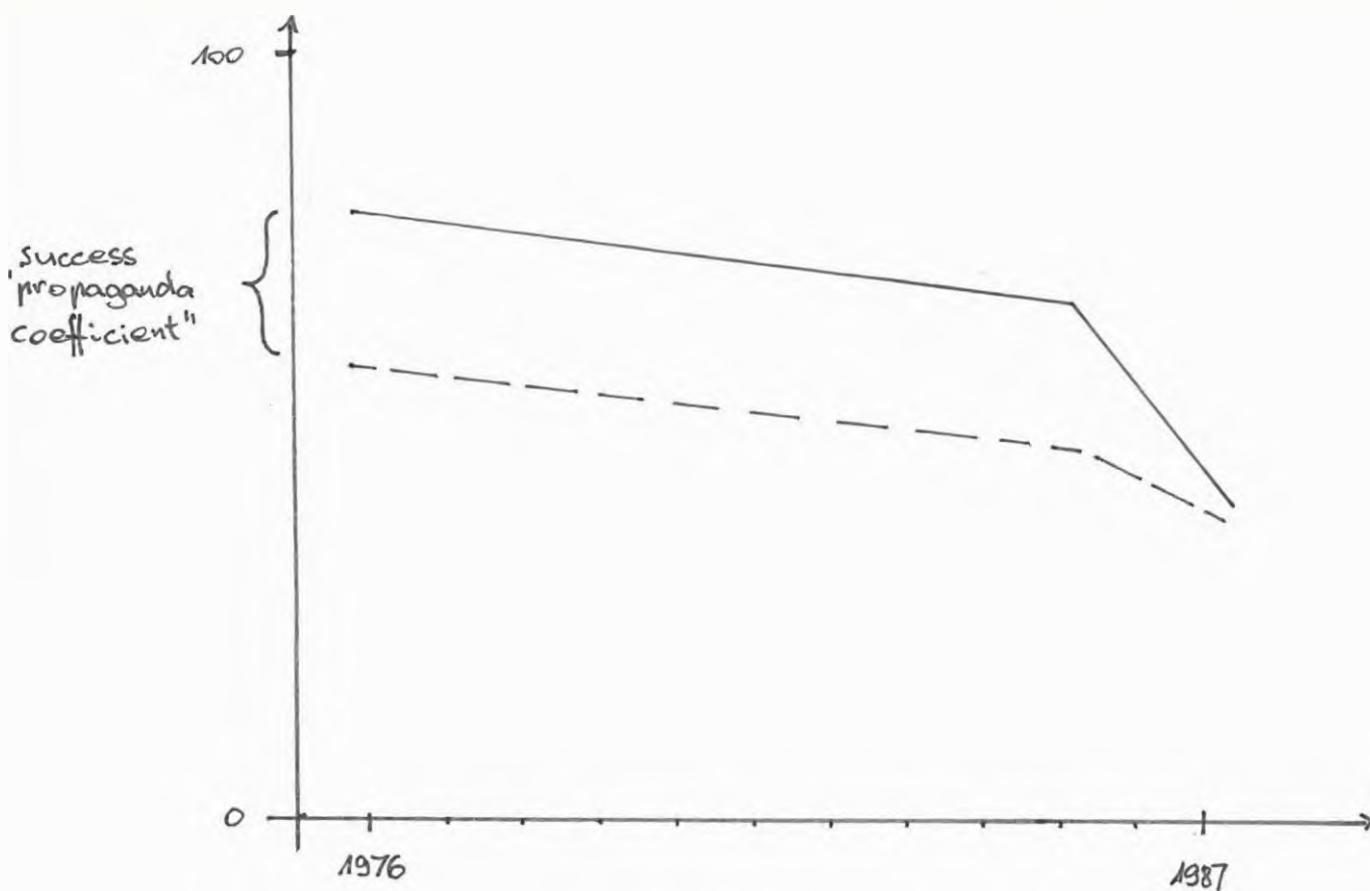


Figure 2.

Political parties and organizations during the negotiations (June - September 1989)

