THE COMMUNIST WORKER AS A NEW CITIZEN IN HISTORY. AN ESSAY ON THE THREE PHASES OF HUNGARIAN SOCIALISM[1]

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In Hungary, there were three different phases of socialism in the twentieth century. The Hungarian Soviet Republic that existed for a few months in 1919, the years of a personality cult after 1947, and the soft dictatorship of János Kádár for approximately thirty years after the 1956 revolution was crushed. These phases were different from each other in a number of respects, but in all three the representatives of political power contrasted their efforts with the bourgeois societies of Western Europe and with the past of the country. In other words, they attempted to create a *new world* and an *alternative society* in a political and cultural sense. This was characteristic not only of Hungary, but also of other countries in the region.

If one studies the ideological literature of the period, one frequently comes across a remarkable expression in the discourse: *socialist/communist worker*.[2] "Worker" can be an economic concept, it can mean the employee with his working capacities, and it can also be a sociological concept denoting physical or intellectual workers. In socialist ideology, however, the concept was not used in these meanings. The word "worker" referred to the *citizens* of socialist/communist society; it was used both as a counter-concept and as an identity concept. (cf. Koselleck 2004a.) The polemical character of the concept is obvious; as an anti-concept, it denied both feudal and bourgeois societies. The worker was not a noble person or an aristocrat, neither was he a capi-

talist nor a bourgeois, because, in contrast, he was part of the political community of society based on his work and not on his descent or property. The function of the concept was to replace the citizen of bourgeois society; a new subject of political rights and a new community of politics were constructed through the person of the worker. The worker was a citizen, however, in a socialist version, who, according to Marxist teachings, was also a new character in world history, as long as he understood and followed these teachings.[3]

This, in itself, was not a subject for debate. After taking control, the political regime declared and later codified it, taking it for granted that the subject of socialism was the worker, and the basis for every right was work. There were political debates only about the interpretation and practical implementation of this principle. Using the categories of Skinner, the *political language* denoted the framework of declaration and implementation in the two cases, respectively (cf. Skinner 2002). Apart from a communist takeover, an obvious role was played in all this by the power of Marxist ideology and the traditions of the labour movement, which had always been the ideology of the poor, the oppressed, and the powerless. In Eastern Europe, therefore also in Hungary, a special feature was added to this: the society of the worker and work also served to reject historical backwardness and active feudal attitudes (cf. Erdei 1976). This feature manifested itself in the peculiar meaning and usage of the concept of the socialist worker.

The meaning of worker is more closely approximated if one notes the fact that in contemporary usage worker and socialism were two aspects of the same thing. The concept supposed that there was a *direct* identity between the individual and society. The political rights of the worker followed from his status, while the characteristics of the worker came from the political system of socialism. This is certainly not a concept of bourgeois society, in which, as Koselleck wrote, "political or social functions were only subsequently derived" from the proprietorial and economic structures. (Koselleck 2004b, 83.) Here, the situation was rather that "legal, political, economic, and social definitions were indifferently united" (Koselleck 2004b, 82.) It is remarkable, however, that Koselleck wrote in such a manner about the early stage of the concept of citizen. This shows that in socialism the citizen was not abstracted from his economic determinants and that the stage of political activity was not primarily a detached institutional system of power.

In this essay, I shall study the history of the concept of the worker, analysing the texts of constitutions and the utterances and debates of politicians and ideologists. Some of the problems discussed here may seem familiar from Marxist philosophy. The texts I analyse, however, are not philosophical but political; the subjects of my sources were parts of political rather than philosophical debates, where necessary interpretations arose as a result of practical problems, primarily difficulties in governmental activities. Hungary is an especially suitable area for such a study because the three phases of socialism represent three *different* types of socialism. In each phase, the worker, *as an alternative citizen*, was a basic political category, as Koselleck understood it, that is, it was a debated and semantically full expression (cf. Koselleck 1972). The worker, however, had a different appearance in each phase. In the period of the Hungarian Soviet Republic he was an unselfish person. In the years of the personality cult he was a top worker, and in the years of Kádárian socialism he was an empty and formalised character in politics. One can, nonetheless, observe a standard direction of change in the use of the concept: the socialist worker gradually became a more articulated and differentiated concept.[4]

The Society Of Work

The Hungarian Soviet Republic existed from 21 March to 1 August, 1919. The social democrats (the Hungarian Social Democrat Party) united with the communists (the Hungarian Party of Communists), won the struggle for power that followed the crisis after the end of World War I, and formed a government. The central administrative unit of the new regime was the Revolutionary Government, made up of commissars. A social democrat, Sándor Garbai, became prime minister, but the most influential member of the government was Béla Kun – founder and president of the Hungarian Communist Party – commissar for foreign affairs and, briefly, for defence. The Revolutionary Government, following the example of Russia, initiated quick and radical changes in the economy, society and culture. A one-party system was introduced, a significant proportion of private property was nationalised, social measures favouring the working class were taken, and an attempt was made to establish a new ideology. Prominent Hungarian intellectuals also participated in the regime. In the

meantime, the Hungarian Red Army was fighting the Romanian and Czechoslovak armies that occupied a large part of the country. As a result of internal political problems and military defeats, the Revolutionary Government finally handed over power to a government that consisted of moderate social democrats. The proletarian dictatorship was followed by an anti-dictatorship, and for nearly thirty years the Hungarian authorities depicted the Soviet Republic as the darkest period in history. When the communists seized power again, the Soviet Republic was reinstated as a glorious period, the first, tragically failed, phase of Hungarian socialism.

The ideology of the Hungarian Soviet Republic was a communist ideology, that is, an anti-capitalist system of concepts, which was imbued by a complete refusal of the Hungarian past and bourgeois society, as well as a desire to create a new world. In this ideology, the communist worker as a political character had a key role. On the very day it was established, the Revolutionary Government published a decree entitled "To Everybody", through which it declared that the Hungarian Soviet Republic was a *state of workers* and a *society of work*. One week later, the government declared the following: "only those who work, who do physical or intellectual work to keep up society, have the right to live in a proletarian state" (A magyar 6/I. 1959, 38). These declarations, later reinforced by the constitution, identify the foundations of the new republic. Every member of communist society works, and only those who work can be part of society.

This, as I pointed out, was not a subject for debate, because those holding the new power thought it self-evident. It was an ideological and legal declaration which was enacted by being declared. The only question was who belonged among the workers. In the short history of the Hungarian Soviet Republic a recurring debate concerned who, based upon what criteria, could be considered a worker. The answer to this question had both existential and political consequences. Studying the open debates of the era, we see that the participants agreed on two aspects; on the one hand, that manual workers and peasants were indeed workers, and on the other hand, that aristocrats and capitalists were not workers, therefore they had to be excluded from the new society. But what about those, who were performing intellectual work? During the Hungarian Soviet Republic, the problems under discussion were connected to their role in society.

According to contemporary documents, a kind of anti-intellectual atmosphere could be felt. A Ministry of Education brochure, *What Did the Revolution Give Us?,* declared that "many people believe and proclaim that intellectual work is not needed in a communist state, and those having intellectual qualifications can now go dig potatoes" (A magyar 6/I. 1959. 610). Even the reason for this hostility was identified: in the eyes of many, people doing intellectual work were equal with those holding power. According to the leaders of the republic, however, the holders of power were not individual people, but rather the class *identity* of the proletariat, therefore, only people who could express this identity could be leaders. Intellectuals were therefore not born leaders, explained the contemporary leaflets, but the same workers as everyone else, so they were also part of society. According to a decree of the Ministry of Education, secondary school pupils, craftsmen's apprentices and university students were all "young intellectual workers" (A magyar 6/II. 1959, 424).

The significance of the problem is aptly demonstrated by the fact that two legally binding governmental decisions were made about the question as to who could be considered a worker. According to Decree XXI of the Revolutionary Government, "everyone is a worker who works in public or private service for wages or a salary" (A magyar 6/I. 1959, 71). In other words, everybody is a worker who does not live on his own property, capital and benefits, and therefore does physical or intellectual work for which he receives wages or salary. The designation practice and the codification process concluded that every member of society was a wage earner, therefore communism was a society of workers doing intellectual and physical work. Exceptions were made only on the basis of age: young people were not yet workers, old people were *no longer* workers.

Not only was being a member of society defined on the basis of work, however, but also the whole of politics, which meant that people could be considered political persons, the citizens of communism, only as workers. Being a worker – in other words being a proletarian, which included all members of society – became the basis for *political* rights as well. On 23 June 1919, the National Assembly of Soviets accepted the "Constitution of the Hungarian Socialist Soviet Republic," which codified that the basis for political rights was existence as a worker. Paragraphs 66, 67, and 68 identified people with the right to vote and hold office. Here, other than obvious exclusions (underage,

insane, convicted), we read that people who "a) employ wageworkers to make profit; b) live on income without work; c) are trades people or d) priests" cannot vote or be elected (A magyar 6/II. 1959, 220). According to paragraph 66:

> only working people have the right to vote. People over eighteen and living on socially useful work, such as workers, employees, etc., or people doing housework that makes the work of the above workers, employees, etc., possible, can vote and be elected members of soviets regardless their sex. Soldiers of the Red Army and those workers and soldiers of the Soviet Republic who used to live on useful work but have partially or fully lost their working abilities can also vote and be elected (A magyar 6/II. 1959, 220).

It is remarkable that not even citizenship was needed to vote and hold office. According to paragraph 67, "citizens of other countries can also vote and be elected if they fulfil the requirements of the previous paragraph" (A magyar 6/II. 1959. 220). Naturally, as noted above, it was not easy to answer the question as to *who* was a worker, which is indicated in the text of the law by the curious "etc.", but the tendency is obvious: we see an interpretation of the public person in which the political rights of the individual are connected to being a worker and to work.

Not only the political status of the worker was identified, but his *characteristics* were also discussed. In connection with this, the question was answered as to why communist society was better than the old society. The simultaneous interpretation of the characteristics of the individual and those of society was possible because a direct identity and homogenous unity between the two were presumed to exist. A frequently asked question was why a worker, also as a public person, should be different and superior, a member of a better society than those who had now lost their power and were banned from society. As can be read in a number of writings, it was because the communist worker was free from the *curse of property* and *economic selfishness*. The leaders of the regime proclaimed that for the first time in history a *homogeneous* political unity of people had been formed in the proletarian state.[5]

One of the leading ideologists of the Hungarian Soviet Republic was the young György Lukács, who published a famous piece in July,

entitled "The Role of Morality in Communist Society" (cf. 1971a). In this he stated that after the political victory of the proletariat a homogeneous society of workers would be formed, where all outside pressures would be unnecessary because of the direct identity between the interests of the individual and those of society, and where workers would perform well and for the benefit of society out of an inner conviction, in other words, production and politics would become a question of morality. For the "introduction" (this was a frequent term!) of communism two conditions were required. On the one hand, leaders had to create working social mechanisms that allowed for the unhindered prevalence of the *identity* between individual and social interests. On the other hand, citizens had to *identify* with the measures of the proletarian dictatorship in their thinking and acts because the leaders represented and created a brotherly society of workers.

During the existence the Hungarian Soviet Republic one of the most widespread views was that after the confiscation of whatever had to be confiscated, the introduction of the new society would simply be a matter of *organisation.* After the proletariat seized power, political struggles and, as a result, the necessity for the representation of interests, would end, proclaimed the ideology; therefore, the time of older systems and organisational forms would be over. But what would the structure of the new political community of workers be like? "We do not need separate organisations any more," wrote József Révai, a leading ideologist, in Vörös Újság [Red News]. (József 1967, 367) "As soon as socialism is fully developed," said Béla Kun in one of his lectures, "only a production system will be left of this whole organisation of authority." (A magyar 6/I. 1959, 522.) According to György Lukács, the role of the party would also be modified: "the essence of the communist party is the radical break with the party forms of acting" (Lukács 1971b, 54). It was a widespread view that there were no internal politics in communism and organisational tasks, in the absence of conflicts of interest, would be easy to solve. Some actual measures were introduced to this end. For example, the role of trade unions in representing workers' interests was abolished, and their leaders were charged with work on organisational tasks.

On the other side of the relationship, however, serious problems appeared. It turned out that there was a problem with the workers. Although private property had been nationalised, exploitation had been abolished, and structural changes implemented, many people

did not identify with the concepts of communism; they did not accept the measures of the authorities. In other words, *there were political differences among the workers*. What was the reason or basis for such differences? All politicians and ideologists of the Hungarian Soviet Republic answered this important question by claiming that the reason was the consciousness of the workers, that is, differences in the consciousnesses of individual workers. In other words, there were workers with developed and less developed consciousnesses. The former already realised that in communism everything directly served their needs, the latter had not yet come to this stage of consciousness, but they could reach it. That is why the most important means of transforming society became *education* and agitation, the shaping of consciousness rather than politics. Politicians claimed that after the victory of the proletarian dictatorship the future of society would lie not in the hands of politicians but in those of *educators*. Society itself would no longer be a political community but rather an *educational organisation*. The ideal and desirable future would come closer and closer as many workers were educated to identify with the new ideology and morality. Béla Kun, minister of foreign affairs, said in a lecture to teachers: "A proletarian dictatorship is in fact a large educational institute where the working class, organised into the ruling class, prepares itself for socialism" (A magyar 6/I. 1959, 522).

Was this view realistic? Can a new society be created through education? This old idea of the Enlightenment raises serious social and philosophical dilemmas, but during the Hungarian Soviet Republic an apparently minor issue put its practical implementation into doubt: the question of *wages*. What happened was that the leaders of the regime, in line with the ideal of a homogeneous society and with the supposed end of economic conflicts of interests, radically transformed relationships at work. With the exception of mining, they abolished performance-based salaries and abandoned outside imperatives of work discipline.

By making time-based salaries universal, they created a significant process for unifying salaries. "There is no longer a difference between the wages of clerks and workers," reads decree LXXXIII of the government (A magyar 6/II. 1959, 419). The new wages were not connected to the actual quality and quantity of the work performed. It was a widespread view that someone who was not able to work as much as someone else should not be punished with smaller wages.

"Wages based on work performance," wrote Jenő Varga, an economist, "basically do not correspond to a real communist system. This is because it is not fair for someone who happens to be of weaker stature, inept or sickly to have a smaller salary than strong, skilful or healthy workers" (Hetés 1969, 193). Similar measures were taken concerning work discipline: the imperative disciplinary measures of leaders were abolished. Trade unions and workers' councils received the task of ensuring disciplined work through their local organisations, the adequate means of which was moral persuasion. "Naturally we have great expectations of the fact," said Gyula Hevesi, minister of economic affairs, "that workers will now perform their tasks with an increased *feeling for work* and *sense of duty*, knowing that they work for the proletarian state and not for the exploiting class" (A magyar 6/I. 1959, 267). This kind of behaviour was all the more to be expected, declared the politicians, because in communism the most important political act was well-performed work itself.

These expectations, however, failed. It is true that no one kept reliable data on the state of work discipline and production during the Hungarian Soviet Republic, but leaders unanimously stated that the intensity of work was gradually declining, there were problems with work discipline and that the workers were working less than before. Two months after the proclamation of the Soviet Republic, one of the important tasks of the political regime became to stop this process. At the National Assembly of Soviets (14-June), the topic of the debate on economics was the catastrophic state of production and work discipline. Jenő Varga, economist, said in his opening speech that "work performance, my comrades, has generally decreased … except for those industries where the workers are restricted to simply serving the machinery" (A magyar 6/II. 1959, 101-102). On 7 July, the government decided that the unified, time-based system of wages was to be abolished, and that the return to differentiated wages based on performance would be left up to the local authorities. No concrete measures were taken, however (A magyar 6/II. 1959, 417-418).

Was there insufficient time to return to performance-based wages, or was the atmosphere unfavourable? Naturally these factors played a part, but the most important motives for insecurity centred around principles rather than practical measures. The dilemma of performance-based wages vs. time-based wages was not only an economic

question, but also an alternative handling of the general views of society and people and the political system of communism. Those who voted for time-based wages imagined the relationship of old and new as an antinomy in which one had to choose between selfishness and unselfishness, guilt and goodness, compulsion and self-consciousness. Performance-based wages and incentives, however, appeared to question this alternative. If the individual had to be encouraged by financial means to perform well, then individual and social interests could not directly coincide; every worker was not an equally good worker. Communism, therefore, could not be introduced and the communist worker was not a homogeneous economic and political character but a complex one.

Heroes Of Work

After World War II, Hungary ended up in the Soviet Union's zone of influence. In 1947, the communists, ousting all other political forces from power, took over the governing of the country and created a proletarian dictatorship. The Hungarian communist party – officially called the Hungarian Workers' Party – was the faithful servant of Soviet communists and aimed at an exact replication of the Soviet system. The nearly ten-year period until 1956 is called the communist dictatorship or the period of the personality cult. This new phase of communism was a period of centralised power, political oppression, and a leader's cult that evolved around the person of Mátyás Rákosi. The nationalisation of private property, the one-party system, the collectivisation of agriculture, and the rule of communist ideology were implemented with open violence. The regime not only sent large masses of its citizens to internment camps and prisons, but also its own comrades.

The ideology of the age continued to be built on communist teachings whose central component in this period was the envisaging of a "world-wide class struggle." History was described as an antagonistic, eternal fight between the oppressors and the oppressed, workers and capitalists, which, after significant sacrifices, would lead to a harmonious and just society. This view was part of an international scene in which countries were preparing for the third world war. Both the external and the internal fights were led by the communist party,

therefore the keeper of the future was not some abstract class-identity and solidarity, as imagined by György Lukács in 1919 (cf. 1971a), but the communist party as an *organised* force. The communist worker remained the central character in political life, but his status and character changed. The essence of this change was that the communist party radically separated the masses of workers into *average* and *excellent* workers in a way that the social differentiation of excellent workers was organised, and the top worker thus emerging became the real communist worker, whom the party put as an example in front of all other people otherwise performing socially useful work.

This new communist worker was called a *stakhanovite* in the Soviet Union, and *top-worker* in Hungary, or, to use another contemporary expression, a hero of work. Posterity usually thinks that these workers were the pride of the period, whose fantastic working achievements are hard to believe. Scepticism here is justified but misleading. The top-worker of the fifties was a *Homo politicus* and not a "production factor;" his doings were political acts "*on the frontline of work*." Top-workers constituted, as expressed in an unusual phrase by Ernő Gerő, a prominent politician of the period, "the new knightly order of the working class." Their life, work, and characteristics were popularised in this period by huge quantities of propaganda writings, although all of it followed more or less the same attitude and scheme.

It was still understood that neither capitalists nor people with significant private property were members of the political body of society. Law XX, in other words the Hungarian Constitution, was passed in 1949 – and, incidentally, remained valid with minor changes until 1989 – in which all this was officially declared. The constitution states that in socialism *full social existence is based on work*. This is expressed by sentences such as "the basis for the social order of the Hungarian People's Republic is work" (9. § 1), or "working is a right, duty and moral issue for all citizens capable of work" (9. § 2), and at the same time "the Hungarian People's Republic provides the right to work to its citizens as well as compensation for work in accordance with its quantity and quality" (45. § 1). It was also declared in the constitution that the *political subject* of socialism was the *working* human being. According to the constitution, "the Hungarian People's Republic is the state of workers and working peasants" (2. § 1), therefore "every power belongs to the working people." (2. § 2) As a result, not only under-age and insane people were banned from among those who

could vote and be elected, but also "enemies of the working people" (63. § 1).

This political subject exercised power in a peculiar way, however. Obviously one could vote and be elected, but there were no political alternatives, not even a choice among people. Local and national elections were *demonstrations* supporting the regime, and the communist party did everything it could to make this so. The logical consequence of this was that in communism and socialism there was *no* politics, because there was no opportunity to represent political alternatives. Citizens could represent political alternatives not in organisational and political life, but in *work*, naturally in a historically specific manner. Workers had the opportunity to vote openly and *in opposition to other workers* for the existing system through their work. It was not compulsory to be a top-worker (while it was compulsory to vote), nevertheless whoever wanted and was able to "*vote for socialism*" in this way was given the opportunity. As Ernő Gerő said, they could become knights of work, heroes of work, they could receive glory and recognition, and could serve their leaders as simple people.

I wish to emphasise again that in the case of top-workers, it was not the "*one-thousand percent*" performance that was important, although this was undoubtedly spectacular. On the one hand, to receive and keep the title of *stakhanovite*, one had to perform 1.5-2 times above the average in the long run, which was not at all unachievable in the given production and working conditions. On the other hand, special results which were significantly higher than this were even described at the time as having been achieved with the help of special conditions created for specific occasions. These were neither possible nor required on a continual basis. In a shift for Stalin's seventieth birthday, a famous planer achieved 1470%. We learn from the brochure about him that he had been told weeks before what kind of work he had to do. Contemporary newspaper articles mention that he was not working on whatever was due, but on something in which high performance was possible. Moreover, every leader of the factory was working to promote his political performance; he was provided with all the organisational conditions for his amazing achievement. The shift itself was not an ordinary one, but also a celebration, as was usual in the case of events aiming at *one-thousand percent* performances. For example, Mátyás Rákosi said the following about a series of work competitions: "Work happens in a decorated hall, under festive con-

ditions. Workers often put on their best clothes" (Rákosi 1951, 252). These were obviously not production but political events, after which tasks and performances went back to everyday realities. "The kind of serial work," says the famous planer, "that I got in the Stalin shift I did not normally get, nor would I have wanted it, because it would have been completely wrong to produce parts that would have been used possibly years later" (Zolnai 1951, 22-23). The fantastic achievement was needed, obviously and admittedly, not by production and the factory, but by political agitation. Therefore we can argue that the outstanding worker of socialism, *the hero of work was not a working person but a public person, his work was not production but politicizing.*

The question was raised as to what kind of *person* the new communist worker was. The politicians of the Hungarian Soviet Republic argued that the difference between the political person of socialism and everyone else lay in the presence or absence of selfishness, because the experience of the abolition of private property was enough to initiate absolute identification with social duties. There was no need to encourage, only educate. In the socialism of the fifties, encouragement was already present, but social recognition, glory, and fame were offered to people instead of money. The communist worker was still unselfish and showed solidarity, but towards the communist regime rather than other workers.

From this point of view, this period offered an alternative: the new motive was the will to stand out from the rest, competition in giving, the powerful "voting-through-work" for the regime. Outstanding workers did not manage their own working conditions or working abilities. All the "banished" categories were identified related to the country and socialism: goods, money, independence, one's own interest, benefit, and superiority. This was clearly connected with the fact that capital did not vanish from the country, but rather began to function in general for the state. Workers themselves did not manage but competed, did not calculate but tried to stand out from the rest: they practiced politics by trying to work as much as possible, by meeting the requirements of the regime as precisely as they could.

The professional knowledge of top-workers was often acknowledged, although this was not objective and professional acknowledgment, but political knowledge and behaviour (cf. Bibó 1986). On the one hand, professional knowledge was full of political meanings, and on the other hand, every useful thought and successful action was

demonstrated to be the consequence of the party's guidelines, following from understanding and implementing them. The way knowledge was acquired was not the simple accumulation of factual knowledge, either. Our people did not learn but became aware, did not gradually engage but suddenly realised. Although the process was called learning, the ideological brochures of the period were really describing enlightening experiences: for example, they met a Soviet stakhanovite, listened to a speech or read a book, and they immediately knew what to do. The essence of their learning was quick identification rather than the slow accumulation of knowledge. Accordingly, the way to spread knowledge was not professional education but agitation. A person could become the best worker in his profession and the entire country not through slow and tiresome learning, but through an enlightening meeting which helped him conquer the "shadows of the past" in his own life and work.

What were the political acts of the new worker like? They were obviously solitary acts carried out in ill-defined political institutions, and their appropriate areas were work and the world of production, where, nonetheless, hierarchy was strong. Political acts happened in this context. The worker did not act of his own free will, but rather according to the principles and directions of the utmost authority, the communist party, which applied to his work as well. The heroes of work were often warned that they could not have achieved their results without direction and help from above, therefore they had no right to monopolise them. Work was not a private but a public issue: choosing and voting, the expression of political opinion, support for the leaders of the country. Its characteristics were service from the individual's point of view and the creation of an obedience hierarchy by the political community. The local and historical specialty of this political public person was constituted by all this.

What were political relationships like among people in this new society? To answer this, one has to know that the *new order* of workers, the group of top-workers, was not a closed community; theoretically anyone from among the workers who lived, worked, and thought according to the new ideas could get in. The emphasis was on being better than other workers in all respects and on *demonstrating* it by outstanding performance upwards and by setting an example downwards. Accordingly, workers here were not connected through solidarity but through *setting and following an example*.

According to the ideology, the relationships between people with developed and undeveloped consciousnesses constituted the basic political structure of society and set the dynamics in motion. Following an example was characteristic of the whole country. Hungarian leaders did not follow their own ideas, but went after the right example, which they finally found in the practice of the most developed and progressive country in the world, the Soviet Union. All stakhanovites spoke of having acquired their way of living, work, and mentality from Soviet stakhanovites. On the other hand, they themselves were examples to be followed. A prerequisite for keeping the title of stakhanovite was to spread one's method and to educate others to be outstanding workers as well. However, more than this actually happened. Strangers in search of good things came to meet the stakhanovites; they asked for their opinion about all issues of production and public life, also setting their private lives and personalities as examples. Others in the factory were no longer their colleagues; they had admirers, envious enemies, and followers. A political hierarchy of workers was created. On the top were the *heroes of work*, since they "had the best performance percentages." At the same time, there were also significant differences among them. Some people came only fifth in the competition to be the best in their profession; they had only 300 percent as a maximum performance and possessed fewer medals.

The political literature of the period, as I have already mentioned, depicted outstanding workers as if a new order, the *nobility of the working class*, had been born. This strange expression fit in well with the political endeavours of the period. Ernő Gerő said the following at a meeting with young people: "We need a new leading stratum that will take up the new ideas, soak them up and turn them into actions." This new stratum, the author goes on, will be the top-workers, whose representatives will have outstanding moral and financial compensation for their work and services, moreover, they will wear distinctive medals. "We believe," Gerő goes on, "that among our working youth there will be many representatives of the new nobility, the nobility of work, many knights of the honour of work" (Gerő 1948, 5, 7). All this did not simply mean financial well-being, but an *open system of differentiation*, a different way of life and political position.

A complicated system of work awards was created in these years; the heroes of work, of course received the most prestigious ones, for

example "The second best worker in the profession," "Three times stakhanovite," "Twice top-worker." These became new titles, used as permanent adjectives with names just like noble titles or ranks used to be. There were some who would always wear their medals and would frame and hang up their awards at their workplaces. Their machines were sometimes separate from the rest, decorated and marked with inscriptions. These people would sit with the presidium on festive occasions; they would often have consultations with the leaders of the country. Their private lives were formed accordingly. *Szabad Nép* [Free Nation], the daily newspaper of the communist party, for example, reported 20 March 1948 on the activities of the Democratic Union of Hungarian Women (DUHW). The activists of the organisation went to the homes of top-workers and did the housework for them free of charge. The paper wrote:

> They initiated a social movement to provide holidays for the heroes of work and their families, to redecorate their homes, to cultivate their land and gardens. Outstanding female workers and artists were elected to be members of the honorary presidential board of the DUHW, and celebrations were organised in their honour. They took care of the everyday chores of top-workers while they were at work.

Top-workers often spent their holidays together in Galyatető (a popular resort in Hungary's highest mountain range), reported the papers, because it is only natural "that those with the highest performances spend their vacation at the highest place in the country" (Déri 1952. 41).

This phenomenon is similar to what Koselleck described as efforts to modernise underdeveloped regions. The first phase of this, he argued in the introduction to *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, is that expressions carrying feudal privileges are not abolished but "democratised": "honour," "dignity" and "heroism" cease to be exclusively feudal categories, their usage is widened to include the "people" and the "nation" (Koselleck 1972. xvi). In Hungary, these expressions were connected to workers and work, therefore they were no longer bound to origins. Work itself was connected to something semantically distant, since work is not an exclusive activity but rather an everyday and tiring one. Interpreted as a political act and behaviour, however, the ambivalence ceased to exist: if work is an activity of power, it can

be glorious and shameful, heroic and cowardly, supporting or denying the political system. The socialist worker, as a citizen, possessed exactly these characteristics.

Worker, Workforce, Toiler[6]

In Hungary, the 1956 revolution ended the communist dictatorship of the fifties, the years of the personality cult. The Soviet authorities crushed the revolution with tanks and the retaliation lasted for years. From the beginning of the 1960s, a new phase commenced in the history of Hungarian socialism. The period until 1989 was still based on the rule of one party; there was state socialism, but it was a more peaceful and articulated world, with compromises and soft dictatorship. Both the people and the authorities tried to accommodate the status quo. Open political manifestations were no longer required, and there were ways to accumulate personal property. Both the authorities and society became more differentiated and open.

The fate of communist ideology, including the role of the worker, is even more interesting. The system was still legitimized based on the concept of communism. However, the main emphasis was shifted from "world-wide class struggle" to creation and development, and therefore, in the ideology, the antagonistic fight between political systems was replaced by *peaceful competition*. The socialist/communist system was good, it was proclaimed, because it provided its citizens with more safety, well-being, honesty, justice and equality than its rivals. Or at least it would be able to do so as progress was made towards communism. The authorities were hoping that people would share this view. János Kádár, the main leader of the communist party for decades, said once at an election congress: "I am sure that in the world-wide struggle of systems our working nation will once again vote for socialism" (Kádár 1986, 369).

The worker himself was different than in the fifties. His social and political status had not changed, but now he had *rivals*. Apart from the divided world of workers, in the fifties the authorities defined only the enemies of society. From the sixties onwards, however, two new and *equal* characters appeared on the scene: the *workforce*, constituted by political economics; and the figure of the *toiler*, guided by everyday behaviour and common sense. This is aptly proven by the fact that

János Kádár consistently spoke in the name of all three characters at the congresses of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party (*Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt*), as well as on other occasions, thus legitimizing their presence in socialism. Kádár did not speak only in the name of the worker, as had the previous leaders of communist and socialist regimes, but also in the name of the workforce and toiler, which retuned public life although it did not end either the strong linkage between *Homo politicus* and work or the central role of the worker.

When Kádár talked about the *workforce*, he discussed aspects of the *management* of the workforce, based on the positions and tasks of economic leaders as well as on the requirements of employers. In this respect his arguments were not much different from those used by capitalists, which he himself condemned many times. "The sensible use of the workforce" (Kádár 1975b, 81), the more effective performance of work, the organisation of work, the retraining and rearrangement of the workforce or "wages that reflect the actual performance of workers to a higher degree" (Kádár 1975a, 197) were important in socialism as well – Kádár said on a number of occasions. He often denounced undisciplined, badly done work: "it is a problem in our country that both good workers and bad workers get by, both those who really work and those who only have a job" (Kádár 1985, 23). He claimed that "there had to be order" in the country, first of all in the workplace (Kádár 1985, 161).

He also accepted, however, the economic point of view of the *working* people, who considered themselves mostly toilers. It was not a problem, Kádár often said, that people knew about "economics," that they learnt to "count with and count on reality, real life," (Kádár 1975a, 371) and that they were mostly working for the well-being of their own families. Neither was it a problem that the will to make sacrifices was not a general feeling: "our nation is mostly interested in 'what's in it for me'" (Kádár 1985, 28). Of course, he added that this could not damage public interest; it was a mistake that "some people tried to gain extra advantages at the expense of the country" (Kádár 1975b, 74). He was not concerned about the relationship between the two interpretations on a practical level, however, because, he argued, during the "construction of socialism" the contrast between public and private would disappear and such conflicts would lose their significance.

From these arguments it follows that neither the workforce nor the toiler were factors that constituted politics. As a result of Kádár's

political realism their existence was not questioned, in other words, they were parts of society, but the *political system* of socialism was not built on them.

Law XX of 1949, that is, the "Constitution of the Hungarian People's Republic," was still valid. As noted above, being a worker was the basis of the right to vote and be elected as well as to be a member of society. (2. §, 9. §) Consequently, argued Kádár, "in our society work is the basis for all rights. Socialism is a society of work, in which able people must work in order to have rights" (Kádár 1975a, 379). In 1975, for example, in a summary to the eleventh party congress, János Kádár tried to tackle the problem which the ideologists of the Hungarian Soviet Republic had already struggled with: whether people performing intellectual work could be considered workers. Kádár answered that "alongside 'leader' another word should be used, such as 'subordinate', since in our country leaders are also workers if they perform their given task honestly" (Kádár 1978, 312). A small anecdote from political folklore illustrates this: during parliamentary elections, politicians who spent decades in leading positions were still described by their "original profession." As a result, during the long decades of socialism, Hungarian society was not led by the people of the party but by physical workers: bakers, mechanics, turners, carpenters, and the occasional teacher or public servant.

The fact that all able people worked, that there was no unemployment in socialism, continued to be an important element in making the regime legitimate. Significantly, this principle was included in the constitution. The regime had to provide employment for everyone and people were obliged to work. This can be considered the "social contract" of socialism, which penetrated and upheld society: the individual can be persecuted if he does not have a job, the regime is illegitimate if it cannot provide all able workers with work. Citizen and worker coincided in this particular and specific form.

When János Kádár or another prominent politician spoke of the socialist worker, he was clearly demarcated from the employer or employee perspective of the workforce. The socialist worker, although he lived on wages and salary, argued the politicians, primarily did physical work in a large factory, but was not a wageworker or a toiler. In other words, he was not an economic but a political character, and therefore he was not guided by his own interests but by his faithfulness to the socialist regime. He was required, as earlier, to work and think as the owner of the country. Since the conditions for this were

created through the abolition of exploitation, he "could be expected to form a sense of responsibility for the fate of society" (Kádár 1975b, 63), in other words, not to think and act as a selfish private person at his workplace. One can hardly find a speech by Kádár about internal affairs in which some version of the following does not occur: "we have great tasks … in combating egoism." (Kádár 1975b, 40)

This idea back then was already fifty years old, but it went through significant changes in the last period of Hungarian socialism. It had lost threat as well as enthusiasm. It was repeated on public occasions, but mostly as a routine expression. Physical workers were rewarded together with artists and scientists, there were movements to produce better work – such as the "socialist brigade movement," which was a self-educating and political community – however, good workers were *no longer* hierarchically *separated* from average workers. They were like the rest, but they tried a *little* harder. There were no campaigns to advertise the best workers. The regime did not count on masses of people behaving unselfishly at work; it would have preferred such a turn of events, but it did not make an effort to idealise the situation.

Reading through the constitution, it appears that the institutions of power created in Hungary were not much different in framework and form from those that existed in bourgeois constitutions (10. § – 44. §). The few differences, however, were important: the constitution excluded the division of central power. As a result, in socialism bureaucrats exercising power were sharply separated from ordinary citizens; leaders remained leaders for decades, naturally in various positions. Therefore, the confirmation and improvement of the status quo could only be advanced through the content and direction of the political participation and politicizing of voters. The socialist worker, as a voter, was a support and token of this system. Politicians talked about the required (socialist) behaviour of citizens and voters so that it coincided with the characteristics of the socialist worker: a person consciously devoted to socialism, who pushes his personal interest to the background and accepts the directives of his leaders. As János Kádár often said: an *honest worker* both in the factory and in politics.

The concept of the socialist worker, interpreted from the point of view of work, gradually became uncertain. The experience was accepted that working people were not really socialist workers but clamorous wage-workers and toilers. All through this era, a centrally

organised series of *work discipline* campaigns recurred periodically. There were such campaigns in 1964-1965, in the mid-1970s, and also in 1986-1987 (cf. Szabó 1987). In these campaigns the political regime condemned the masses of the people for not working with enough discipline, for being selfish, in other words, for not being socialist workers. The campaigns were ideological condemnations as well as legal measures: employment conditions were restricted, the proportion of people working for performance-based salaries was increased, being late was not tolerated, and sickness benefits became more difficult to obtain. It must be remarked that these ideological campaigns and restrictive measures were always preceded by a fallback in economic development.

The first discipline campaign took place in 1964-1965. When the leaders of the communist party faced the fact that the target numbers of the current five-year plan were not going to be achieved, the Central Committee issued a declaration entitled "Measures to Improve Work Performance and Work Discipline" (1964). These measures, however, did not achieve the required results. After this, the Central Committee accepted the "Orientation Policies" (1966), which was the beginning of a successful new economic mechanism introduced in 1968 (cf. Vass 1968). In later campaigns, this choreography repeated itself. The political regime always reacted to economic hardships first by restricting the conditions of work and only later by reforms, although no statistical data ever proved that work discipline was particularly loose in Hungary. These campaigns also had scapegoats: construction workers in 1964, office workers in 1975, and private entrepreneurs in 1986.

Obviously such campaigns reflected significant contradictions expressing one of the internal tensions of the system: *Are there socialist workers at all in socialism?* If the work discipline campaigns were justified, then people in state-owned, socialist factories behaved as if they had worked in capitalist factories. The diversion of political and economic meanings turned out to be fatal for the worker as well as for socialism. By the end of the 1980s, nothing remained of the meaning of the socialist worker but the two basic principles legitimising the system: *full employment and a lack of strikes*.

There have always been unemployment and work-related dissatisfaction in Hungary, but they never took an *open* and *mass* form. In the 1980s, however, the situation changed. Increasing unemployment forced the authorities to support unemployed people by financial

means, although the phenomenon was not called unemployment. It was forbidden to use this expression in public. The authorities provided an "employment-search benefit," which meant that in socialism there was no unemployment, only difficulties in finding employment, since the s*ocialist worker* could not be unemployed. The same applied to strikes. The Hungarian delegate voted for the document declaring the right to strike at the 21st general assembly of the UN, however, it was ratified in Hungary only ten years later, in 1976 (Law IX), and no enforcement regulations were attached. The right to strike remained a theoretical right in Hungary; in reality, no one could strike because *socialist workers* do not strike. In both cases, the problem lay in quantity. As long as it was about individual events and only a few people, it could be said, and politicians indeed did say, that these were *occasional* manifestations of the workforce of the toiler mentality. Over a certain limit, however, this argument could no longer be used. While very few people actually left the country, in the 1980s *Hungarian socialism was losing masses of its citizens.*

Conclusions

In this study, I have analyzed how a new subject of political rights and a new community of politics were constructed in three historical phases of Hungarian socialism. The main character in this construction was the socialist/communist worker, who was interpreted through his work. He belonged, however, to the world of politics rather than the world of production: he was the new citizen of the new political regime. His was to be the role that *citizen* plays in bourgeois society, but the meaning of this concept was modified through time. In the period of the Hungarian Soviet Republic the worker was an *unselfish* person, who supported the new regime in all areas of life. In the years of the personality cult he was a *top-worker*, whose life and acts were put before others by the regime as examples to be followed. In the years of Kádárian socialism, he was an *empty* and *formalised* character in politics, who was expected to support the regime but was understood to have personal views and interests as well. In this study, I have presented the complex meanings of the concept of worker, as well as its usage as a counter-concept and identity-concept. In the

later phases, the socialist worker gradually became a more articulated and differentiated concept, and in the end his opposite also became a member of society. This carried serious contradictions from the point of view of legitimation.

I think this conceptual historical study has shed some light on a hitherto neglected area of socialism: the understanding of political characters. Such analyses have already been carried out, but from a viewpoint fundamentally critical of ideology, in which the political characters of socialism were derived from the functioning of institutions of power. As a result, the central character was a human being at the mercy of a dictatorship, deprived of his rights, who, as *Homo politicus*, was not free at all. Socialism, however, also constructed itself as a *positive reality*. In my analysis, I have tried to show that the citizen of this regime was a multilayered and effective character in the political praxis of the period, who, as demonstrated by the conceptual historical analysis, was not only more helpless than the *Homo politicus* of bourgeois societies, but was also a citizen based on a *different logic*. The worker, since his citizenship was constructed based on the provision of living conditions, was *existentially* subject to the regime. This, however, was equally true for the regime as well. Through interpreting the worker as the citizen, the political system created a rigid operational framework which could not be improved, only loosened. The differentiation of the concept was not the correction and improvement of the worker as citizen, but rather his gradual elimination.

NOTES

1. Kari Palonen wrote in an essay analysing Finnish political thinking that after his concept-historical and political-theoretical writings maybe he was well equipped "to achieve the demanded *Verfremdungseffekt* in relation to the Finnish discourse." (2001, 147) This is my hope and intention, too. I wrote a number of essays on Hungarian socialism in the past twenty-five years, in which I tried to interpret politics from the point of view of the world of work and production. (cf. Szabó 1985, 1987, 1998.) When preparing this article, I reread the sources many times and reconsidered my earlier works. The problem for me was that the historical characters did not think and say about themselves and their age exactly what I wrote, that communist studies concentrated mostly on the political institutions of dictatorship, and lastly that I myself was part of this history. After several phases of *Verfremdungseffekt*, I reached the conclusion that one of the key concepts of the *political* thinking of socialism was the socialist (communist) worker used in the sense of citizen. To outline this concept, naturally I needed theoretical *methods* and empirical *distance*. Before 1990, we were barred from these by the regime and by history, respectively.

2. I consider the adjectives 'socialist' and 'communist' synonyms, because they were used this way in the political texts. They had no category differentiating meanings: the worker was described by one or the other.

3. Kenneth Burke writes: "The worker whose understanding becomes infused with this doctrine, then sees himself not merely as an individual joining with other individuals to improve his bargaining position with his employer: he sees himself as a *member of class*, the proletariat, which is destined to play *a crucial role in the unfolding of history as a whole.* Thus, while participating with maximum activity in the particular organisational and propagandist problems that mark his local situation, he transcends the limitation of these local conditions and of his *spontaneous* nature as member of the working class. For he sees his role in terms of an *absolute,* an ultimate." In other words he does not consider himself only an employee, but, as Burke writes, he is "*the* Proletarian" (Burke 1950, 196.) In my analysis, I attempt to show how this idea was confronted with political practice.

4. In my analysis, I do not study in detail either the ideological-historical or the international aspects of the problem, neither do I reflect, with a few exceptions, on communist studies. The latter I shall not deal with because these do not discuss the problems I raise. Analysing the international political and ideological aspects would undoubtedly be worthwhile, however, it would surpass the limitations of such an essay. I shall always try, nonetheless, to present adequately the historical situation in which the discussed political phenomena occurred.

5. The leaders and theoreticians of the contemporary international labour movement showed vivid interest in the question whether in communism workers will work un-

selfishly. In the 1890s, there was a debate about this in *Die Neue Zeit* edited by Kautsky. Anarchists said yes, as this will be the obvious consequence of the ending of exploitation and state power. Bernstein, on the other hand, argued that this was an illusion, therefore state enforcement authorities were not to be wound up. The debate was repeated twenty years later. In a 1919 polemic writing (*Terrorism and Communism*), Kautsky attacked the forced labour measures of Soviet Russia, and Trotsky, who was at this point the minister of internal affairs, replied defending these measures (*Terrorism and Communism. Anti-Kautsky*). The debate had several rounds, and may have been known to the leaders of the Hungarian Soviet Republic. For example, the brochures of the Kautsky-Trotsky debate were published in Hungarian.

6. While 'toiler' may sound strange, it is still the most suitable word to translate the Hungarian 'melós.' This is what physical workers called themselves. It has a touch of down-grading, self-pity, self-conscious honesty and irony.

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