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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Los Angeles

Socialist Popular Culture and Youth Culture during the Long 1960s in Hungary

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
Requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy
In History

by

Beth Marie Greene

2013

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Socialist Popular Culture and Youth Culture during the Long 1960s in Hungary

by

Beth Marie Greene

Doctor of Philosophy in History

University of California, Los Angeles, 2013

Professor Ivan T. Berend, Chair

In this dissertation, the author examines the spread of popular culture in Hungary during the long 1960s, with particular emphasis on how the Hungarian government's policy on popular culture affected Hungarian youth culture. Drawing on literature and theory from consumption, popular culture, and youth culture, the author uses a variety of primary source documents to demonstrate that throughout the 1960s, the Hungarian state socialist government promoted cultural consumption in a way that spoke to popular demand while couching this consumption within the rhetoric of modern socialism. Cultural products were depoliticized and increasingly subsumed into the market reforms that were being implemented during this period, meaning that culture, too, had to answer in some way to consumer demand. As consumption and mass media became associated with modernity, the government argued that products of popular culture were in keeping with their efforts to build socialism not because of their content, but because these products were consumed in a socialist manner. The introduction of Hungarian socialist popular

culture also served as a way to provide an alternative to Western variants, which were becoming increasingly available in the era of peaceful coexistence. All of these elements can be seen in the discussion of Hungarian youth culture, where many aspects of youth culture were allowed, and even promoted, and the government argued that the consumption of youth culture was acceptable as long as it was symbolic of young people's search for something new. This argument can be clearly seen in Hungarian beat music, which was representative of the complex relationship between the state, the musicians, and the youth audience. This relationship that led to the creation of a distinct, Hungarian version of popular music that met youth demand and at the same time served the interests of the socialist government. The contents of this dissertation provide a unique perspective on current literature on state socialist consumption and culture, arguing that in the long 1960s in Hungary, the government achieved a measure of success in its attempt to create a distinct type of socialist popular culture.

The dissertation of Beth Marie Greene is approved.

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Arch Getty

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2013

For my family, William and Nanci Greene
and Amy Hemkendreis

TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Figures	vii
List of Tables	vii
List of Abbreviations	viii
Acknowledgements	ix
Vita	xiii
Introduction	1
Chapter One: Gentlemen and Comrades	27
Chapter Two: Buying and Selling	69
Chapter Three: Socialist Popular Culture	125
Chapter Four: Youth Culture	169
Chapter Five: Beat	216
Epilogue	265
Bibliography	276

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 2-1: Look dear! There are two forints left over.	95
Figure 2-2: Behold! I have discovered America!	99
Figure 2-3: Battle for the Customer	119
Figure 2-4: Every child can have his own car!	123
Figure 4-1: How young people are viewed by...	170
Figure 4-2: Janice Joplin on the cover of <i>Ifjúsági Magazin</i>	187
Figure 4-3: Do you think armchairs are a petty bourgeois invention?	198
Figure 4-4: NOW what are you rebelling against?	198
Figure 4-5: The phone isn't red.	202
Figure 4-6: Remember when they sneered at <i>our</i> fringe?	210

LIST OF TABLES

Table 2-1: Purchase Loans in Hungary	77
Table 2-2: Hungarian Ownership of Household Appliances	78
Table 3-1: Tourism Rates in Hungary	154

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CPSU	Communist Party of the Soviet Union
DISZ	Youth Workers League
MDP	Hungarian Workers' Party

MRT	Hungarian Radio and Television
MSZMP	Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party
KISZ	Communist Youth League
RFE	Radio Free Europe
UN	United Nations

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Writing a dissertation is a lonely process that nonetheless requires the help of numerous mentors, colleagues, friends, and family members. While these acknowledgements cannot adequately express my gratitude, I would like to take the opportunity to thank all those who have assisted me in this endeavor. My advisor, Ivan Berend, has been an important figure in my life ever since I took his East European History class as an undergraduate student. Since then, he has become a mentor and a friend, taking my vague love of Hungarian history and turning it into a viable dissertation topic, while at the same time giving me the freedom to pursue my own passions. Ivan's knowledge of economic history has helped me to navigate the complex terrain of culture and consumption, his personal experiences have offered an important first-hand account of the events I write about, and his responsiveness, helpfulness, and positivity have provided a strong foundation for my success. I cannot thank him enough for his support. I would also like to thank my committee: Robert Brenner, Gyula Gazdag, and Arch Getty, whose questions and comments during my oral defense remained with me throughout this entire process, and have served to enrich my dissertation. Professor Brenner's outside perspective and keen understanding of history helped me to see my dissertation topic outside of the context of Eastern Europe, and led me to examine a broader body of literature that became integral to my argument. Professor Gazdag's contributions enabled me to see the 1960s in Hungary from the perspective of a Hungarian artist, and his perception and experience of the Hungarian government during that period were extremely important in both my research and writing. Professor Getty's knowledge of Soviet history helped me to see the role of Hungary within the Soviet Bloc, and helped me to place my dissertation within the larger discourse on state socialism. I am also indebted to the UCLA History department, which continued to provide

funding and support for my dissertation. This support has been integral in assuring that I completed my project in a timely manner.

My dissertation has also put me in connection with a number of Hungarian scholars and cultural figures, whose perspectives were integral in shaping my topic. I would particularly like to thank Attila Pók, who was my mentor during the time I spent doing research in Hungary. Professor Pók helped me to navigate the world of Hungarian archives and put me in touch with scholars who have helped me immeasurably in the course of writing my dissertation. My monthly meetings with Professor Pók were critical to ensuring that I remained on top of my research in Budapest, and the guidance he provided during my tenure in Hungary was invaluable. I would also like to thank the scholars that I met while in Hungary, who were always willing to discuss my topic and provide advice on sources and further avenues of research. I would particularly like to thank Péter Agárdi, Sándor Horváth, Melinda Kalmár, and Tibor Valuch, who provided me the tools to write a better, more analytical dissertation. I also benefited from interviews with Hungarian cultural figures: János Bródy, György Komjáthy, Zsuzsa Koncz, who took time out of their busy schedules to speak at length with an American PhD student (and fan). The Department of Education's Fulbright-Hays grant enabled me to conduct my research in Budapest, for which I am extremely grateful. Finally, my dissertation would not have been possible without the help and support of my teacher and friend, Erzsébet Csereklye, who helped make the notoriously difficult Hungarian language comprehensible to a non-native speaker. Bözse helped me when I had no hot water in my apartment, she welcomed me to her home in Tahi, and she continues to help when I am stumped with a difficult Hungarian translation. She remains one of my dearest friends.

I would also like to thank the University of California, Washington, DC, which has been my surrogate campus for the past three years. I am particularly grateful to Jan Reiff, whose help at UCLA and in Washington, DC was extremely important to me. Professor Reiff helped to ground my dissertation in cultural theory, and meeting with her helped to make me feel secure in my academic career and in my future goals. She was always available to write a letter of recommendation, and to meet with me to discuss my topic. It was Jan who recommended to me that I apply for the TA position in Washington, DC, for which I will always be grateful. Jim Desveaux and Joel Aberbach have my profound appreciation for agreeing to hire a Hungarian historian to teach a research seminar to mostly political science students. I am also indebted to Melanie DuPuis, whose faith in my Drupal abilities has given me a much-needed supplement to my income. Throughout the writing process, I was lucky to have Amy Bridges read many parts of my dissertation, and her comments, advice, and breakfasts were extremely important to completing this dissertation. My work has immeasurably improved from presenting chapters at UCDC Research Lunches, and the graduate students who work at UCDC have helped to ground me throughout this process. Particular thanks are owed to Alfreda Brock, Mary Byrne, and Chantal Quintero, who have been a constant source of support and encouragement throughout my stay here in DC. My dissertation has also benefitted immensely from the resources available at the Library of Congress, and from the helpful staff, which was always available to help me find microform reels of obscure Hungarian newspapers.

Such a process cannot be completed without the help of dear friends, especially the community of graduate students and former graduate students who are understanding and supportive of what can sometimes be a trying experience. I would particularly like to thank Elizabeth Everton, Cher Geiger, Sean Guillory, Maya Haber, Mark Heller, Lauren Janes, Matt

Kearney, and Chloe Thurston, who have been constant pillars of support throughout this process. Finally and most importantly, I would like to thank my family, who have supported my dream to study history and encouraged me to pursue my passions even when they seemed impractical. To my parents, William and Nanci Greene, who have been my biggest cheerleaders and most ardent supporters throughout this entire process, thank you cannot convey how much I appreciate your love and support. My sister and brother-in-law, Amy and Adam Hemkendreis, have helped to keep me grounded throughout this process, and remain my very best friends. I also want to thank my grandparents, John and Frances Brach, whose love and support was always welcome and needed. I still remember when I was eighteen my grandpa telling me that he couldn't wait to see me become a doctor, and while this was not the type of doctor he had in mind, the memory has nonetheless propelled me to complete this process. I'm lucky to have you.

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Beth Greene, “‘It Doesn’t Matter if Their Hair is Long as Long as They Wash it’ Youth Culture in Hungry in the 1960s,” UC Washington Center Faculty Research Lunch, Washington, DC December 2011.

Beth Greene, “Beat: Hungarian Youth Music and Culture in the 1960s,” UC Washington Center Faculty Research Lunch, Washington, DC March 2013.

Introduction

In the history of the Cold War, the 1960s represented a distinctive shift in the battle terrain. In the early years, the building of the Berlin Wall and the Cuban Missile Crisis signaled the continued existence of armed discord between the two sides; however, as the decade progressed, overt military action gave way to a subtler, more ideological war that was characterized by the term “peaceful coexistence.” The conflicts of this period were symbolic of the desire of both the United States and the Soviet Union to compete for ownership of the future, a competition that extended from outer space to the home kitchen.¹ As modernity became increasingly associated with mass consumption, leaders of Soviet Bloc countries focused on technological and economic innovations to provide an alternative, modern, and socialist path to consumption that would secure gains in living standards for the citizens of state socialism.² For many of these countries, mass consumption spread to some degree into culture as well, especially with the expansion of mass media, and socialist governments strove to accommodate consumption of popular culture into a cultural ideal that was rooted in traditional forms of “high” culture. At the same time, however, while the superpowers were battling for who would provide a better living standard for the next generation, the generation in question was busy forming its own culture, one that was distinct from and often seemingly in opposition to the values of the older generations. Western newspapers published stories on Soviet youth entranced by Western music, style, and modes of consumption while the socialist press noted with equal glee the drug use, sexual experimentation, and rejection of capitalism and consumption that was characteristic of Western youth subcultures. Internally, both societies viewed the unprecedented independence

¹ Susan E. Reid and David Crowley, introduction to *Style and Socialism: Modernity and Material Culture in Post-War Eastern Europe*, edited by Susan E. Reid and David Crowley (Oxford: Berg, 2000), 9.

² György Péteri, introduction to *Imagining the West in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union*, edited by György Péteri (Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh University Press, 2010), 4-12.

of youth culture with concern; nonetheless, both recognized the need to appeal to a broad spectrum of young people.

In this dissertation, I examine the spread of popular culture in Hungary during the 1960s, with particular focus on how this dissemination can be seen in youth culture. Drawing on literature and theory from consumption, popular culture, and youth culture, I demonstrate that throughout the 1960s, the Hungarian state socialist government worked increasingly to promote a type of cultural consumption that satisfied the population's desire for mass-produced culture while at the same time adhering, at least in theory, to the principles of socialism. Throughout the decade in Hungary, culture was increasingly separated from its traditional role as the vanguard of ideology, and increasingly accountable to the new driving forces of the government's policies: technology and the economy. The new subordinated role of culture, coupled with economic reforms that encouraged greater attention to consumer demand in order to increase consumption and provide better living standards, opened up an area of Hungarian culture that lacked the ideological rigidity of earlier periods. This allowed for an increased level of consumption of popular culture, which the government argued was in keeping with its policies, not for its content, but for its place within a society still in the process of building socialism. The creation of Hungarian popular culture was also an attempt by the Hungarian government to provide an alternative to Western variants, which were considered particularly dangerous as peaceful coexistence led to more interaction between Hungary and the countries of the capitalist West. All of these factors can be seen in the government's discussion of Hungarian youth: between the officially sponsored youth culture and the oft-criticized youth subcultures, the majority of Hungarian youth were able to participate in a youth culture that the government tolerated and even promoted. During this period, the complex relationship between the government and this

type of youth culture can be seen most notably in Hungarian beat music, which provided young people with a sense of a shared generational experience and at the same time allowed the government to encourage a distinct, Hungarian variant of music that was portrayed as more tasteful than its Western counterpart. The 1960s represented a distinct shift in the government's cultural policies from the previous era: while elite, "high" culture and socialist realism remained the ideal, popular culture had an increasingly secure place in the Hungarian socialist party's discourse of modern socialism.

Hungary in the Long 1960s

As with many pivotal eras, the historical concept of the Sixties extends beyond the confines of the decade after which it is named, and encompasses the period of broad-sweeping social, cultural and political changes that are associated with the term "the 1960s." Indeed, the "long 1960s," a period whose years varied from region to region and even country to country, was experienced on a global scale, and was influenced by a variety of factors, including the end of the Second World War and subsequent baby boom, the end of colonialism in Africa and Asia, and the spread of mass media and mass communication. In the Soviet Union, the long 1960s are generally defined as the period between Stalin's death in 1953 and the invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968. This period is most often associated with the more permissive atmosphere of Khrushchev's Thaw and peaceful coexistence, in which consumption and living standards were oft-cited goals of the Soviet Union's Communist Party. In Hungary, the long 1960s began several years later, following the Soviet repression of the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, and ended later as well, with Brezhnev's criticism of Hungarian reforms in 1972 and the subsequent demotion of many of the reform-minded members of the Hungarian Communist Party that had served to define the decade. The central figure of this period in Hungary is First

Party Secretary János Kádár, a pragmatic leader whose tenure covered nearly the entirety of post-Stalinist state socialism in Hungary, from 1956 to 1988. Kádár's famous motto, "he who is not against us is with us," is indicative of the more inclusive approach to socialism that served as the basis for many of the Kádár government's policies, especially during the 1960s. The leaders of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' party (MSZMP) were so unpopular following the revolution's suppression and the subsequent reprisals that they emerged from the revolution's aftermath with a keen understanding of public sentiment and a willingness to adopt the policies that were necessary to ensure the support of Hungarian citizens.³ They were thus suitably poised to take advantage of the more permissive atmosphere that had been ushered in by Khrushchev's policies.

Living Standards and Consumption

Because modern popular culture is inextricably linked to mass consumption, it is important that my dissertation address the changes taking place in Hungarian consumption during the period under analysis. This is especially critical as one of the most prominent features of the long 1960s in Soviet Bloc countries was the increased focus on raising the level of consumption and living standards for the population and, as the decade progressed, consumption was a key area of conflict with the capitalist West. Early in the decade, the Soviet Union had the upper hand in the space race, but trailed the United States in terms of mass consumer goods, a lack that was painfully evident during the 1959 Kitchen Debate between Khrushchev and Nixon, which took place in front of a fully furnished American kitchen in Moscow. Because of its domestic and international importance, research on consumption has become an increasingly

³ János Rainer, "The Sixties in Hungary – Some Historical and Political Approaches," in János M. Rainer and György Péteri, eds., *Muddling Through in the Long 1960s: Ideas and Everyday Life in High Politics and the Lower Classes of Communist Hungary* (Trondheim: Trondheim Studies on East European Cultures and Societies, 2005), 15.

integral element of scholarship on state socialism. Early studies on consumption focused on the failure of state socialist economies to provide for its citizens, which was a main factor of the system's ultimate collapse. Hungarian economist János Kornai posited this view most classically in his pivotal book, *Economies of Shortage*, in which he argued that in centralized, state socialist economies, all the power lay in the hands of the suppliers, and the resultant behavior was characteristic of a sellers market where the producers had all the power and the buyers were forced to accept what was being sold or go without.⁴ Similarly, in their study, Ferenc Fehér, Ágnes Heller, and György Márkus argued that a centralized elite ruled the economy, and this elite's desire to maintain power rather than rationalize the economy resulted in the endemic problems of the planned economy. In this way, the elite determined what could be consumed as well as how and in what quantities.⁵ Such an argument can also be seen in Czech dissident Václav Havel's essay, "The Power of the Powerless," in which he contended, "In highly simplified terms, it could be said that the post-totalitarian system has been built on foundations laid by the historical encounter between dictatorship and the consumer society."⁶

Recent scholarship has not denied the problems that plagued the state socialist economies; however, it has provided a more nuanced view of the role of consumerism in the Soviet Bloc. One study female consumerism in the Soviet Union noted, "The management of consumption was as significant for the Soviet system's long survival as for its ultimate

⁴ János Kornai, *Economics of Shortage*, 2 vols. (Amsterdam: North-Holland Publishing Company, 1980).

⁵ Ferenc Fehér, Ágnes Heller, and György Márkus, *Dictatorship Over Needs* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983). A brief but oft-cited expansion on this idea can be found in Katherine Verdery, *What Was Socialism, and What Comes Next?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 26-9.

⁶ Václav Havel, "The Power of the Powerless," in *The Power of the Powerless: Citizens Against the State in Central-Eastern Europe*, ed. John Keane (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1985), 20.

collapse.”⁷ Current discussions of consumption during state socialism thus focus not on the failure of governments to provide for its citizens, but on the way in which consumption was portrayed, experienced, and negotiated by Soviet Bloc populations, revealing a more complex depiction of consumption and consumerism in these societies. As another recent study on consumption argued, “As in the West, consumption practices in communist societies were related to social status, gender, sociability, leisure, individual agency, and popular discontent, but in different ways. They were intimately tied, for example, to socialist notions of modernity and progress; that is, consumption of ‘modern goods’ was part and parcel of the making of a modern *socialist* consumer.”⁸ One recent study even noted the influences of neoliberalism in the economic theory of market socialism, challenging the notion that there was a stark impenetrable divide between capitalist and state socialist economies.⁹ Early English language studies that addressed the nuances of state socialist consumption focused primarily on East Germany;¹⁰ however more recent studies have been published on a variety of Soviet Bloc countries, most notably in edited volumes that try to provide a detailed picture of socialist consumption throughout Eastern Europe.¹¹ Perhaps unsurprisingly, given its reputation as the birthplace of consumer-oriented “goulash communism,” there are a number of recent studies on consumption

⁷ Susan E. Reid, “Cold War in the Kitchen: Gender and the De-Stalinization of Consumer Taste in the Soviet Union under Khrushchev,” *Slavic Review* 61 No. 2 (2002): 212, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2697116>.

⁸ Paulina Bren, and Mary Neuburger, introduction to *Communism Unwrapped: Consumption in Cold War Eastern Europe*, edited by Paulina Bren and Mary Neuburger (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

⁹ Johanna Bockman, *Markets in the Name of Socialism: The Left-Wing Origins of Neoliberalism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011).

¹⁰ See for example André Steiner, “Dissolution of the ‘Dictatorship over Needs’? Consumer Behavior and Economic Reform in East Germany in the 1960s”; and Ina Merkel, “Consumer Culture in the GDR, or How the Struggle for Antimodernity was Lost on the Battleground of Consumer Culture,” both in *Getting and Spending: European and American Consumer Societies in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Susan Strasser, Charles McGovern, Matthias Judd (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 167-185 and 281-299.

¹¹ In addition to Reid and Crowley (2000) and Bren and Neuburger, see Susan Reid and David Crowley, eds., *Pleasures in Socialism: Leisure and Luxury in the Eastern Bloc* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2010).

in Hungary, although many of them are in Hungarian.¹² A notable exception is Krisztina Fehérváry's study on state socialist material culture, in which she drew from a number of Hungarian sources to depict the complicated relationship between state socialist governments and consumer goods.¹³ Given the study of Hungarian consumption's potential to provide insight into the broader dialogue of consumption in state socialism, more English language studies on the subject are critical.

While literature on state socialist consumption during the long 1960s has received a good deal of attention in recent years, relatively less focus has been awarded to discussions of state socialist selling, including marketing and advertising. It is perhaps telling that the most comprehensive book on socialist advertising was published in 1974.¹⁴ Early research on the state socialist economy precludes the importance of any sort of intermediary between the state and the consumer. According to these studies, there was little room in the government's control over consumption for sellers to have any say in what buyer's purchase, and moreover, little impetus on the part of the sellers to engage in sales activities when the state socialist "sellers market" gives production the advantage over consumption.¹⁵ Nonetheless, in the 1960s, especially as

¹² See for example Vörös Miklós, "Életmód, ideológia, háztartás: A fogyasztáskutatás politikuma az államszocializmus korszakában" [Lifestyle, Ideology, Household: Consumer Research Policy in the Era of State Socialism]; and Ferenc Hammer and Tibor Dessewffy "A fogyasztás kísértete" [The Specter of Consumption] both in *Replika* 26 (June 1997): 17-30 and 31-46; Tibor Valuch, "Csepel bicikli, Caesar konyak, Symphonia, Trapper farmer: A fogyasztás és a fogyasztói magatartás változásai a szocialista korszakban" [Csepel Bicycle, Caesar Cognac, Symphonia, Trapper Jeans: The Change in Consumption and Consumption Behavior in the Socialist Era]; and Sándor Horváth, "Csudapest és a friziderszocializmus: a fogyasztás jelentései, a turizmus és a fogyasztáskritika az 1960-as években" [Csudapest and Refrigerator Socialism: Accounts of Consumption, Tourism, and Consumption Criticism in the 1960], both in *Replika* no. 3 (2008): 40-59 and 60-83. While not specifically about consumption, images of consumption can be found in Tibor Valuch, *Hétköznapi élet Kádár János korában* [Everyday Life in the Kadar Era] (Budapest: Corvina, 2006).

¹³ Krisztina Fehérváry, "Goods and States: The Political Logic of State-Socialist Material Culture," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 51 no. 2 (2009): 426-459, doi:10.1017/S0010417509000188.

¹⁴ Philip Hanson, *Advertising & Socialism: A Study of the Nature and Extent of Consumer Advertising in the Soviet Union, Poland, Hungary, and Yugoslavia* (White Plains: International Arts and Sciences Press, 1974).

¹⁵ For an early depiction of seller behavior in state socialism, see Kornai (1980), 109-126.

state socialist governments introduced market-oriented reforms, sales became an important facet of the more modernized socialist economy, representing the increased focus on consumer demand as opposed to centralized planning.¹⁶ Sellers continued to look toward the central authorities for the majority of its economic cues;¹⁷ nonetheless the 1960s saw a distinct focus on creating a more modern sales experience for the socialist consumer. Only recently has literature on sales and advertising in state socialism become more pervasive in the dialogue about consumption.¹⁸ Particularly notable is the work of Patrick Hyder Patterson, whose discussion of the retail trade in Central and Eastern Europe has opened a new dimension in the study of consumption.¹⁹ Patterson's discussion of state socialist department stores raises important questions about the feasibility of creating a distinct, socialist variant of retail sales in the same way that Soviet Bloc governments attempted to define a distinctly socialist method of

¹⁶ For an interesting discussion of market socialism, see Bertell Ollman, ed., *Market Socialism: The Debate Among Socialists* (New York, Routledge, 1998).

¹⁷ As Kornai stated, "The firm comes to expect that its level of profit, the wages and profit share-out payable to its employees, its welfare spending, or its scale of investment will depend on what various superior authorities decide, not on the market." János Kornai, *The Socialist System: The Political Economy of Communism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).

¹⁸ Interestingly, there are several works that discuss the retail trade in the Soviet Union during Stalinism. See for example the comprehensive book by Julie Hessler, *A Social History of Soviet Trade: Trade Policy, Retail Practices, and Consumption, 1917-1953* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004); Jukka Gronow, *Caviar with Champagne: Common Luxury and the Ideals of the Good Life in Stalin's Russia* (Oxford: Berg, 2003). For a study on East German advertising, see Anne Kaminsky, "'True Advertising Means Promoting a Good Thing through a Good Form': Advertising in the German Democratic Republic" in *Selling Modernity: Advertising in Twentieth-Century Germany* ed. Pamela E. Swett, S. Jonathan Wiesen, and Jonathan R. Zatlín (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007) 262-286. For an interesting study of tobacco sales in Bulgaria, see Mary Neuburger, "The Taste of Smoke: Bulgartabak and the Manufacturing of Cigarettes and Satisfaction," in Bren and Neuburger, 91-115. For a description of the Polish shopping experience see David Crowley, "Warsaw's Shops, Stalinism, and the Thaw," in Reid and Crowley (2000), 25-47.

¹⁹ See Patrick Hyder Patterson, "Risky Business: What Was Really Being Sold in the Department Stores of Socialist Eastern Europe?" in Bren and Neuburger, 116-139; also Patterson, "Making Markets Marxist? The East European Grocery Store from Rationing to Rationality and Rationalizations" in *Food Chains: From Farmyard to Shopping Cart*, ed. Warren Belasco and Roger Horowitz (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 196-216. Patterson has also published a number of studies on sales and advertising in Yugoslavia. See for example "Truth Half Told: Finding the Perfect Pitch for Advertising and Marketing in Socialist Yugoslavia, 1950-1991," *Enterprise & Society* 4 no. 2 (2003): 179-225; and *Bought and Sold: Living and Losing the Good Life in Socialist Yugoslavia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011), especially the chapter "Selling it: Legitimizing the Appeal of Market Culture."

consumption.²⁰ More work needs to be done to examine the way the market-oriented policies in state socialism incorporated sales techniques as an effort to encourage selling to be more in sync with consumer demand. This is especially true in Hungary, where the economic reforms of the late 1960s increasingly focused on the creation of a “Competition for the Consumer” and an attempt to reestablish connections between the consumer and the economy. Such research will further elucidate the complex relationship between the state socialist market economy and consumer demand.

“Americanization” and the Cultural Cold War

Following the Second World War, mass culture became an increasingly prominent aspect of the cultural terrain throughout Europe. Studies of popular and consumer culture during this period in Western Europe often focus on the transformation of a traditional, bourgeois consumer society into one that reflected American standards of mass consumption and culture. Many do so in the broader context of the “Cultural Cold War,” whereby the United States and the Soviet Union fought for superiority in the cultural sphere, pitting Soviet ballet and film against American jazz and abstract art.²¹ Indeed, scholarship in this field has demonstrated that the American government was heavily invested in promulgating a positive image of American society abroad. Volker Berghahn’s study on the “Intellectual Cold Wars” in Europe discusses the concerted efforts of the American government to cajole West European intellectuals into abandoning their disdain for American mass culture. This was considered necessary to bring Western Europe closer to the American sphere and to ensure that the Soviet Union would not

²⁰ Patterson (2012), 133-5.

²¹ For an extensive, if flawed, discussion of the Cultural Cold War, see David Caute, *The Dancer Defects: The Struggle for Cultural Supremacy during the Cultural Cold War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

take advantage of any perceived discord between the United States and its allies.²² Similarly, Frances Stonor Saunders's book documents the activities of the CIA in funding seemingly independent cultural agencies in order to promote American culture. In discussing his findings, Saunders noted, "The extent to which America's spying establishment extended its reach into the cultural affairs of its western allies, acting as unacknowledged facilitator to a broad range of creative activity, positioning intellectuals and their work like chess pieces to be played in the Great Game, remains one of the Cold War's most provocative legacies."²³ Another recent study on American identity and Cold War propaganda describes in detail the way the United States Information Agency (USIA) struggled to portray various themes of American life, from democracy and capitalism to gender and race relations.²⁴ These studies reflect the extent to which the American government had a stake in promoting its ideology in Western Europe, and add complexity to the idea that the "Americanization" of these countries was an inevitable consequence of modernity; however, it does not discuss the way in which West European countries, many of which looked upon American mass culture with no little disdain, received and adapted American mass culture to reflect specific European ideals.

In her extensive work on the spread of the American "Market Empire" into Europe, Victoria de Grazia chronicles the way American businessmen, politicians, and diplomats facilitated the introduction of American-style consumer practices into European society. This introduction involved more than just advertising, supermarkets, and Hollywood movies: it also

²² Volker R. Berghahn, *America and the Intellectual Cold Wars in Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

²³ Frances Stonor Saunders, *The Cultural Cold War: The CIA and the World of Arts and Letters* (New York: The New Press, 1999), 5.

²⁴ Laura A. Belmonte, *Selling the American Way: U.S. Propaganda and the Cold War* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010).

incorporated new ways to engage in commerce, from adopting the “service ethic” embodied by the American Rotary Club to the creation of the “citizen-consumer.” De Grazia also describes the way in which European societies, far from being simply complacent to American persuasion, adapted American methods to suit their own social and cultural needs.²⁵ An expansion of this idea can be found in Richard Kuisel’s book on American consumer culture in France, in which he suggested that while the French may have adapted some aspects of American-style consumerism, they nonetheless maintained their characteristic “Frenchness.”²⁶ Indeed, in one edited volume on American culture in Western Europe, the essays emphasize that oftentimes American mass culture was used as a foil to define what it meant to be European rather than as a way emphasize the conformity of Western Europe to American modes of culture.²⁷ This type of definition is emphasized in Uta Poiger’s study about the influence of mass culture in East and West Germany. Both states struggled to define themselves against the onslaught of American popular culture; however, while West Germany depoliticized the act of cultural consumption, at the same time connecting mass culture to the spread of democracy, the East German government continued to treat the consumption of mass culture, which was often suppressed, as a political act.²⁸ Portrayals of the way in which American-style mass culture was adapted, defined, and viewed in Western Europe provides a nuanced picture of the way in which similar products, methods, and attitudes could be incorporated into the everyday life of a variety of social and

²⁵ Victoria de Grazia, *Irresistible Empire: America’s Advance through 20th-Century Europe* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005).

²⁶ Richard F. Kuisel, *Seducing the French: The Dilemma of Americanization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

²⁷ Rob Kroes, *If You’ve Seen One, You’ve Seen the Mall: Europeans and American Mass Culture* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press)

²⁸ Uta G. Poiger, *Jazz, Rock, and Rebels: Cold War Politics and American Culture in a Divided Germany* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

political systems. Mass culture may have emerged victorious, but not without changing to suit the needs of the European audience.

The permeation of American-style mass culture in Eastern Europe has not escaped analysis, although the literature is relatively sparser than that of the Western part of the continent. Particularly notable is the work of Walter Hixson, whose book examines the way in which American government used propaganda and cultural infiltration in the Soviet Bloc as a weapon of the Cold War. As such, the practice was viewed as a critical aspect of America's national security policy. Hixson argued that the turning point of American policy occurred following the 1956 revolutions in Poland and Hungary, whereby Radio Free Europe controversially encouraged citizens to continue fighting and implied that help was on the way. In the aftermath of the revolution, Americans turned from overt psychological warfare to more subtle cultural infiltration as a means of winning over the inhabitants of Soviet Bloc countries. Hixson's final chapter on the American National Exhibition in Moscow is portrayed as the triumph of American foreign policy, as countless Russian citizens eagerly viewed such modern American innovations as Pepsi-Cola, color television, and a life-sized, fully equipped American kitchen.²⁹ A similar tone can be found in Arch Puddington's work, *Broadcasting Freedom: The Cold War Triumph of Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty*, which describes how these "independent" radio stations helped to peaceably bring an end to the Cold War. The very title reflects how Puddington, himself a former Radio Free Europe employee, esteemed the value of radio propaganda as a weapon on the Cold War front.³⁰ Both Hixson and Puddington provide

²⁹ Walter L. Hixson, *Parting the Curtain: Propaganda, Culture, and the Cold War, 1945-61* (Basingstoke: MacMillan, 1997). Similar themes are explored in Yale Richmond, *Cultural Exchange and the Cold War: Raising the Iron Curtain* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003).

³⁰ Arch Puddington, *Broadcasting Freedom: The Cold War Triumph of Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2003).

valuable insight into the way the West viewed its mission in Eastern Europe; however, they do not delve deeply into the way Soviet Bloc societies viewed this mission. In contrast to discussions of American-style mass culture in Western Europe, where authors portray a dialogue between two societies, studies of Eastern Europe portray a stark world of restrictive governments and passively receptive citizens who were eager to sample the consumer delights that were entirely lacking in their own countries. Such rhetoric speaks of the continued portrayal of a stark East-West divide: items that were symbolic of the West, such as modern consumer goods, were thought not to exist in the East, which in classical Cold War dialogue served as a foil for Western values.³¹ These depictions do not represent the reality that existed for the two Cold War camps, particularly with regard to state socialist populations. Indeed, one article on popular reception of the American Exhibition argued that the Soviet audience was much less avidly impressed by the American offerings than Hixson implied. As an example, the study points to an entry in the exhibition's visiting book, in which one woman expressed indigence at the American showcase, noting, "I think it was unnecessary to ship a frigidaire that cost more than ours across the ocean. One would expect greater scope and more courage from such a country as the USA. Yet, what are we being shown—pots and kettles, frying pans and shoes, as if we were savages."³² More research is necessary to expand the discussion of the influence and reception of mass culture in Soviet Bloc countries, both by the government and its citizens.

Popular Culture

Although consumption in Soviet Bloc continues to be a popular source of research for many scholars, studies of popular culture have been published with less frequency. Traditional

³¹ Patrick Major and Rana Mitter, "East is East and West is West? Toward a Comparative Socio-Cultural History of the Cold War," *Cold War History* 4 no. 1 (2003): 1-22, doi: 10.1080/14682740312331391714.

³² Susan E. Reid, "Who Will Beat Whom? Soviet Popular Reception of the American National Exhibition in Moscow, 1959," *Kritika*, 9 no. 4 (2008): 895, doi:10.1353/kri.0.0030.

literature on culture for this region often focuses on the sharp distinction between the “official” culture espoused by the government and the more “authentic” culture that was circulated by the underground as *samizdat*.³³ The former is pure manipulation, the latter a genuine expression of popular opinion. Further, because official channels necessarily had control over the mass media, there was little opportunity for the creation of authentic mass cultural products.³⁴ Several studies have challenged this portrayal of popular culture, and have argued that much of the officially produced “mass culture” was actually quite popular with state socialist citizens. In his book, Richard Stiles traces the evolution of Russian popular culture in the twentieth century. In his introduction, Stiles argued against the traditional belief that only underground culture expressed genuine public sentiment and that official culture was automatically inauthentic.³⁵ Stiles’s thesis is compelling and his book aptly covers the culture of several disparate periods; however, his main argument is often lost in his analysis. In his chapter on the Khrushchev Thaw, for example, Stiles portrays the unofficial music of guitar poets as a balm for the stilted official culture of the era.³⁶ Several more recent studies have effectively examined state socialist mass media in a way that demonstrated its official origins as well as its popularity. In her study, *The Greengrocer and His TV*, Paulina Bren examines the influence of television on the Czechoslovak population following the Prague Spring. During this period, television was used as an instrument for the government’s policy of normalization, which advocated a more private form of “self-

³³ George Saunders, *Samizdat: Voices of the Soviet Opposition* (New York: Monad Press, 1974). See also Marketa Goetz-Stankiewicz, *Twenty Years of Czechoslovak Underground Writing* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1992). In his forward to the book, Timothy Garton Ash dubbed it as an “excellent selection from the work of the best – and therefore banned – writers, critics, and philosophers,” xiii.

³⁴ Gerald Stanton Smith, *Songs to Seven Strings: Russian Guitar Poetry and Soviet "Mass Song"* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press), 92.

³⁵ Richard Sites, *Russian Popular Culture: Entertainment and Society Since 1900* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 1-8.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 123-47.

actualization.” Television offered an arena for the government to promote a more private form of state socialism for the “citizen viewer,” and many Czechoslovak citizens took advantage of the government’s less intrusive methods of encouraging socialism. Indeed, Bren’s reference to the greengrocer is a nod to the greengrocer in Havel’s “The Power of the Powerless,” who unthinkingly places a communist slogan in his shop window. While Havel exhorts the hapless greengrocer to abandon his complacency and “live in truth,” Bren argues that in the era of late socialism, Czechoslovak citizens were content to live in their private, depoliticized spheres and did not necessarily believe in Havel’s call for revolution.³⁷ In her study of Soviet mass media, Kristen Roth-Ey chronicles the way in which the Soviet Union began to produce products of mass culture that increasingly resembled that of the capitalist West. Unlike Western Europe, however, Soviet officials were unable to compromise on their criticism of American-style culture, nor would they incorporate mass culture into their broader cultural ideal. Thus the government’s increased production of mass culture was representative of the Soviet government’s retreat from the ideals of socialism and its “radiant future” into a greater focus on everyday life.³⁸

Soviet Bloc governments were not the only socialists who were grappling with popular culture and its implications. As mass-produced culture became an overt representation of a more modern society, Marxist theorists in the West increasingly weighed in on the influence of mass culture on everyday citizens in capitalist societies. On the study of popular culture, the neo-Marxist Frankfurt School is particularly notable. Members of this school, including Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer, and Herbert Marcuse, published a number of works that made

³⁷ Paulina Bren, *The Greengrocer and His TV: The Culture of Communism after the 1968 Prague Spring* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010).

³⁸ Kristen Roth-Ey, *Moscow Prime Time: How the Soviet Union Built the Media Empire that Lost the Cultural Cold War* (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2011).

important contributions to theory on popular culture. In their book, Adorno and Horkheimer created the concept of the “cultural industry,” which was responsible for reproducing unchallenging culture that served to reinforce the status quo. “Culture today is infecting itself with sameness,” argued Adorno and Horkheimer, “Film, radio, and magazines form a system. Each branch of culture is unanimous within itself and all are unanimous together.”³⁹ They argued further, “The standardized forms, it is claimed, were originally derived from the needs of the consumers: that is why they are accepted with such little resistance. In reality, a cycle of manipulation and retroactive need is unifying the system ever more tightly.”⁴⁰ The theorists argued that consuming the unending sameness of the products produced by the cultural industry dulled the worker’s imagination and thus reinforced the existing social structure. Adorno’s essay on popular music further expands upon the idea that popular culture only served to enforce the dominance of capitalism. As he argued, “The frame of mind to which popular music originally appealed, on which it feeds, and which it perpetually reinforces, is simultaneously one of distraction and inattention. Listeners are distracted from the demands of reality by entertainment which does not demand attention either.”⁴¹ Adorno argued that workers are so deflated by working within the capitalist system that they search for a way to escape from everyday life that doesn’t require the effort needed to consume traditional forms of “high” culture. “To escape boredom and avoid effort are incompatible,” Adorno suggested, “Hence the reproduction of the

³⁹ Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 94.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 95.

⁴¹ Theodor W. Adorno, “On Popular Culture [With the Assistance of George Simpson,” in *Essays on Music*, introduction, commentary, and notes by Richard Leppert, new translations by Susan H. Gillespie (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 458.

very attitude from which escape is sought.”⁴² In contrast to traditional, high culture, which aspires to transform society and encourage imagination, the Frankfurt school adherents argued that the cultural industry merely provided diversion and served to reinforce existing mechanisms. Authenticity is not achieved in the difference between “popular” and “official” but in the distinction between “high” and “low.”

As Roth-Ey and Bren describe, throughout the 1960s the Hungarian government increasingly focused on everyday socialism as opposed to relying solely on promises of glories yet to come. However, if the Soviet government of Roth-Ey’s study conceptualized American-style mass culture in a way that mirrors that of the Frankfurt School, I argue that the Kádár government’s attitude toward this type of culture is more complex. Certainly, the Hungarian media produced scathing reports on the role of mass culture in the West that would rival that of any Frankfurt School theorist, and the long-term goal of culture was to reflect a higher level of taste within the population; however, in Hungary, the government argued that popular culture was a necessary aspect of culture, which met the demands of a population whose tastes were being developed in a transitional stage of socialism. As one Hungarian Politburo member argued, “Communists cannot display impatience – this will solve nothing. We cannot run ahead and separate ourselves from the masses – we must see that the most read Hungarian writer is still [the romantic novelist Mór] Jókai.”⁴³ As with consumption in general, the government portrayed consuming popular culture, particularly Hungarian variants, as appropriate when carried out

⁴² Ibid., 459. Adorno wrote several essays connecting jazz to this type of social conformity, and was not always well received. Indeed, historian Eric Hobsbawm describes Adorno’s essays as “some of the stupidest pages ever written about jazz.” See Eric Hobsbawm, *The Jazz Scene* (New York: Pantheon, 1993), 300.

⁴³ “Részlet Szirmai István Ideológiai és kulturális életünk időszerű kérdései című előadásából” [Portions of István Szirmai’s Speech Entitled “Timely Questions of Our Ideological and Cultural Life”], in Gergő Bendegúz Cseh et al., eds., *Zárt, Bizalmas, Számozott: Irodalom-, Sajtó-, és Tájékoztatáspolitikai, 1962-1979 (Documentumok)* [Closed, Confidential, Numbered: Literature, Press, and Information Policy, 1962-1979 (Documents)], Vol 2 (Budapest: Osiris Kiadó, 2004), 359.

within a socialist framework. Because culture and its producers had an ever diminishing role in shaping ideology, the government was able to argue that what was socialist about popular culture was not the product itself, but the way in which it was consumed and the role that it played in society. In the West it served to reinforce the capitalist system; in Hungary, it was light entertainment for a society engaged in building socialism, a symbol of the government's increased focus on consumer demand, and a testament to young people's search for something new. This was indicative of the government's larger, more pragmatic policies, which strove to portray state socialism in a more expansive manner. It also reflected the party's desires to present a form of socialist modernity that would incorporate aspects of mass consumption and culture while theoretically adhering to socialist principles. Popular culture was thus portrayed not as a retreat from socialism's promise of a better future, but a tool in securing it.

Youth Culture

After the Second World War, young people took on a more visible, more separated, and, for the adult generation, a more worrying role in society. While scholars have always examined adolescence with some degree of consternation, it is only during the war that the word "teenager" first appeared in print. As an article in *The New Yorker* argued, "Adolescents are those in transit from puberty to maturity, a journey that is much larger than people realize... But now we also have something quite different; namely, teenagers – not just children growing into adults but a sharply differentiated part of the population."⁴⁴ One historian noted that the 1960s were characterized by "the rise of the unprecedented influence of young people, most clearly expressed in the formation of a potent youth culture. Inextricably bound in with the forces of commercialism, this youth culture had a steadily increasing impact on the rest of society,

⁴⁴ Dwight Macdonald, "Profiles: A Caste, a Culture, A Market – I," *The New Yorker*, November 22, 1958, 57.

dictating taste in fashion, music, and popular culture generally.”⁴⁵ During the 1960s, young people were the de facto representatives of popular culture, and were counted among its primary consumers. The increased prominence of young people and their influence in popular culture met with no little resistance from the adult generation. This resistance can be easily seen in one of the linchpins of youth culture: rock music. As an article in *The New Yorker* stated, “Above all, teenagers rock ‘n’ roll – the very term is unsettling. Here teenism reaches its climax, or its nadir – at any rate, its least inhibited expression. Here one may observe in their purist form the teenagers’ defiance of adult control, their dominance of certain markets, their tendency to set themselves up as a caste, and the tribal rituals and special dialects they have evolved.”⁴⁶ Adults feared what they saw as the delinquency of youth subcultures, which were seemingly more prominent than before. In his work on the Mods and Rockers, two clashing youth subcultures in Britain, Stanley Cohen described what he termed “moral panic:”

Societies appear to be subject, every now and then, to periods of moral panic. A condition, episode, person or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests; its nature is presented in a stylized and stereotypical fashion by the mass media; the moral barricades are manned by editors, bishops, politicians and other right-thinking people; socially accredited experts pronounce their diagnoses and solutions; ways of coping are evolved or (more often) resorted to; the condition then disappears, submerges or deteriorates and becomes more visible... One of the most recurrent types of moral panic in Britain since the war has been associated with the emergence of various forms of youth culture originally almost exclusively working class, but often recently middle class or student based) whose behaviour is deviant or delinquent.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Arthur Marwick, “Youth Culture and the Cultural Revolution,” in Axel Schildt and Detlef Siegfried, *Between Marx and Coca-Cola: Youth Cultures in Changing European Societies, 1960-1980* (New York: Bergham Books, 2006), 44.

⁴⁶ Dwight Macdonald, “Profiles: A Caste, a Culture, A Market – II,” *The New Yorker*, November 29, 1958, 91.

⁴⁷ Stanley Cohen, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics: The Creation of the Mods and Rockers*, 3rd ed. (London: Routledge, 2002),

The reaction to youth culture and subculture was not limited to the West. As Uta Poiger described, both East and West Germans reacted negatively to the teenage rebels known as the *Halbstarke*, the difference being that in the West, this reaction occurred primarily among social scientists, while in East Germany, youth behavior was more of a state matter.⁴⁸

Scholars have attributed the post-war rise of young people's visibility and distinction to a variety of factors. Certainly by the mid-1960s, the baby boom that had occurred directly after the war increased the sheer number of young people during this era. Even in Hungary, which by the early 1960s had the lowest birthrate in Europe, an increase in births characterized the years immediately following Second World War. Similarly, the rise in mass media and technology facilitated the creation, reproduction, and dissemination of all types of culture, and young people were often among the first to take advantage of the new forms of entertainment that were being offered. However, other factors played a role in young people's increased distinction from the adult generations. In an influential study on American teenagers, Thomas Hine pointed to the increase in high school education as one of the primary factors of the creation of a distinct youth culture. As Hine described, "What was new about the idea of the teenager at the time the word first appeared during World War II was the assumption that all young people, regardless of their class, location, or ethnicity, should have essentially the same experience, spent with people exactly their age, in an environment defined by high school and pop culture."⁴⁹ Hine argued that in America, young people who were traditionally classified in terms of size or whether or not they had gone through puberty were increasingly grouped by age and were more frequently attending high schools where they shared similar experiences with their peers. In Hungary too,

⁴⁸ Poiger, 106-136.

⁴⁹ Thomas Hine, *The Rise and Fall of the American Teenager* (New York: Perennial, 2000), 11.

the restructuring of the education system led to the growth of young people enrolled in all levels of education during this period, especially in urban populations.⁵⁰ Increased connection to peer groups helped facilitate the creation of a youth culture that was significantly different from that of the adults.

During the post-war period, young people were also increasingly distinguished by their potential as consumers. In 1958, *The New Yorker* published a two-part article profiling Eugene Gilbert, a man who had established a research firm intended to assist companies in selling to the teenage market. The article stated, “There is now a special youth market, and people with things to sell had better become aware of it.”⁵¹ The rising youth market was a factor of young people’s increased purchasing power, but also of the fact that young people tended to consume more than previous generations. Older generations still had memories of the interwar depression and the hardships of the Second World War; however, by the 1960s, young people were too young to remember these periods and were thus more apt to spend their own money and that of their parents on consumer goods.⁵² Entrepreneurs, quick to capitalize on profit-making activities, began to produce and market goods solely for the youth market. One study on youth culture attributed a large portion of the unprecedented youth influence to “the spending power of the overwhelming majority in a new market entirely devised with them in mind, and through their being, in part at least, arbiters of taste in that market.”⁵³ Hungarian economists, too, saw the potential of youth consumption. In 1964, an article in a Hungarian newspaper noted, “The

⁵⁰ Gábor Gyányi, György, Kövér, and Tibor Valuch, eds., *Social History of Hungary from the Reform Era to the End of the Twentieth Century*, trans. Mario Fenyo (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 572-575

⁵¹ Macdonald (November 22), 57.

⁵² Schildt and Siegfried, 13-14.

⁵³ Marwick, 43.

purchasing of young people, who are either dependent on their parents or wage earners themselves, is *significant enough because of its volume*, but perhaps even more important is its dynamism, in which this group of buyers is influenced by the most modern products and the most fashionable selections.” The report noted that young people spent twenty-two billion forints per year on goods, and accounted for 25% of the food, hospitality, and clothing sales.⁵⁴ Youth culture thus represented a paradox: on one hand, it was associated with a group that was increasingly distinguishing itself from the older generations and forming its own culture. On the other, the unique quality of youth culture that emerged during the 1960s was in large part a product of the very system young people sought to distance themselves from.

Discussions of young people in state socialism often focus on the youth subcultures that were often the source of consternation of Soviet Bloc governments. Several recent studies on East and West Germany describe the way in which young men formed a hyper-masculine society in reaction to both official culture and that of their parents.⁵⁵ Another recent essay discusses the Latvian hippie movement, which stood counter to official Soviet culture and sought to represent Latvian identity.⁵⁶ Hungarian historian Sándor Horváth examines Hungarian youth subculture primarily through the lens of the Great Tree Gang, a Budapest group that often clashed with police. Horváth argues that the government’s construction of the youth identity helped to define how this subculture behaved and expressed their autonomy.⁵⁷ Certainly scholarship on youth subcultures in this region is an important contribution; however, it gives the impression that such

⁵⁴ T.A., “Modern fogyasztó” [Modern Consumer], *Figyelő*, December 16, 1964.

⁵⁵ Mark Fenmore, *Sex, Thugs and Rock ‘n’ Roll: Teenage Rebels in Cold-War East Germany* (London: Berghahn Books, 2007); Poiger (2000)

⁵⁶ Mark Allen Svede, “All You Need is Lovebeads: Latvia’s Hippies Undress for Success,” in Crowley and Reid (2000), 189-208.

⁵⁷ Sándor Horváth, *Kádár gyermekei: Ifjúsági lázadás a hatvanas években* [Kádár’s Children: Youth Rebellion in the 1960s] (Budapest: Nyitott Könyvműhely, 2009). Henceforth Horváth (2009a)

cultures were more predominant and influential than they actually were, and furthers the notion that “genuine” youth culture could only exist within the realm of the unofficial. Several studies have emerged that have countered this idea. Alexei Yurchak’s study on late socialism in the Soviet Union notes that only a small portion of Soviet youth identified with the government’s depiction of delinquent behavior. While they wore jeans and listened to Western music, they did not consider themselves to be among exaggerated, selfish youth that were often depicted in the Soviet Press.⁵⁸ A similar study argues that the majority of young people in the Soviet Union participated in and even enjoyed many officially sponsored events, counteracting the idea that “official” culture necessarily meant stilted ideological sessions.⁵⁹ In Hungary, the cultural and economic changes that occurred during the 1960s meant that youth culture could exist in a way that was not officially supported by the Hungarian government, but also not officially banned. This led to the creation of a vibrant youth culture that few have written about.

Chapter Breakdown

My dissertation is organized into five chapters, which aim to contribute to the research described above. In chapter one, I discuss the early reforms of the Kádár government, from 1956 to the early years of the 1960s. Following the revolution, the Kádár government declared a battle on two fronts: on one side against those leaders of the revolution, and on the other the dogmatists of the Stalinist-era leaders in Hungary. Such a battle helped to situate the government within a more pragmatic ideology, one that was particularly conscious of securing popular support. It is during this period that many of the main ideological tenets of the newly-formed MSZMP were

⁵⁸ Alexei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until it Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 158-206.

⁵⁹ Gleb Tsipursky, “Pleasure, Power, and the Pursuit of Communism: Soviet Youth and State-Sponsored Popular Culture During the Early Cold War, 1945-1968” (PhD diss., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2011), Proquest (3477511).

put in place, although many of these reforms could not be felt until the early 1960s. Nonetheless, the cultural, economic (particularly agricultural), and international reforms represented a dramatic shift from the previous era of state socialism, a shift exemplified by Kádár's maxim, "he who is not against us is with us." Chapter two discusses MSZMP's policies to improve consumption and living standards in Hungary. Originally a part of Khrushchev's desire to overtake the West in standard of living, the government increasingly focused on rationalizing the economy and connecting production more closely with consumption, and instituted a number of piecemeal reforms throughout the decade to counteract many of the endemic failures of the centrally planned economy. The culmination of these reforms, the New Economic Mechanism, was implemented in 1968 and strove to give more autonomy to producers and sellers, using profit incentives to ensure a better connection between supply and demand. Such a connection was highlighted by the highly-advertised "Competition for the Consumer," which promised a transformation of the economy from a sellers market to a buyers market that would rely evermore on consumer demand. During this period, selling and advertising became symbols of the increased focus on consumption, and on meeting the needs of Hungarian buyers. Chapter three discusses the cultural reforms that occurred during this period. As culture became increasingly decoupled from ideology, the government argued that cultural products would need to be more responsive to economic forces. Culture did not escape the forces of the New Economic Mechanism, and profit was to be an incentive for the cultural producers as well, albeit in a more limited way. Because culture was more responsible to public demand, the government highlighted the importance of improving the taste of Hungarian citizens, but contended that such improvements would be gradual, and many in the Hungarian media argued for the creation of a Hungarian popular culture that would bridge the divide between elite and mass culture. Such a

creation was considered especially necessary to counteract Western influence as more Hungarians were able to travel to the West, and peaceful coexistence led to increased cultural exchange with Western countries.

My fourth and fifth chapters deal with Hungarian youth culture. Chapter four looks at the rise of various types of youth culture in Hungary during the 1960s. During this period the official culture of the Communist Youth League (KISZ) began to make efforts to ensure that all Hungarian youth would find a place within the organization's activities, whether or not they were members of KISZ. Several of their activities, for example the organization of concerts at Youth Park, were extremely popular with a broad spectrum of Hungarian youth, including subcultures, who, unable or unwilling to go into the park, nonetheless loitered outside in order to hear the music that was being played. In the media, youth subcultures were portrayed as participating in youth activities in a way that only seemed rebellious but instead maintained existing mechanisms of society. For the majority of youth who were neither KISZ adherents nor members of a subculture, the government adopted a tolerant attitude, suggesting that much of youth culture could be considered socialist as long as it was symbolic of the youth's desire for something new, something they would eventually find within socialist society. My fifth chapter traces the discourse that surrounded Hungarian beat music, arguing that beat was not a political movement but a powerful youth culture, and as such occupied the paradoxical position of being independent from, while at the same time relying on, the existing society. In an attempt to turn young people away from Western music, the Hungarian government actively sought to improve the quality of Hungarian dance music, organizing festivals and producing albums that met the demands of Hungarian youth for their own type of music. For their part, Hungarian musicians often couched political messages between their lyrics, while at the same time participating in

music festivals, producing albums through the state-owned record company, and adopting attitudes about taste that often reflected those of the government. Beat music was extremely popular among Hungarian youth, who felt that this music expressed their generation and was an integral aspect of their shared experience. My dissertation seeks to provide nuance to the depiction of popular culture in state socialist countries: in Hungary, popular culture was portrayed, like consumption itself, as consistent with the socialist ideal of creating a modern socialist society.

Chapter 1

Gentlemen and Comrades

In 1968, the production *Gentlemen and Comrades* (*Urak és Elvtársak*), a sketch comedy show written by Tibor Róna and Károly Litványni, premiered at the Vidám Színpad in Budapest. In one sketch, a man from Budapest dies and goes to heaven where he is greeted by Saint Peter and two gates, one marked “Gentlemen” and the other “Comrades.” The man must decide which gate to go through. If he was a good socialist, he must go through the gate marked “Comrades”; if he had lived the life of an exemplary gentleman, he must go through the gate marked “Gentlemen.” The problem is inherently clear: one cannot be a good gentleman and a good comrade at the same time. Yet the man cannot decide which gate to go through. He exclaims to Saint Peter, “I was a comrade, but in a gentlemanly manner!”¹ While Saint Peter cannot understand his reservations, the man cannot decide, and St. Peter sends him back to Hungary until he and the other citizens of Budapest can identify which category they belong to. After asking if St. Peter had thought his declaration through and receiving a reply in the affirmative, the man notes, “Then we will have a long life on earth.”² In a monologue, the emcee discusses the Hungarian man’s problem in more detail:

How to build socialism in a capitalist environment – that we know. How to build socialism in a socialist environment – that we also know. How to build socialism in an environment with both groups – we know that too. But how is it possible to build socialism in a small country like ours, when on one side there are capitalists, on another socialists, and on another those who have no idea who they are – in their entire lives neither the gentleman nor the comrades expected this development!³

¹ Tibor Róna and Károly Litványni, “Urak vagy elvtársak” [Gentlemen or Comrades], in *Urak és elvtársak* [Gentlemen and Comrades] (Budapest: Szépirodalmi Könyvkiadó, 1970), 141.

² *Ibid.*, 146.

³ “Urak és elvtársak” [Gentlemen and Comrades], in Róna and Litványni, 148.

In the aftermath of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution, the Kádár government focused on creating a socialist state that would encompass the largest segment of Hungarian society: those who considered themselves neither comrades nor gentlemen. Throughout the 1960s, the Hungarian government expanded and redefined what was required to be a “builder of socialism,” making it easier for non-party members to contribute to cultural, political, and economic growth.

In this chapter, I analyze the years immediately following the 1956 Hungarian Revolution, particularly the way in which the newly installed Hungarian government began to usher in a new era that was distinctly different from Hungary’s Stalinist period in the early 1950s. Following the revolution, the pragmatic Kádár government distanced itself from extreme political viewpoints and began to implement specific strategies that significantly increased the manner in which Hungarian citizens who were not members of the socialist party could participate in official life. Making use of the lessons of 1956 and grounding themselves in the more liberal atmosphere of Khrushchev’s Thaw, the Hungarian government created policies that incorporated gray areas and concessions, allowing for a greater plurality of viewpoints that were nonetheless firmly embedded within state socialism. In the immediate aftermath of the revolution, these policies were essential in normalizing relations within and outside of Hungary’s borders, and laying the foundation for broader, more extensive reforms that would continue to take shape throughout the 1960s.

The Aftermath of 1956

According to cultural minister György Aczél, when Kádár arrived with Soviet tanks at the Hungarian parliament building on November 7, 1956, not even his wife was happy to see him. Mária Kádár felt that the job that Kádár was tasked with was much better suited to the

Hungarian Stalinist leader, Mátyás Rákosi, and his group of hard line supporters.⁴ Indeed, Kádár's involvement in crushing the Hungarian Revolution and the brutal reprisals that followed remains one of the most controversial aspects of his thirty-two year term as General Secretary of the newly constituted Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party.⁵ Numerous dismissals, internments, arrests, and hangings characterized the period immediately following the revolution, especially between April 1957 and spring 1959.⁶ All told, in a country of less than 10 million, more than 100,000 people were affected by the reprisals,⁷ and roughly 200,000 people left the country.⁸ In June of 1958, Imre Nagy, the leader of the revolution, was hanged along with several leading members of his government. Nagy's execution would long represent the excesses of the Hungarian communist regime in the eyes of many Hungarians. However, the aftermath of the revolution also saw developments that would determine the new course of state socialism in Hungary under Kádár. The population of Hungary, which had endured half a century of calls to arms,⁹ had grown weary of great causes and longed for a return to normalcy.¹⁰ As many of those poised to lead the opposition had either left the country or were facing trial, large-scale resistance to the communist government from within Hungary became increasingly improbable only a few

⁴ Indeed, as Aczél recounts, the first words Mária spoke to Kádár upon his arrival to the Hungarian Parliament building were "You should have left this shit to Rákosi's lot. It shouldn't be you doing this." Roger Gough, *A Good Comrade: János Kádár, Communism, and Hungary* (New York: I.B. Taurus and Co Ltd, 2006), 102.

⁵ The ruling communist party, the Hungarian Workers' Party, was dissolved during the revolution, when Kádár was still a member of Nagy's revolutionary government. In November, Kádár decided to keep the new name of the party, effectively distancing himself from Rákosi and his group.

⁶ The last hanging took place in the summer of 1961.

⁷ Roughly 22,000 people were sentenced to prison, 13,000 people sent to internment camps, and 229 were sentenced to death as a direct result of their participation in the revolution.

⁸ Csaba Békés, Malcolm Byrne, and János M. Rainer, eds., *The 1956 Hungarian Revolution: A History in Documents* (Budapest: CEU Press, 2002), 375.

⁹ In the period between 1906 and 1956, Hungary had seen two world wars, a Red Terror (1919), a White Terror (1919-1921), a Soviet occupation, and a revolution.

¹⁰ Békés, Byrne, and Rainer, 369.

months after the Soviet tanks arrived in Budapest. It had also become clear that the Hungarians could not depend on assistance from the West. During the revolution, the majority of Hungarians had assumed that they would receive some sort of assistance from the United States.¹¹

Broadcasts from Radio Free Europe (RFE) substantiated these assumptions, whereby many RFE broadcasters encouraged Hungarians to continue to fight and implied (or did little to counteract the implication) that help from the West was forthcoming.¹² When help didn't arrive, and subsequent information from the West indicated an unwillingness to intervene, Hungarians recognized the importance of reconciling themselves to the Kádár government, which had become the only path to a relatively normal existence.

The revolution also had a profound effect on the new Hungarian government. Shaken by the events of the revolution, spurned by the West, and struggling to maintain a tenuous relationship with Soviet leadership,¹³ Kádár recognized the need to earn support from the Hungarian citizenry in order to reinforce his authority. Working to improve the standard of living for everyday Hungarians, often characterized by increased consumption and relative freedoms, became a cornerstone of the post-1956 Hungarian socialist government's struggle to gain legitimacy.¹⁴ On December 5, 1956, MSZMP's Provisional Central Committee issued an important resolution that is often highlighted as one of the first defining documents of the Kádár era. The resolution promised to redefine the role of central planning and asserted the conviction

¹¹ Charles Gati, *Failed Illusions: Moscow, Washington, Budapest, and the 1956 Hungarian Revolt* (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press; Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), 207

¹² "Policy Review of Voice for Free Hungary Programming, October 23-November 23, 1956," in Békés, Byrne, and Rainer, 464-484.

¹³ Molotov and the more dogmatic leaders of the Soviet Union were in favor of returning Rákosi's group to power and saw Kádár as being too liberal. Indeed, the decision to put Kádár in power over the more hard-line Münnich was in part a concession to Tito, whom Molotov viewed unfavorably.

¹⁴ "Increased standard of living" became so ubiquitous within Hungarian society that it turned into a joke: "Question: What is the standard of living in Hungary? Answer: The standard of living is always rising."

that “The main concern of our economic policy shall be to make the gradual increase in the worker’s standard of living the primary consideration of national income distribution and economic investment plans.”¹⁵ The resolution put political emphasis on the need for large-scale economic reforms that were deemed necessary to increase living standards. To that end, Kádár appointed an economic committee led by István Varga, whose May 1957 proposal offered comprehensive reform, calling for control of the economy through economic tools such as price reform rather than central planning.¹⁶ The timing was inopportune for such a comprehensive reform proposal. On May 1, 1957, a large crowd assembled at Heroes’ Square for the May Day celebrations, a symbol for Kádár that the worst of public opposition to his leadership was over.¹⁷ At the same time, many of the far-left elements in the Hungarian communist party were staging a comeback with the support of those Soviet leaders who had objected to Kádár’s appointment. These left conservatives consistently attempted to influence the Kádár government’s policies and labeled the Varga Committee’s proposal as “economic revisionism.”¹⁸ With a political battle on the horizon and the economy consolidating faster than had been expected, the inexperienced Kádár government abandoned comprehensive economic reform in favor of solutions that focused on the symptomatic problems of the Hungarian system, rather than the underlying cause. Nonetheless, the Varga Committee represented a shift in emphasis in Hungarian policy that was

¹⁵ Karola Nemethné Vágyi, and Levente Sipos, eds., *A Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt ideiglenes vezető testületeinek jegyzőkönyvei I. Kötet: 1956. november 11 – 1957. január 14.* [Minutes of the Hungarian Socialist Workers’ Party Provisional Leadership Bodies, Volume I: November 11, 1956 – January 14, 1957] (Budapest: Interart, 1993), 245.

¹⁶ Ivan T. Berend, *The Hungarian Economic Reforms 1954-1988* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 45-51.

¹⁷ In his office, Kádár kept a photograph of the event, which he considered to be of great personal and political importance. László Gyurkó, “Introductory Biography,” trans. György Bánkai and Mária Végh in Janos Kádár, *János Kádár: Selected Speeches and Interviews*, ed. Robert Maxwell, trans. György Bánkai et al. (Elmsford: Pergamon Press, Inc., 1985), 107.

¹⁸ Berend, 62-78.

aimed at improving the Hungarian standard of living and gaining the party legitimacy with the Hungarian population. Many of the Varga Commission's suggestions would later be incorporated into the comprehensive economic reforms that occurred in Hungary during the second half of the 1960s.

Two Fronts: The Struggle Against Stalinism

Throughout the Soviet Bloc, the impetus for de-Stalinization began with Khrushchev's "Secret Speech"¹⁹ in 1956, which marked a decided shift in Soviet policy, away from the personality cults that had surrounded Stalin and his counterparts in the Soviet Bloc. However, even following his address, Khrushchev still fought the more dogmatic leaders of the Soviet party until June 1957, when Khrushchev won a decisive victory against the hard-line opposition led by Molotov, a staunch supporter of Stalin, and his allies.²⁰ This gave Khrushchev the ability to expand his more reform-oriented policies and foster a more balanced, though still noticeably unequal, relationship with the Soviet Bloc countries. It also accelerated the pace of de-Stalinization and ushered in a more permissive period throughout Eastern Europe that was known as Khrushchev's Thaw. In Hungary during the late 1950s and early 1960s, the Soviet leadership bolstered Kádár's transitional policies in recognition of Kádár's role in the repression of the Hungarian revolution, and of his unwavering allegiance to the Soviet Union. Despite opposition from the more hard line members, the Soviet Central Committee threw its support behind Kádár in order to present a united front as the Hungarian government began to

¹⁹ In his opening address to the Twentieth Party Congress, Khrushchev denounced many of Stalin's actions, including the purges and the personality cult that had surrounded the former Soviet leader. The speech was delivered during a closed session; however, within a month, word of the speech's content had reached the Soviet Bloc and even the West. Because the content of the speech was theoretically not intended for anyone but Soviet leadership, it was dubbed the "Secret Speech."

²⁰ See for example "CPSU Central Committee Plenum Transcript from June 24, 1957" in Békés, Byrne, and Rainer, 527-531.

consolidate its power. As Khrushchev began to consolidate his own power in the Soviet government, Kádár's position was strengthened by his friendship with Khrushchev, which was shared by their wives. Khrushchev had somewhat of a paternal relationship with Kádár, and once remarked that Kádár was only a few years older than his son, who had died in the Second World War. For his part, Kádár stated that Khrushchev's Secret Speech served as the basis for his leadership.²¹ As Khrushchev's power grew, so too did Kádár's ability to implement his own reform-minded policies in Hungary.

Indeed, at the same time that Khrushchev was struggling against Molotov and his associates, Kádár had begun to deal with his own Hungarian dogmatists. Though the party characterized the revolution as a "counterrevolution" against socialism, MSZMP also criticized the role of the Rákosi government, suggesting that its excesses fueled counterrevolutionary sentiment. Almost immediately following the revolution, Kádár defined his own "battle on two fronts,"²² arguing that MSZMP needed to struggle against Nagy's revisionists on one side and Rákosi's dogmatists on the other. Rákosi, Gerő²³ and many influential leaders of the now defunct Hungarian Workers' Party (MDP) were in the Soviet Union, and were eager to return home with support from their hard-line counterparts in the Soviet Union. Molotov and his group were suspicious of Kádár, and warned that his actions of distancing himself from the Rákosi group implied that Kádár was planning to "go the route of Yugoslavia."²⁴ However, in a November 6 meeting of the Soviet Central Committee, Khrushchev and his coterie threw their support behind

²¹ Gough, 146-147.

²² The concept of a two front battle was not Kádár's invention: Gomułka espoused similar rhetoric after the revolution in Poland. However, Kádár continued to champion this idea even after Moscow advocated for a more one-sided approach against revisionism. Raymond Taras, *Ideology in a Socialist State: Poland 1956-1983* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 1984), 52.

²³ The First Party Secretary of MDP at the time of the revolution.

²⁴ Békés, Byrne, and Rainer, 385.

Kádár.²⁵ This support is reflected in the Provisional Central Committee's December 5 resolution, which blamed both Rákosi and Nagy for the events of the revolution, and accused the Rákosi clique of committing serious errors and even crimes.²⁶ During a Provisional Central Committee meeting on February 12, 1957, Kádár faced questions regarding the efficacy of battling on two fronts. Some of the more conservative party members preferred to concentrate solely on punishing those who had participated in the revolution. Kádár was also informed that many people were asking questions about the dissolution of MDP and maintaining the name MSZMP, which had been established during the revolution.²⁷ Despite these reservations, the Provisional Central Committee passed another resolution on February 25 that stated that Rákosi and Gerő could not return to the Hungary for five years. Other members of the Rákosi group were not allowed to return for one year.²⁸ In a speech following the resolution, Kádár stated, "The consolidation took place without Rákosi, Gerő, and Zoltán Szántó."²⁹ Experience tells us this is how it must work."³⁰ The decision to keep Rákosi out of Hungary signaled Kádár's intention to continue his two-pronged struggle regardless of what the more conservative opposition had expressed.

²⁵ "Notes from the CPSU Central Committee Presidium Meeting Reflecting a CPSU Leadership Split, November 6, 1956" in Békés, Byrne, and Rainer, 393.

²⁶ Vági and Sipos, 239.

²⁷ Karola Némethné Vági and Károly Urbán, eds., *A Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt ideiglenes vezető testületeinek jegyzőkönyvei II. Kötet: 1957. január 25 – 1957. április 2.* [Minutes of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party provisional leadership bodies, Volume II: January 25, 1957 – April 2, 1957] (Budapest: Interart, 1993), 114-121.

²⁸ Vági and Urbán, 170-172.

²⁹ Zoltán Szántó was a member of Nagy's inner circle, who was sent along with Nagy to Romania to await trial. He wrote a letter to Kádár asking to return to Hungary, a request that was granted in autumn of 1958 after Szántó produced incriminating evidence against Nagy and his associates.

³⁰ Vági and Urbán, 221.

However, although the newly instated leaders of MSZMP took a relatively rigid stance against Rákosi and higher-ranking members his party, some members of the former leadership were allowed to return home per the February 25 resolution. Among them was József Révai, a key figure of the Rákosi period. Révai was a key ideologue of the Rákosi era, and had served as Minister of Public Education in the early years of the Rákosi government. A shaper of pre-1956 cultural policy, Révai was the only member of the so-called “Muscovite Foursome”³¹ who was allowed to return and to participate in Hungarian political life. Before arriving in Hungary, Révai was also allowed to publish an article in the Hungarian newspaper *Népszabadság* (People’s Freedom),³² which appeared on March 7, 1957. The massive article entitled “Purity of Ideas!” (*Eszmei Tisztaságot!*) spanned over two full pages of text. In the article, Révai spelled out his interpretation of the revolution and its aftermath. Révai criticized the December 5 resolution of the Provisional Central Committee, stating, “Imre Nagy and his group were the true architects and leaders of the October Counterrevolution, and those who gloss over or minimize this fact are making concessions to the counterrevolution and opening the gate to the invasion of counterrevolutionary ideas within the party.” Révai argued that by suggesting Rákosi and his followers played a role in the revolution, the Kádár government was conceding that Nagy and his followers had a reason to revolt, which to Révai was evidence of the revolutionary ideology that still existed within MSZMP.³³ Révai also addressed the mistakes made by the Rákosi group, but suggested that the “battle on two fronts” that the Kádár government espoused (and Révai

³¹ Rákosi, Gerő, Révai and Mihály Farkas. Farkas remained in Hungary and was sentenced to prison in the spring of 1957. He was freed as a result of the partial amnesty of 1961.

³² *Népszabadság* was another product of the post-revolutionary era, having started in November of 1956. It was the successor to the newspaper *Szabad Nép* (Free People), which had been the main newspaper of the pre-revolutionary period.

³³ Révai also cited the fact that *Népszabadság* had only recently (several months after the end of the revolution) started printing the slogan “Workers of the world, unite!” on its front page, and that the Szikra Publishing House retained its revolutionary name, the Kossuth Publishing House.

supported in theory) was in reality a battle on one front – against the Rákosi-Gerő clique. While he recognized the inherent danger of dogmatism and the mistakes of the former government, Révai suggested that the Kádár government was damning Rákosi and his colleagues generally without citing and analyzing specific mistakes or concrete examples. Moreover, because MSZMP government spoke only of the errors of the former leadership, it belittled “those great achievements... the entire Hungarian nation has accomplished in its 12 years under the leadership of the Hungarian Communist Party³⁴ and MDP.”³⁵

Révai’s article prompted an immediate response both within and outside of Hungary. Many Hungarians feared the return of Rákosi and his clique in spite of the February Resolution, and many within MSZMP felt that the article belittled the government’s post-revolutionary achievements and downplayed the mistakes of the Rákosi-Gerő governments. Outside of Hungary, the general consensus in the West was that the article acted as a symbol of the rift between Kádár and the Soviet government, the latter supporting Rákosi. In this sense West argued that the article was a reflection of the internal politics of the Soviet Union, and seemed to foreshadow the return to a more Stalinist approach.³⁶ In March 1957, Kádár and a delegation of Hungarians traveled to Moscow. Upon his return, Kádár announced to the Provisionary Executive Committee that the leaders of the Soviet Union were in agreement with the February Resolution. Indeed, Kádár stated that the Soviet leaders called the former Rákosi leadership “political corpses” and noted, “the Soviet comrades have seriously begun to think there is

³⁴ The Hungarian Communist Party (MKP) was the main communist party in Hungary at the end of the Second World War. In 1943, Kádár dissolved the Communist Party of Hungary (KMP) and created the Peace Party, which was replaced in 1944 with the MKP. In 1948, MKP merged with the Social Democrats to form MDP. Thus Kádár is responsible for dissolving and renaming the communist party in Hungary on two separate occasions.

³⁵ József Révai, “Eszme Tisztaságot!” [Purity of Ideas!], *Népszabadság*, March 7, 1957.

³⁶ Melinda Kalmár, *Ennivaló és hozomány: A kora kádárizmus ideológiája* [Food and Dowry: The Ideology of Early Kádárism] (Budapest: Magvető, 1998), 32-33.

something wrong in Rákosi's head." Kádár also reaffirmed his assertion that Rákosi's return would elicit "a growth of the factions within the party, and in response... this would give birth to the right-wing as well, which would be an extremely dangerous thing for the party in the current period."³⁷ Kádár's description of his meeting with Soviet leaders belied the general consensus in the West that a return to Stalinism in Hungary was imminent. It also reaffirmed Kádár's unwavering dedication to fighting the extremes within MSZMP.

Yet although Kádár maintained his strong opposition to the principles in Révai's article, Révai's position in the Hungarian government continued to grow. On June 17, 1957, Kádár championed Révai's election to the Central Committee, stating, "In spite of his faults [Révai] is a communist and an interesting person."³⁸ Révai participated in MSZMP's National Conference, which took place from June 27-29, 1957, at the same time that Khrushchev was battling hardliners in the Soviet Party. Révai was a seemingly sympathetic figure: as the result of a stroke, one of his hands was paralyzed, he walked with a cane, and had difficulty speaking. However, his involvement in the conference began on an ignominious note when Kádár chastised him for interrupting another speaker.³⁹ When it was time for him to speak, Révai said exactly what was expected, making a speech that was materially similar to his *Népszabadság* article. Révai again criticized the government and the December Resolution for its weak stance toward the revolutionaries and its hard stance toward the pre-1956 leaders.⁴⁰ Kádár's response

³⁷ "Kádár's Report before the HWSP Provisional Executive Committee on the Soviet-Hungarian Negotiations in Moscow, April 2, 1957," in Békés, Byrne, and Rainer, 517-518.

³⁸ Magdolna Baráeth and Zoltan Ripp, eds., *A Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt ideiglenes vezető testületeinek jegyzőkönyvei IV. Kötet: 1957. május 21 – 1957. június 24.* [Minutes of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party Provisional Leadership Bodies, Volume IV: May 21, 1957 – June 24, 1957] (Budapest: Interart, 1993), 160.

³⁹ According to one report, Kádár banged his fist on the table, stating, "In our party, Comrade Révai, it is not the custom to interrupt the speakers, nor will it be!" Gyurkó, 106.

⁴⁰ Kalmár (1998), 39.

was certainly not what Révai had hoped for. He made clear that Rákosi and his group had no place in the new MSZMP government: “the flags of the fallen leadership... fell in such a manner and in such circumstances that they can never again return to the leadership of the party.” With regard to Révai suggesting that the government was treating the Rákosi group unfairly, Kádár warned, “it is with such slogans that the members of the former leadership attack the party, while they are fighting for their personal interests.” Kádár also defended the December Resolution, stating, “Even if there are faults... in its main points the Central Committee’s evaluation has proved correct, and today nobody can work usefully for the party who does not fully identify himself with the essentials of this resolution.”

Faced with such strong opposition from the party leadership, Révai was forced to accept the majority view in order to maintain his position on the Central Committee. However, while he continued to participate in political life until his death in 1959, Révai’s main purpose with regard to the Kádár government’s policies had already been carried out. This is perhaps most telling in Kádár’s discussion of Révai’s *Népszabadság* article:

We argued a great deal about whether we should allow the article to be published. Not a single person in the Executive Committee agreed with every one of the assertions he made in the article. Nevertheless we published it, because we thought that the article contained many valuable conclusions. And indeed, it was proper to publish it, for it gave strength to the struggle against the counterrevolution. In my opinion Comrade Révai’s contribution here was also useful. Mainly because it evoked a healthy reaction from the participants at the Party Conference with its apologies for dogmatism, sectarianism and the mistakes of the former leadership.⁴¹

Révai’s actions suited a number of Kádár’s purposes. His article in *Népszabadság* served as a barometer of public opinion. When faced with Rákosi’s return, the more liberal members of the party rushed to support Kádár, who was then able to pursue some of his more contentious policies, including the trial and execution of Imre Nagy. Kádár’s stinging rebuttal of Révai’s

⁴¹ Kádár (1985), 191-196.

speech at the National Conference also served as a reminder to the more conservative members of the party, including Révai, who proceeded to fall in line behind the Kádár leadership. There is every indication that Kádár had intended to use Révai's return to Hungary as a way to consolidate his own power.⁴² However, regardless of whether it was intentional, Révai's return to politics was not a harbinger of the subsequent return of Rákosi and his government; rather, it served to speed up the demise of the old leadership in favor of Kádár and MSZMP. When permanent party and government institutions officially replaced their hastily-organized provisional counterparts, it was clear that the leadership of MSZMP was younger, more moderate, and outwardly dedicated to the principles of the December Resolution, including the two-pronged battle against both dogmatism and revisionism. This government, and the resolution by which it abided, would be integral in defining the policies that would shape the 1960s.

The Return to Collectivization

With political consolidation well underway, the Kádár government returned to social issues that had been put aside since the revolution. Of primary importance was agriculture and collectivization. The revolutionary government had put an end to the forced deliveries and quotas that were characteristic of the Soviet model, and following the revolution the Kádár government confirmed that they would not return. The revolution had severely weakened the role of collective farming in the countryside, and emboldened peasants returned to private family farming in its wake. In 1957, Lajos Fehér, a former advocate of Imre Nagy's New Course in 1954,⁴³ was appointed as the head of the Central Committee's Agriculture Department and tasked with creating a collectivization plan. In July of that year the party produced the *Agrarian*

⁴² For a more detailed interpretation of the events, see "Kádár Plays Chess" (*Kádár sakkozik*) in Kalmár (1998), 44-47.

⁴³ When he served as First Party Secretary from 1953-1955, Nagy introduced his New Course, a policy that abolished forced collectivization and focused on light industry.

Theses, which criticized the collectivization drive of MDP and its leaders, suggesting that collectivization was carried out too rapidly, before the economic conditions for collectivization were available. The *Theses* suggested that collectivization could not succeed without the proper setting, and outlined a long-term plan that encouraged large-scale investment, incorporating technical assistance, and voluntary collectivization.⁴⁴ After its appearance, the *Agrarian Theses* met with staunch opposition from some members of MSZMP leadership, essentially splitting the party on the issue of collectivization. Those who supported the *Agrarian Theses*, including Fehér, advocated for a gradual approach with an initial focus on modernizing grain production over animal husbandry. Those opposed, led by Agriculture Minister Imre Dögei, supported a more rapid collectivization that included both crops and animals, and criticized the notion that voluntarism would lead to widespread collectivization.⁴⁵

The international situation seemed to be in favor Dögei's camp. Khrushchev, seeking to exceed the West in production and answer to China's Great Leap Forward, pressed for all countries in the Soviet Bloc to speed up collectivization based on the Soviet model while simultaneously investing heavily in industry.⁴⁶ During his April 1958 visit to Hungary, Khrushchev pressured Kádár to resume rapid collectivization.⁴⁷ In a December meeting, Kádár appealed to the Central Committee, stating, "Compared to our tempo, the Soviet Union, China, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia – all of the brotherly countries except Poland – is rushing. Everyone is

⁴⁴ "Agrár Tézisek" [Agrarian Theses], in Henrik Vass and Ágnes Ságvári, eds., *A Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt határozatai és dokumentumai 1956-1962* [The Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party Resolutions and Documents, 1956-1962] (Budapest: Kossuth Könyvkiadó, 1973), 102-122.

⁴⁵ Martha Lampland, *The Object of Labor: Commodification in Socialist Hungary* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 174-175.

⁴⁶ B. Adair, "The Agrarian Theses and Rapid Collectivization: Accommodation in Hungarian Agriculture 1956-1960," *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics*, 17 no. 2 (2001), 141, doi: 10.1080/714003575.

⁴⁷ Gough, 124.

ahead of us – even the Albanians are far ahead of us.”⁴⁸ On December 7, 1958, the Central Committee issued a resolution that outlined the process of collectivization that was to take place in Hungary.⁴⁹ Collectivization was to take place by April of 1961 and the coercive measures that had been used by MDP during Hungary’s first collectivization were forbidden. The resolution also included a sharp rebuke against the “sectarianism” of Dögei and Féher.⁵⁰ Soon after the resolution was passed, agitators for collectivization stormed the countryside, going from door to door to encourage people to join cooperative farms. They gave lectures and debated with peasant farmers for hours, and while force was officially discouraged, abuse, both psychological and physical, was not uncommon. Many of the peasants, having lived through the Rákosi-era collectivization, joined the collective farm at the mere threat of pain. More common were the threats that failure to join the collective would result in one’s children losing access to education. The most effective method agitators in the countryside employed was not force but the targeting of local elite. Once a respected member of the community joined the collective, the rest of the village typically followed suit.⁵¹

The second collectivization in Hungary was carried out at a rapid pace; however, certain concessions were made to the villagers that made joining the collective more palatable. While there were some increased investments into agriculture, it had become clear that there was not enough money to build the shelters that were required for large-scale animal husbandry. As a result, peasants were allowed to hold animals on their own household plots (*háztáji gazdaság*),

⁴⁸ “Előterjesztés a part agrárpolitikájával kapcsolatos kérdésekről” [Presentation on Issues Relating to the Party’s Agricultural Policy] in Karola Némethné Vágyi et al., *A Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt Központi Bizottságának 1957-1958. évi jegyzőkönyvei* [Minutes of the Hungarian Socialist Workers’ Party Central Committee, 1957-1958] (Budapest: Magyar Országos Levéltár, 1997), 717.

⁴⁹ Vass and Ságvári, 286-295

⁵⁰ Vágyi et al., 917.

⁵¹ Lampland, 179-192.

and to allow the animals to feed from collective fodder. Kádár justified this action in an October 1959 meeting of the Central Committee, saying, “Fodder must be taken where the animals are – otherwise there will no fattened cattle, no fattened pigs, no anything.”⁵² Also tolerated was sharecropping, which allowed the peasants to incorporate more land into their own household plot, land that could be harvested using the machinery that belonged the collective. Predictably, despite Kádár’s support, these concessions met with no little opposition from the more hard-line elements of the party leadership. In June of 1960, Fehér wrote an article in the journal *Társadalmi Szemle* (Social Review), which defended the government’s stance on household plots and collectivization. Fehér stated that the household plots were an important intermediary step toward collectivization, and would continue to be necessary until the collectives were able to produce a sufficient amount of agricultural products. “And then,” wrote Fehér, “*and only then, on the basis of this*, will household plots become pointless and unnecessary. *Until that time, however, we need them, and we must take this issue seriously!*”⁵³ Fehér acknowledged that there were those in the party who felt that allowing agricultural concessions displayed “capitalist tendencies,” but reminded everyone, “*The country needs meat!*”⁵⁴ He reiterated his position during a Central Committee meeting in October, stating, “We must understand that with regard to this and other temporary measures, we must take our starting point not from our desires or ideals, but from reality.”⁵⁵ Ever conscious that he was considered to be soft on the peasantry, Fehér billed all agricultural reforms as necessary temporary measures, and insisted that these

⁵² MOL 288. f. 4/25. ő. e. “A termelőszövetkezeti mozgalom helyzete és továbbfejlesztésének feladatai” [The Collective Farm Situation and Tasks for Further Development].

⁵³ Lajos Fehér, “Termelőszövetkezetek megkonsolidálásának és a mezőgazdasági termelés időszerű feladatai” [The Consolidation of Collective Farms and Current Tasks in Agricultural Production] *Társadalmi Szemle* 6 (1960): 11.

⁵⁴ Fehér, “Termelőszövetkezetek megkonsolidálásának,” 12.

⁵⁵ MOL 288.f.4/36-37.ő.e. “Jelentés a termelőszövetkezeti mozgalom helyzetéről és javaslat a továbbfejlesztésre” [Report on the Collective Farm Movement and Recommendations for Further Development].

measures did not point to a deviation from Marxist-Leninism. Fehér's position was strengthened in December 1959, when he was elected as Central Committee Secretary of Agriculture. Imre Dögei, his ideological opponent, had not fared so well. After being caught using the more heavy-handed, Rákosi-era methods to force peasants into collectives, Dögei was relieved of his post as Agricultural Minister in January of 1960 and in May he was expelled from the Central Committee. Dögei's replacement as Agricultural Minister was Pál Losonczi, former chairman of the Red Star collective in Barcs, which was known for its innovations, especially with regard to remuneration.⁵⁶

By 1961, over ninety percent of arable land was in the hands of the state or collective farm, and the collectivization drive was considered a success. Despite the importance Fehér and Kádár placed on the temporary nature of concessions, the agricultural reforms that had been implemented during the second collectivization continued to be an integral part of Hungarian agriculture. In February 1961, in a resolution that praised the success of the collectivization drive, the Central Committee stressed the importance of household production in concert with collective farms.⁵⁷ Between 1961 and 1965, household plots produced 25.9% of the total value of agricultural products in Hungary. In 1965, household plots accounted for 68.5% of corn, 60.3% of pork, 77.8% of cows' milk, and 57.6% of egg production.⁵⁸ However, while often described as less harsh on the peasantry, the collectivization drive of 1959-61 was not without hardships. According to writer László Gyurkó, collectivization was a dark period in the Hungarian countryside:

⁵⁶ Berend, 103-104.

⁵⁷ Vass and Ságvári, 497-501

⁵⁸ Miklós Schindele "A háztáji gazdaságok" [Household Plots] *Historia* 8 no. 5-6 (1986), 24-25.

As I remembered it, collectivization took place within a few months. I was there, and witnessed terrible tragedies, even bloodshed. I saw a son who disowned his father for joining the cooperative, and a father who disinherited his son for joining. Unfortunately, I saw force as well, not the kind that uses a whip, but psychological duress. I saw propagandists who dealt with peasants as heartlessly as if they were not human beings, and propagandists who grieved with the farmers. A woman who left her husband, and a man who left his wife. I saw a peasant who signed the paper that he'd join, and then hanged himself. The country was in turmoil.⁵⁹

Despite the proscription of many Rákosi era excesses, the Kádár government's collectivization drive represented the final and permanent transformation of agriculture in the Hungarian countryside and was thus an extremely difficult transition for the bulk of the Hungarian peasantry. Nonetheless, the perception that this final collectivization was not as difficult as that of Rákosi and his party was also slowly but firmly rooted in the minds of the peasantry, who began to see the benefits of the collectives, especially in conjunction with household farming.⁶⁰ Collectivization in Hungary was equipped with a number of paradoxes that were characteristic of the Kádár government. By 1961, one of the most hated Rákosi era programs was reinstated with no little success, and the leader of this second collectivization drive was not a left-wing dogmatist, but a Nagy-era reformer. Furthermore, concessions were imbedded into the program that radically changed the way in which the state interacted with the peasantry. Forced deliveries were officially abolished, and the government tolerated the rise of household plots, sharecropping, and flexible wage payments. In the process of collectivizing, agriculture was therefore the earliest economic sector in Hungary to introduce lasting reforms that were less centrally controlled and more oriented towards prices and the market.

Culture and the Intelligentsia

⁵⁹ Gyurkó, 115.

⁶⁰ Lampland, 191-192.

Like most East European countries, the intelligentsia in Hungary had historically maintained a strong influence on Hungarian society, in both the cultural and political spheres. Until the end of the First World War, the Prussian Kingdom, the Habsburg Empire, the Ottoman Empire, and the Russian Empire controlled the vast majority of Eastern European land. As a result, the national identities that emerged in the region during the nineteenth century were largely constructed around a cultural and literary elite, which would simultaneously represent the political goals of these burgeoning groups. In 1848, for example, the Hungarian poet Sándor Petőfi is largely credited with starting the Hungarian Revolution against the Habsburgs by reading aloud his poem, the *Nemzeti Dal* (National Song). During the Rákosi era with Révai at the helm of cultural policy, the political importance of intellectuals remained largely unchallenged. However, as the excesses of MDP became more evident, the writers and intellectuals were among the first to become disillusioned with Rákosi and his coterie, and many participated in the Hungarian Revolution. Some, like György Lukács, had prominent positions in the Nagy government. Furthermore, as the revolution was suppressed, members of the Writers Union (*Írószövetség*) were among the last of those who continued to resist the newly-installed Hungarian government, organizing strikes among the intelligentsia and disseminating poems and other literary works that were in support of the Nagy government and the principles of revolution.⁶¹ On December 28, in what was to be the last major action of the Hungarian Writers Union, a declaration was overwhelmingly supported by the attending members and read aloud by then president Áron Tamási. Entitled “Anxiety and Faith” (*Gond és Hitvallás*), the declaration reaffirmed the writers’ allegiance to the principles of the revolution. Convinced that the writers could not be depended upon to support the new post-revolutionary government, MSZMP

⁶¹ For a description of actions of the Writers Union in the months after the revolution see Éva Standeisky *Az Írók és a Hatalom 1956-1963* [Writers and Power 1956-1963] (Budapest: 56-os Intézet, revised addition, 1996), 99-188.

suspended the Writers Union on January 17, 1957, and it was dissolved three months later. Shortly thereafter, repercussions against writers were carried out, with the harshest sentences reserved for those writers who were communists and former communists.

Thus, by mid-1957, the intellectual community was disorganized and greatly diminished. A number of important intellectuals had left Hungary in the turmoil immediately following the Soviet invasion, and were continuing to agitate against the Kádár government in the West, forming a new Hungarian Writers Union in Western Europe. These writers also published periodicals: the *Irodalmi Újság* (Literary Newspaper), which was based in London, and the Munich-based *Új Látóhatár* (New Horizon).⁶² In Hungary, members of the intellectual community, including Tibor Déry, István Bibó, and Gyula Háy, were in prison, and were later given long sentences.⁶³ Others, like István Örkény, left or were expelled from the communist party. The literary journals had been dismantled, and the only cultural periodical that was being published was *Élet és Irodalom* (Life and Literature),⁶⁴ an orthodox weekly closely monitored by the MSZMP cultural apparatus.⁶⁵ For a long time after the revolution, Kádár held a deep-seated resentment against the former intellectual elite, who had not taken his side once he came into power. Nonetheless, he chose to work with the current group of intellectuals rather than create a new cultural elite. This was done for a variety of reasons. Those intellectuals who had rallied to Kádár immediately following the revolution were generally not as qualified as those who had participated in the post-revolutionary Writers Union, and many held doctrinaire beliefs

⁶² Standiesky, 367.

⁶³ Déry was given nine years, Háy six, and Bibó was sentenced to life imprisonment.

⁶⁴ The first edition of *Élet és Irodalom* appeared in March 1957.

⁶⁵ “Az Irodalmi Élet Szánálása” [The Reorganization of Literary Life] in Gergő Bendegúz Cseh, Melinda Kalmar, and Edit Pór, eds., *Zárt, bizalmas, számozott: Tájékoztatáspolitikai és cenzúra 1956-1963 (Dokumentumok)* [Closed, Confidential, Numbered: Information Policy and Censorship 1956-1963 (Documents)] (Budapest: Osiris Kiadó: 1999), 18.

that were not in keeping with the new line the government had set forth. Furthermore, the experience of 1956 had impressed upon the Kádár government the folly of maintaining a strong, ideologically-focused intellectual class, who could become dangerous when disillusioned.⁶⁶

Kádár, however, was wary of intellectuals and lacked the will to deal with them on a regular basis. That task was relegated to Central Committee member György Aczél, who was appointed deputy Cultural Minister in 1957. Despite his relatively modest position with the party,⁶⁷ Aczél would be dubbed the tsar of Hungarian cultural policy early on in his tenure in the Kádár government. Born into a poor Jewish family in Budapest, Aczél had much in common with Kádár. Both joined the communist party in the 1930s, and unlike the early leadership in Hungary, including Nagy, neither Aczél nor Kádár had spent extensive time in the Soviet Union. Both participated in the communist resistance in Hungary during the Second World War and both were victims of the Hungarian purges in the early 1950s, spending several years in prison under Rákosi. Both espoused a moderate political viewpoint, although Aczél was often criticized as being too reform-minded. Throughout their lives, Aczél and Kádár maintained a close personal relationship, as did their wives.⁶⁸ Despite their similarities, however, Aczél and Kádár had exceedingly disparate personalities. Unlike Kádár, Aczél thrived in dealing with the intellectuals, and often relished his close personal connections with the cultural elite as well as the power he wielded over Hungarian cultural life. Vain where Kádár was modest, elitist where Kádár was egalitarian, emotional where Kádár was stoic, Aczél represented a different but complementary archetype of Hungarian socialism. Furthermore, despite being a cultural

⁶⁶ Gough, 128

⁶⁷ It was not until 1967 that Aczél was elected as Central Committee Cultural Secretary, the highest cultural position within the party.

⁶⁸ Kádár's wife Mária was a patient of Aczél's wife, a doctor. Gough, 139.

enthusiast with the ability to charm writers and intellectuals of all varieties, Aczél did not hesitate to make use of his contacts within the state security organizations to bring reluctant intellectuals to heel.⁶⁹

In addition to Aczél's measures, other coercive actions were taken to insure Hungarian writers would fall into line during the early years of the Kádár government. When the United Nations (UN) continued to pursue "The Hungarian Question" in its General Assembly meetings, Kádár recognized the importance of the intellectual community in securing international support for MSZMP. During a Central Committee meeting on August 9, 1957, Kádár stated, "It is most important that well-known people – scholars, artists, doctors, world-famous people – come forward. We could organize around 30 large rallies, but they would say that we forced people... It would mean much more if well known people – for example, at the PEN Club or International Bar Association – would write the UN General Secretary."⁷⁰ In September, Kádár had a letter in his hand signed by over 200 Hungarian writers. According to Hungarian newspapers, this powerful message from the intellectual community was a direct result of Kádár's speech, which had stirred the writers to action. However, the sudden outpouring of support more likely came from Kádár's meeting with Gyula Illyés and László Németh, two populist writers who met with Kádár to discuss leniency on their imprisoned colleagues. At this point, many of the writers had yet to be sentenced, and rumors were swirling about possible death sentences for Déry and others. In the course of that meeting, Kádár led them to infer that organizing their colleagues against the UN would go a long way in helping those intellectuals who remained in prison

⁶⁹ Rudolf L. Tökés, *Hungarian's Negotiated Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 67-8.

⁷⁰ "Az MSZMP KB Titkársága 1957. augusztus 9-ei ülésének jegyzőkönyve (részlet)" [The minutes of the August 9, 1957 session of MSZMP's Central Committee Secretariat (selection)] in Cseh, Kalmár, and Pór, 388.

awaiting sentences.⁷¹ Certainly, such an inference could not fail to play a role in the writers' decision to petition the UN to abandon the Hungarian Question.

Despite its undeniable reliance on force, MSZMP leadership often combined more heavy-handed tactics with concessions when interacting with writers and intellectuals. In September 1957, the Hungarian literary journal *Kortárs* (Contemporary) released its first edition despite reservations expressed by Central Committee Secretary of Culture Gyula Kállai, who was concerned about the relative lack of control over the editors of *Kortárs* and of the pessimistic, ambiguous tone of the pieces that had been prepared for publishing.⁷² Edited by József Darvas and Gábor Tolnai, *Kortárs* featured numerous works from a variety of authors, including those who had been marginalized during the Rákosi era. The first volume included works from former Writers Union president Áron Tamási and populist writer László Németh. Perhaps more symbolically, *Kortárs* was a literary journal during the short-lived Hungarian Republic of the late 1940s, which had been in power prior to the institution of state socialism.⁷³ *Kortárs*'s former editor, Lajos Kassák, a Social Democrat and avant-garde artist who was thrown out of the party during the Rákosi era, was also featured in the first edition of the reconstituted journal. The September 1957 edition also featured a statement to the editors from six writers and former communist party members.⁷⁴ In it, the writers re-affirmed their allegiance to building socialism, stating, "Our work, our entire lives are in service to Hungary's socialist development." They also

⁷¹ Sándor Révész, *Aczél és Korunk* [Aczél and our Age] (Budapest: Sík Kiadó Kft.: 1997), 84-85.

⁷² Kállai Gyula tájékoztatója az Élet és Irodalomról az MSZMP KB Titkársága 1957. Április 19-ei ülésén (részlet a szó szerinti jegyzőkönyvből)" [Gyula Kállai's Bulletin on Élet és Irodalom at MSZMP's April 19, 1957 session (selection from the verbatim minutes)], in Cseh, Kalmár, and Pór, 38.

⁷³ A somewhat similar occurrence can be seen with the journal *Nagyvilág* (World), a periodical featuring world literature. Originally produced by the Writers Union at the end of 1956, *Nagyvilág* was once again published with a new editorial staff in April of 1957. Standiesky, 221.

⁷⁴ Benjámín László, Sándor Erdei, Kónya Lajos, István Örkény, Gyula Sipos, and Lajos Tamási.

separated themselves from those writers who had left Hungary after the Revolution and had organized a new Writers Union in the West. “We have nothing to do with the foreign-established ‘Writers Union’ or the *Irodalmi Újság* that is published there. If the aforementioned organization and paper attack socialism, they attack us.”⁷⁵ The writers drafted the proclamation with pressure from the government, and some within the party felt that it didn’t go far enough in accepting blame for the revolution.⁷⁶ Thereafter, however, the authors’ works appeared regularly in *Kortárs* and later in the more orthodox *Élet és Irodalom*.⁷⁷

In addition to working with the existing writers within Hungary, the leaders of MSZMP worked to establish a new cultural policy that would redefine the role of the intellectual elite. On August 6, 1957, in the course of discussing the current state of literature, the Politburo adopted a series of recommendations of which Aczél was the primary author.⁷⁸ One recommendation signaled an expansion of what would be considered acceptable in culture, stating, “The party and the government principally sanctions socialist realist works, but will support every other progressive, realist school, and ensures the release – while reserving the right to criticize – works from those non-realist schools that do not oppose the People’s Democracy.”⁷⁹ The same proposal was published verbatim in a Politburo resolution on September 12, 1957.⁸⁰ This text, which

⁷⁵ Benjamin László, “A Kortárs Szerkesztőségének” [To the Editors of Kortárs] *Kortárs* 1 no. 1 (1957): 144-145.

⁷⁶ “A Politikai Bizottság 1957. augusztus 6-ai ülésének, előterjesztése, szó szerinti és határozati jegyzőkönyve az irodalmi helyzetről” [The Politburo August 6, 1957 Session Report, Verbatim and Resolutive Minutes on the Literary Situation], in Cseh, Kalmár, and Pór, 55.

⁷⁷ According to Benjámín László, when he wrote György Aczél in the summer of 1957 with a request to write in *Élet és Irodalom*, he was refused because his writings (and those of his colleagues who were inclined to comply with the political situation) were being reserved for the less doctrinaire *Kortárs*. Kalmár (1998) 86-87.

⁷⁸ Révész, 82.

⁷⁹ “A Politikai Bizottság 1957. augusztus 6-ai ülésének...” in Cseh, Kalmár, and Pór, 57.

⁸⁰ “Az MSZMP Központi Bizottsága Politikai Bizottságának határozata az irodalommal kapcsolatos egyes intézkedésekről” [The Central Committee of MSZMP’s Politburo Resolution Regarding Several Measures With Relation to Literature], in Vass and Ságvári, 142.

reaffirmed the superiority of socialist realism but nonetheless made allowances for other cultural genres, was the first indication of MSZMP's most emblematic cultural policy, the Three Ts.⁸¹ Aczél's method of categorizing cultural products, the Three T's distinguished between that which was sanctioned (*támogatott*), that which was forbidden (*tiltott*), and that which was acceptable but not officially endorsed by the government (*tűrt*).⁸² Although they were inconsistently carried out, and what was considered acceptable often fluctuated, the Three Ts established a particular gray area in culture that allowed for a broadening of the cultural products available in Hungary throughout the Kádár period.

Further resolutions regarding literature and culture followed in June of 1958. The first was a Central Committee resolution on the populist writers, which was also published in *Társadalmi Szemle*.⁸³ Examining both the historic and current role of the populist writers, the resolution rejected the ideology of populism following the introduction of socialism, arguing that such an ideology led to nationalist sentiments. At the same time, it acknowledged the contribution of populist writers to Hungarian literature, stating, "The party and the state cannot share the view that [populist writers] should organize as a political group or literary assembly; however they wish to stress that the 'populist' writers can participate in building the people's democracy as individuals, and as public and literary figures."⁸⁴ While critical of populist ideology, the purpose of the resolution was not an attempt to destroy the populist writers, but to neutralize their political position. The populist writers understood that under the Kádár

⁸¹ The policy would not be known as such until mid-1958. Révész, 82.

⁸² Initially, Kádár was not happy with Aczél's plan, exclaiming, "Whose idea is this bullshit?" Gough, 130.

⁸³ Az MSZMP Központi Bizottsága Kulturális Elméleti Munkaközösségének állásfoglalása a "népi" írókról" [The Central Committee of MSZMP's Cultural and Theoretical Panel's Position on the "Populist" Writers] in Vass and Ságvári, 210-235.

⁸⁴ Vass and Ságvári, "Az MSZMP Központi Bizottsága Kulturális Elméleti Munkaközösségének állásfoglalása a "népi" írókról," 234-5.

government they could continue to produce works that reflected the populist genre, but they could not regain the powerful political position that they had occupied under previous governments.⁸⁵

Another important resolution was “The Guiding Principles of MSZMP’s Cultural Policy.”⁸⁶ Announced in September 1957, the resolution was intended to be a serious party resolution on the state of culture and cultural policy from 1948 to the present.⁸⁷ By the time it was completed, five to six thousand people – experts and non-experts – had been consulted regarding its content. It had also been sent to the parties of five Soviet Bloc countries, and important non-communist artists were brought into the debate.⁸⁸ After several drafts and party debates,⁸⁹ the Guiding Principles were presented on June 25, 1958. It was divided into six sections, which included the history of Hungarian culture both before and after the revolution, the main tasks for cultural development, and the party and states role in guiding culture. In the historical section, the Guiding Principles offered more criticism for Révai, who oversaw MDP’s cultural policy from 1948-1953. The resolution argued that during this period, the communist party did not take into account the idea that the cultural tasks would necessarily be slower and more gradual than their political or military counterparts, and therefore was too hasty and overestimated the socialist development of the intelligentsia. “We did not pursue a lasting,

⁸⁵ Kalmár (1998), 89-90.

⁸⁶ “Az MSZMP művelődési politikájának irányelvei” [The Guiding Principles of MSZMP’s Cultural Policy] in Vass and Ságvári, 243-271.

⁸⁷ Kalmár (1998), 87.

⁸⁸ Kalmár (1998), 150-151.

⁸⁹ See for example MOL 288. f. 5/69. ő. e. “Előterjesztés az MSZMP kultúrprogramjára” [Presentation Regarding MSZMP’s Culture Program]; “Az MSZMP művelődési politikájának irányelvei” [Guiding Principles of MSZMP’s Cultural Policy] in Karola Némethné Vágyi et. al., eds., 472-516. Kádár himself chose Aczél to chair the latter debate, despite the fact that there were at least three other people who ranked higher than him (including Central Committee Cultural Secretary Gyula Kállai). Révész 101.

consistent, principled, theoretical battle against the influence bourgeois ideology in order to defeat opposing views; rather, we were often satisfied with suppressing these views by decree.”⁹⁰ Instead of pursuing a long, measured struggle against other ideologies, the resolution argued, Révai settled for suppressing them, giving the appearance of uniformity without actually changing the minds of the intelligentsia. He was therefore unable to gauge the true political position of the intellectual class, nor combat the root of anti-socialist behavior. In contrast, the Guiding Principles argued that the process of cultural transformation would be gradual, and the party should work to change rather than suppress non-socialist tendencies.

The Guiding Principles further allowed for non-socialist realist artists to participate in Hungarian culture, arguing for “The nascent new culture: its tenor socialist; its form international culture.”⁹¹ The resolution argued that all Hungarian culture should work to build socialism but that its form was open to negotiation: in other words, the party wanted heterogeneity of culture without political pluralism.⁹² Furthermore, while still professing the superiority of socialist realism, the Guiding Principles laid more groundwork for the Three Ts, stating that literature that did not overtly go against the socialist state would be acceptable, if not officially sanctioned. The resolution also allowed for non-socialists to participate in the intellectual community:

[The central leadership] must be supported by the culture’s best communist and non-party workers, the various advisory bodies, committees, and unions; and it must ensure that appropriate people will be placed in key cultural positions: those strong-principled, loyal, professional, and competent communists and non-party members, who dare to shoulder the responsibility for the area entrusted to them, and who are ready to fight to put into effect the party’s policies.⁹³

⁹⁰ Vass and Ságvári, “Az MSZMP művelődési politikájának irányelvei,” 251.

⁹¹ Vass and Ságvári, “Az MSZMP művelődési politikájának irányelvei,” 256.

⁹² Révész, 101.

⁹³ Vass and Ságvári, “Az MSZMP művelődési politikájának irányelvei,” 270.

The Guiding Principles, largely reflective of Aczél's work, suggested that cultural figures could participate in building socialism by participating in cultural life regardless of party affiliation as long as they did not directly oppose the government. It is no surprise, therefore, that the relatively permissive policy outlined in the Guiding Principles met with some resistance from the more hard-line members of the party. The position of these hardliners was evident in the February resolution "Several Questions About Hungarian Literature After the Liberation: Theses," which was published in *Társadalmi Szemle*.⁹⁴ In comparison to the Guiding Principles, the February Theses spent less time condemning the Rákosi-era cultural policy and more time criticizing György Lukács and the Writers Union, while socialist realism was even more glorified.⁹⁵ The basic principles of the Three Ts, while present, narrowed the range of what would be tolerated:

The existence of various literary schools is a fact that we must take into account in literature. But we must learn from the past years, when the schools' freedom of success essentially became a bourgeois slogan, whereby long ago political trends lined up behind stylistic schools while speaking of "cultural freedom." At the same time we must be cautious that we do not push out any written endeavor, which is generally progressive, has realist tendencies, is prepared to support the building of socialism, and can enrich our literature with significant artistic products.⁹⁶

While allowing that there were select non-socialist realist authors that could help build socialism, the February Theses cautioned that cultural schools that were not outwardly anti-socialist could nonetheless hide anti-socialist political sentiment that would agitate against the government in the guise of securing cultural freedom.

⁹⁴ "A Felszabadulás Utáni Magyar Irodalom Néhány Kérdéséről: Tézisek" [Several Questions About Hungarian Literature After the Liberation] in Vass and Ságvári, 318-341.

⁹⁵ Révész, 111.

⁹⁶ Vass and Ságvári, "A Felszabadulás Utáni Magyar Irodalom Néhány Kérdéséről," 338.

The more restrictive tenor of the February Theses was also evident in the first meeting of the reconstituted Writers Union. According to the Theses, the Writers Union's predecessor, the Literary Counsel (*Irodalmi Tanács*), "deserves credit for restarting literature, but its activities are not sufficient in the current circumstances. It is too introverted, and not supported by the wide circle of writers."⁹⁷ The return of the Writers Union was first seriously discussed at the end of 1958, when the time was deemed appropriate for a more comprehensive organization to be established. During a Politburo meeting on November 25, 1958, Kállai stated, "When we just now spoke of this issue, we reached the conclusion that the conditions are ripe for the reconstruction of the Writers Union, and it seems that its formation would advance the further development of literature."⁹⁸ In the ensuing months, debates took place within MSZMP leadership about the Writers Union's direction, its members, and its focus.⁹⁹ The first meeting of the Hungarian Writers Union was held on September 25, 1959, under the presidency of József Darvas, a favorite of the Rákosi-era government. Tellingly, Aczél was not in attendance, and he warned populist writer Gyula Illyés not to attend lest he be made a scapegoat by Kállai, who was delivering a speech.¹⁰⁰ Indeed, Kállai's speech was more reflective of the Union's Rákosi-era leadership. "We view the Writers Union as a form of Hungarian socialist literature," stated Kállai, "By socialist literature we mean socialist realism." Furthermore, he added, "The fundamental task of the Writers Union is to help Hungarian literature become socialist literature as soon as possible." József Darvas's speech reinforced the idea that the Writers Union was not a

⁹⁷ Vass and Ságvári, "A Felszabadulás Utáni Magyar Irodalom Néhány Kérdéséről," 339.

⁹⁸ MOL 288. f. 5/105. ő.e., "Határozati javaslat a művészeti szövetségek helyreállítására, a művészek közötti ideológiai és politikai munka egyes kérdéseire" [Resolutional Proposal on the Restoration of Artistic Associations, and Certain Issues Regarding Artists' Ideological and Political Work].

⁹⁹ Kalmár (1998), 95-102.

¹⁰⁰ Révész, 111.

separate political organization, arguing, “The new Writers Union cannot simply be a continuation of the old... Its tasks are to unite, direct and chiefly support the development of socialist literature in Hungary’s literary world, and by no means can it become a political forum.”¹⁰¹ Despite its conservative tone, the Writers Union reflected some of the Kádár government’s more permissive cultural policies: in principle Kállai’s speech reaffirmed the Three Ts, albeit the more limited form outlined in the February Theses, and the founding members of the Writers Union included a number of populist writers including László Németh and Áron Tamási.

Between 1958 and 1962, Hungarian cultural policy vacillated between the more conciliatory tone of the Guiding Principles and the hard-line approach of the February Theses.¹⁰² Nonetheless, the main principles of the Three Ts remained, although the works that would be tolerated were continuously changing. Furthermore, within this period many intellectuals had begun to make peace with the Kádár government. In 1957, Németh won the prestigious Kossuth Prize, and populist and non-communist writers were increasingly able to publish their works, many of them contributing to *Kortárs*. In April of 1960, a further concession to the intellectual community was made when a partial amnesty enabled writers Déry and Háy to be released from prison. Indeed, rather than creating a new literary elite that would serve its traditional political function in support of the government, the Kádár government sought to depoliticize literature in favor of a more heterogeneous, less powerful intelligentsia. During a Politburo meeting, Kádár said, “In my estimation, first is the newspaper, the radio, and theater; second is the literary journal. I don’t care what they print. It doesn’t greatly disturb our party’s overall conflict, but

¹⁰¹ “A Magyar Írók Szövetségének alakulo közgyűlése” [The Hungarian Writers Union’s Statutory Meeting] *Élet és Irodalom*, October 2, 1959.

¹⁰² Révész, 111.

what appears on radio and in the newspaper directly influences our society and has repercussions for the political struggle.”¹⁰³ While perhaps an overstatement that Kádár didn’t care what was printed in literary journals, his words indicated that mass media was more politically important for the Kádár government, and the writers had less political power than they had enjoyed under previous governments. Kádár’s statements indicated his intention to remove the intellectual elite from their previous political positions, allowing them to operate solely within the cultural realm. Such a position is also reflected in a referendum by József Darvas, which stated, “We consider it important to articulate that in this changed society a new behavior of writers is necessary. The writer is not a leader, but rather a servant of the nation.”¹⁰⁴ Like with household plots in agriculture, the Three Ts were seen as temporary measure in the transformation of culture. While Révai’s cultural policies were too hurried and focused too much on restriction, the Kádár government argued that the Three Ts would allow for a more gradual, more thorough transformation of culture. Even as late as 1972, Kádár argued, “If here there is a seventy-year-old writer – a bourgeois writer – who is not Marxist, not communist, he can still be a very honest, useful person. I cannot imagine the same in the Soviet Union, because the revolution’s been there for fifty years, and if the seventy-year-old writer in question begins to write in a bourgeois mode, he is already an opponent of the revolution.”¹⁰⁵ Kádár argued one must take into account the fact that socialism in Hungary was instituted later than in the Soviet Union, and this, coupled with Révai’s mistakes, meant that the Three Ts were an important transitional measure in the steady, measured cultural transformation.

¹⁰³ MOL 288. f. 5/214 ő.e., “Előterjesztés az irodalmi kritika egyes problémáiról” [Proposal Regarding Certain Problems in Literary Criticism].

¹⁰⁴ Kalmár (1998), 104.

¹⁰⁵ MOL 288. f. 5/575.ő.e. “Jegyzőkönyv a Politikai Bizottság 1972. február 22-i megtartott üléséről” [Minutes from the Politburo’s February 22, 1972 Session]; Gough 130.

Hungary and the World

Once the internal situation was stabilized, the Hungarian government began to look outward to improve its international position. Following the Soviet intervention in the revolution, the UN Security Council called an Emergency Session of the UN General Assembly, which was held November 4-10, 1956. The resolutions adopted by the Emergency Session condemned the Soviet invasion of Hungary and called upon the Secretary General to launch an investigation of the events.¹⁰⁶ After the revolution, the Hungarian government became increasingly isolated from the international community. In January 1957, the UN established a Special Committee¹⁰⁷ to investigate the situation in Hungary. In February, the member countries agreed to take no action following the presentation of the Hungarian delegation's credentials. While this was largely a symbolic gesture – according to the UN Rules of Procedure, the Hungarian representatives were de facto members until a final decision could be made, and could therefore fully participate in the General Assembly – it nonetheless placed Hungary in an awkward position within the UN.¹⁰⁸ Hungarian relations with the United States were further complicated by the unique tensions between the two countries. The Hungarian Crown of St. Stephen, a powerful symbol of the Hungarian nation, was being held in Fort Knox after the US Army recovered it from the retreating Germans in May 1945. The American ambassador to Hungary, Edward Wailes,

¹⁰⁶ United Nations General Assembly – Emergency Special Sessions, “Resolutions adopted by the General Assembly during its Second Emergency Special Session from 4 to 10 November 1956, November 4-10, 1956, http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/3355&Lang=E.

¹⁰⁷ The Special Committee was not allowed into Hungary under the grounds that its establishment violated the terms of the UN Charter. The report that was submitted on the revolution was based on witness accounts in Western Europe and the US. Barnabas Racz, “Hungary and the United Nations 1956-1962: A Legal and Political Analysis” (Budapest: United Nations Association of Hungary, 2007), 6. The more than 250-page report was presented at the Eleventh Session of the General Assembly and argued that the revolution was spontaneous, that the Soviet Union violated Hungary's sovereignty by invading, and that the Kádár government was put in place through military force. United Nations, Resolution, A/3592, “Report of the Special Committee on the Problem of Hungary,” 1957, <http://mek.oszk.hu/01200/01274/01274.pdf>.

¹⁰⁸ Racz, 6.

arrived in Hungary on November 2, 1956 and left in February 1957 after refusing to present his credentials to the Kádár government. After Wailes's departure, Hungary would only have Legation status with the United States until 1967. Following the Soviet invasion in 1956, the Hungarian Cardinal József Mindszenty had attained asylum in the American Legation in Budapest, where he was to remain for fifteen years. The United States had also accepted a large number of Hungarian immigrants after the Second World War and 1956, and many of these immigrants were vociferous in their insistence that the US government not make concessions to Kádár and his government.

In addition to the Emergency Session, between 1956 and 1962, the Hungarian Question was discussed during UN General Assembly meetings, largely under the aegis of the American representatives, and the General Assembly passed eleven resolutions regarding the situation in Hungary in the aftermath of the revolution. A relative change in Hungary's international position came in 1960. In April, the government announced that it would abolish internment camps and issue a partial amnesty for some prisoners in celebration of the fifteenth anniversary of the end of German occupation in Hungary.¹⁰⁹ Additionally, a number of African nations were admitted to the UN who, looking to curry favor with both the Soviet Union and the United States, chose to abstain from the voting.¹¹⁰ However, while the State Department indicated that the partial amnesty was a positive sign, it was not enough for the United States government to begin to normalize relations with Hungary, nor would they remove the Hungarian Question from the UN

¹⁰⁹ MOL 288. f. 31 ő.e., "Előterjesztés hazánk felszabadításának 15. évfordulója alkalmából részleges közkegyelemre" [Report on the Partial Amnesty on the Occasion of the Fifteenth Anniversary of Hungary's Liberation]. Déry and Háy were released during this amnesty.

¹¹⁰ János Radványi, *Hungary and the Superpowers: the 1956 Revolution and Realpolitik* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1972), 82.

agenda.¹¹¹ In October 1960, Kádár traveled to the UN to deliver a speech in the Fifteenth Session of the General Assembly. Confined only to Manhattan, Kádár was met by demonstrators, largely émigré groups opposed to the Kádár government. Inside of the UN, just as Kádár was to deliver his speech, roughly half of the delegates walked out of the room in protest. In his speech, Kádár spoke out against the Hungarian question, stating, “The ‘question of Hungary’ in the United Nations has to do with the cold war and many other things, but it has nothing to do with Hungarian reality, nor has it anything to do with the objectives laid down in the Charter of this world organization.” While Kádár acknowledged that relations between the United States and Hungary were strained, he asserted, “We are of the opinion that the Hungarian and the United States peoples have common interests in safeguarding peace, shaping friendship between them and normalizing relations between the two countries.”¹¹² Furthermore, Kádár argued, “Our delegation is of the opinion that the General Assembly, putting aside the issues which serve only cold war purposes, must concentrate its attention on questions of really high significance.”¹¹³ Despite his defiant tone, Kádár’s trip to Manhattan had a profound affect on him. According to János Radványi, Hungarian chargé d’affaires to the United States from 1962-1967, Kádár preferred not to speak about his experiences at the UN: “Kádár could hardly have failed to notice the degree of isolation which his regime was subject in the world organization; and these first-hand impressions, as I was later told, influenced him greatly in his later decisions.”¹¹⁴

¹¹¹ Radványi, 85.

¹¹² United Nations General Assembly, 883rd Plenary Meeting, “Fifteenth Session: Official Records,” October 3, 1960, <http://www.un.org/depts/dhl/dag/docs/apv883e.pdf>, 335.

¹¹³ “Fifteenth Session: Official Records,” 339. During this speech Kádár justified his own actions in the 1956 Revolution with the lines that would later be engraved on his tombstone: “I was... where I had to be, and I did what I had to do” (Ott voltam, ahol lennem kellett, Azt tettem, amit tennem kellett).

¹¹⁴ Radványi, 93.

Realizing that the partial amnesty did not sufficiently move the international community to shelve the Hungarian Question, the Kádár government thought that it would be possible to settle American opposition by offering to release Mindszenty in exchange for dropping the Hungarian Question and returning the crown. The leaders of MSZMP had assumed – not incorrectly – that Mindszenty and the Hungarian Question were more trouble to the United States government than they were worth.¹¹⁵ Indeed, the resolution on the Hungarian Question during the Sixteenth Session of the UN General Assembly¹¹⁶ passed with a record 17 negative votes and 32 abstentions. There were also several Hungarian leaders who felt that solving the Mindszenty issue was of primary importance for the Americans.¹¹⁷ After discussing the issues with American officials, however, it became clear to Radványi that the United States government viewed a general amnesty as the principal condition for more normalized relations with the United States and the dropping of the Hungarian Question in the UN. This was detailed in a written document that was delivered to Radványi.¹¹⁸ Kádár discussed the subject of amnesty with Khrushchev in November of 1962 following the Cuban Missile Crisis. Kádár stated that he felt as though the Americans were more willing to compromise than previously, and that the Hungarian Politburo had found that a general amnesty would not affect security in Hungary.¹¹⁹ In November 1962, during his opening speech at MSZMP's Eighth Congress, Kádár made implicit comments that addressed the prospects for amnesty. Similarly, the Hungarian Deputy Foreign minister issued a

¹¹⁵ László Borhi, “‘We Hungarian Communists are Realists’: János Kádár’s Foreign Policy in the Light of Hungarian-US Relations, 1957-67,” *Cold War History*, 4 no. 2 (2004), doi: 10.1080/14682740412331391795, 17.

¹¹⁶ United Nations General Assembly, Resolution 1741(XVI), “Question of Hungary,” December 20, 1961, <http://daCentralCommitteeess-ods.un.org/TMP/3727554.67891693.html>

¹¹⁷ Radványi, 111.

¹¹⁸ Radványi, 101; Borhi, 17.

¹¹⁹ Radványi, 141.

memorandum that hinted broadly at the idea of a more general amnesty being introduced in Hungary.¹²⁰ In December 1962, the UN resolution on the Hungarian Question reaffirmed the objections outlined by previous resolutions and requested that the Secretary General take any initiative he deemed helpful, but noted, “in the circumstances the position of the United Nations Representative on Hungary¹²¹ need no longer be continued.”¹²² The resolution, while still expressing disapproval of the situation in Hungary, essentially put to an end the Hungarian Question in the UN. On March 21, 1963, Kádár announced the general amnesty during the opening session of Parliament. Roughly four thousand prisoners were released, including political theorist István Bibó, who had been sentenced to life imprisonment.¹²³ In May of 1963 the State Department issued a report on Hungary, arguing that Hungary had gone through extensive de-Stalinization and the situation had improved. The same month, the UN General Assembly found the credentials of all delegate nations, including Hungary’s, to be in order.¹²⁴ Tensions between Hungary and the international community were further assuaged when U Thant, Secretary General of the UN, visited Hungary in July of 1963. U Thant’s visit represented a formal and symbolic conclusion to the Hungarian Question in the United Nations.

The Kádár government also worked to normalize relations with the Catholic Church. Although the Kádár government held doctrinaire communist beliefs on religion, Kádár acknowledged that the process of removing the role of religion in society would take two

¹²⁰ Borhi, 18.

¹²¹ The Representative on Hungary, Sir Leslie Monro, was appointed in December 1958 to report to the General Assembly in relation to the situation in Hungary.

¹²² United Nations General Assembly, Resolution 1857(XVII), “Question of Hungary,” December 20, 1962, <http://daCentralCommitteess-ods.un.org/TMP/3698755.80072403.html>

¹²³ Gough, 143.

¹²⁴ Rádanyi, 150.

generations.¹²⁵ Talks to reach an official agreement with the Vatican on activities like the appointment of bishops began on May 7, 1963. The Chief Negotiator on the Hungarian side, József Prantner, reported regularly to the Politburo on the proceedings.¹²⁶ The final agreement, signed on September 15, 1964, represented a compromise, although the Hungarian government was the relative winner. The agreement stated Vatican would nominate bishops with the approval of the Hungarian government, and bishops had to take an oath of loyalty to the state, although the wording of the oath was altered. The two sides also agreed to continue the discussion to solve any outstanding issues.¹²⁷ While the 1964 agreement did not solve the Mindszenty issue, the Kádár government believed that forging an agreement with the Vatican would effectively isolate Mindszenty, who was not involved in the negotiations. Indeed, during one Politburo meeting, Kállai stated, “Mindszenty, who imagined that the world would not turn without him, could not prevent this agreement.”¹²⁸

The international policies of the Hungarian government were implemented in the context of Khrushchev’s Peaceful Coexistence, which allowed the leaders of MSZMP to improve relations with the West while maintaining its ties to the Soviet Bloc. In the course of the early 1960s, Kádár government incorporated further concessions that helped to improve Hungary’s relations with the West. For example, in December 1963, the Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced that it would stop jamming the radio programs of the BBC, Radio Free Europe, and Voice of America. The Ministry produced a classified memo that detailed the

¹²⁵ Gough, 144; Csaba Szabó, “Magyarország és a Vatikán: Egyházpolitika a hatvanas években” [Hungary and the Vatican: Church Policy in the Sixties] in János M. Rainer, ed., *“Hatvanas évek” Magyarországon tanulmányok* [The Sixties in Hungary: Essays] (Budapest: 1956-os Intézet, 2004), 74.

¹²⁶ Szabó, 85-90.

¹²⁷ Gough, 144.

¹²⁸ 288. f. 5/344. ö.e., “Beszámoló a Vatikán megbízottjával folytatott tárgyalásról.”

method by which the news would be announced to the international community, especially England and the United States, arguing the decision to cease jamming was a step that “would be expedient to use to [our] advantage” for propaganda purposes.¹²⁹ Rádványi gave the news to Harold Vedeler, State Department Director of the Office of European Affairs, on January 13, 1964.¹³⁰ By 1964, Hungary’s situation in the international arena had dramatically improved. The UN had ceased to take up the issue of the Hungarian Question and had accepted the Hungarian delegation’s credentials. The agreement with the Vatican gave some concessions to the Catholic Church while allowing the Hungarian government to maintain a measure of control. Even the relationship with the United States had begun to improve following the general amnesty and in spite of failing to resolve the Mindszenty issue. When “Kádárism” was discussed in an American Chiefs of Mission meeting in Bonn in 1963, it was noted, “Officially, the Hungarian government has substantially met the requirements our government has outlined for the improvement of relations.”¹³¹ Following the revolution, the Kádár government had been isolated from the international community. In less than a decade, it was able to improve its situation dramatically, even managing to secure the cautious support of the State Department.

Conclusion

¹²⁹ “Külgügyminisztériumi feljegyzés a rádióállomások zavarásának megszüntetéséről” [Ministry of Foreign Affairs Memo on the Cessation of Jamming Radio Stations] in Cseh et al., 302.

¹³⁰ According to the report, Rádványi acknowledged that Voice of America was a serious station, however, “As to RFE, Radvanyi said that Premier Kadar had decided to cease jamming of this station to bring some humor into the life of Hungarians, since RFE broadcasts were so ridiculous they could not be taken seriously.” United States Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964–1968, Volume XVII, Eastern Europe*, Document 100, “Memorandum of Conversation,” January 13, 1964, <http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1964-68v17/d100>.

¹³¹ National Archives at College Park (NARA), Subject-Numeric File 1963: Box 3927 General Records of the Department of State; Central Foreign Policy Files; Record Group 59, “Kadarism”

In a speech to the Patriotic People's Front in 1961, Kádár uttered the phrase that would characterize his tenure as First Party Secretary: "He who is not against us is with us."¹³² He clarified his position in a speech at the closing of MSZMP's Eighth Party Congress:

In the Hungarian People's Republic all people who earn their living by work – and do not spend their days and nights plotting and making bombs – go to their jobs in the morning and work there, are actually *with* us even if perhaps this is not a conscious attitude on their part; for if in the country the general policy is good, then socialist society is being built on industry, in agriculture, in the spheres of intellectual work, and all who work are building the socialist society.¹³³

In the years after the revolution, the Kádár government managed to establish policies that broadened the socialist discourse and redefined what it meant to be a "builder of socialism." While many of these were not fully instituted until well into the 1960s, the basic elements were already established in the early years of Kádár's tenure. Over time, the distinction between socialist and non-socialist, between gentleman and comrade would be blurred as Hungarian citizens began to tacitly support the regime by participating in Hungarian public life. Kádár's slogan and the policies that the MSZMP leadership put in place permitted and even encouraged this shift, suggesting that gradual change was necessary in order to build socialism comprehensively. They argued that the Rákosi government had instituted policies that were too fast and too rigid, and by doing so they were caught unaware when opposition began to stir.

Politically, Kádár carefully set up a government that was moderate and pragmatic. Fueled by Khrushchev's Thaw in the Soviet Union, MSZMP sought to participate in the wave of de-Stalinization that had already begun in the Soviet Union and other state socialist countries. The battle on two fronts allowed the Kádár government to deal with two political extremes: on one

¹³² Gough, 135.

¹³³ János Kádár *On the Road To Socialism: Selected Speeches and Interviews, 1960-1964* (Budapest: Corvina Press, 1965), 117.

side the revolutionaries characterized by the Nagy group, and on the other the hard-line dogmatists who occupied leadership positions in the Rákosi government. By calling back Révai and criticizing his excesses, Kádár managed to bring the members of MSZMP in line. The more conservative elements were required to accept Kádár's leadership or face expulsion from the party, and the more liberal members hurried to rally around Kádár, who represented moderation compared to Révai's dogmatism. The second collectivization drive in Hungary represented the government's more moderate stance. While carried out at rapid pace, MSZMP's collectivization incorporated a number of concessions. The system of forced delivery that had been abolished during the revolution was never reinstated, and peasants were allowed to maintain small household plots with machinery from the collective. Animals were still kept on private plots and were fed with collective fodder. Many of these measures were billed as temporary, and were deemed necessary until the appropriate investments could be made in agriculture. Nonetheless, the system of household plots lasted until the end of state socialism and enabled much of the peasantry to come to terms – and even support – collectivization. Hungarian farm workers earned a steady salary from the collective and were able to supplement what they earned from their own household plots.

In culture, the Kádár government depoliticized the traditional intellectual elite, who had historically maintained a political as well as a cultural function in Hungarian public life. Relegating intellectuals solely to the cultural sphere allowed Hungarian writers and cultural figures who were marginalized by the Rákosi government to participate in official cultural life and at the same time neutralized their potential to mount political opposition. The Three Ts established a gray area in culture that allowed for works that were not directly against socialism to be produced in Hungary. While the definition of what was considered anti-socialist often

vacillated, the tolerated category allowed intellectuals who would be considered dissidents in other socialist countries to continue to produce their works within Hungary's state-run culture industry. The Three Ts were also supposed to be a temporary measure, necessary for a complete transformation of Hungarian culture to socialist realism. Leaders of MSZMP acknowledged that this would be a gradual process, and in the meantime intellectuals who did not adhere to socialist realism could still be useful in building socialism in Hungary. Once the Kádár government began to see results in the domestic sphere, it began to look outward to improve its international position. The general amnesty allowed Hungary to normalize relations with the UN, and even the United States began to work with Hungarian leaders to improve relations between the two countries. By May 1963, Hungarian Question was no longer discussed in the UN General Assembly, and the Hungarian delegation's credentials had been accepted by UN member states. The agreement with the Vatican enabled Hungarian citizens to participate in the Catholic religion and gave the Hungarian government a measure of control over high-ranking religious figures in Hungary. It also served to isolate Mindszenty, who was rapidly becoming an inconvenience for the Americans and the Vatican.

Throughout this period, MSZMP consistently argued that its policies were not the result of a change in ideology. Hungary remained a socialist country and a strong supporter of the Soviet Union. Nonetheless, policies that incorporated gray areas and "temporary" measures broadened the discourse of socialism and incorporated the majority of Hungarian citizens, whether gentlemen or comrades, into the socialist project. As the American Chiefs of Mission meeting in Bonn explained, "A combination of gradualism and pragmatism has brought the Hungarian people a quality of leadership that fitted their need, took realistic account of their

interests and still enjoyed the confidence of the Russians.”¹³⁴ As a result of the policies implemented early in its tenure, the Kádár leadership was poised to create a unique, Hungarian form of state socialism, one that reflected the specific needs of its citizens.

¹³⁴ “Kadarism.”

Chapter 2

Buying and Selling

By the early 1960s, the Kádár government focused increasingly on improving the standard of living for Hungarian citizens. As Tibor Róna put it in his satirical history of Hungarian socialism in *Népszabadság*, “We realized that the best tool for raising the standard of living was to raise the living standards.”¹ A central aspect of the focus on standard of living was the effort to increase household consumption and produce more consumer goods. During this period, mass consumption was increasingly associated with modernity and modern life, and state socialist countries throughout the Soviet Bloc began to produce consumer goods in an effort to secure popular support and keep up with the capitalist West. Although Hungary’s approach was in keeping with its socialist neighbors, including the Soviet Union, the Kádár government’s focus on consumption met with resistance from some of the more hard-line members of the party, who objected on ideological grounds. Despite these objections, MSZMP implemented economic reforms in the late 1960s that only helped to cement the idea that the government was focused on improving the choice and supply of consumer goods for the average Hungarian buyer.

In this chapter, I examine the increasingly central role of consumption in Hungary during the 1960s. Throughout this period, the Kádár government strove to implement reforms that would make it easier for Hungarians to purchase consumer goods, while incorporating the role of consumption and sales into its discourse of socialism. At the same time, the Hungarian media published a number of articles and debates in an effort to define socialist commerce in Hungary. As the 1960s progressed, economic reforms were put in place that were intended in part to make

¹ Tibor Róna, “Egy kis történelmi konferansz: Utólagos megjegyzések az előbbi tizenhét évhez” [A Short History Monolog: Remarks on the Past Seventeen Years], *Népszabadság*, April 4, 1962.

consumption easier for the average Hungarian. In 1968, the New Economic Mechanism was enacted, which was intended to give more autonomy to producers, enabling them to manufacture goods that Hungarians were willing to purchase. During the preparations for the reform, media focus shifted to the role of the seller. Suggesting that the mechanism would necessitate a “Competition for the Customer,” the Hungarian press highlighted the need for vendors to engage in sales activities like advertising, marketing, and public opinion research in order to “win” more Hungarian shoppers. As the 1960s progressed, increasing consumption became a cornerstone of MSZMP’s policies, and Hungarian state socialism became known as “goulash communism” or “Frigidaire socialism.”

The Nylon War

In his 1951 satirical article in *Common Cause*, David Riesman fabricated an American offensive against the Soviet Union. Called “Operation Abundance,” or more colloquially, the “Nylon War.” The premise was simple: “If allowed to sample the riches of America, the Russian people would not long tolerate masters who gave them tanks and spies instead of vacuum cleaners and beauty parlors.”² Operation Abundance dropped thousands of dollars of American consumer goods – nylons, cigarettes, washing machines, and even jeeps – on Russian cities, whose citizens scrambled to amass the bounty of American-made goods that were being proffered. Soviet officials were largely unsuccessful in stemming Russian enthusiasm for such goods, and counteroffensives were ineffectual: “Searing vodka, badly styled mink coats (the only really selling item), undependable cigarette lighters – these betray a sad lack of know-how in production and merchandising.”³ In the end, Operation Abundance had its desired effect, as

² “The Nylon War” in David Riesman, *Abundance for What?* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1964), Google e-book, 49.

³ *Ibid.*, 53.

“Russian people, without saying so in as many words are now putting a price on collaboration with the regime. The price – ‘goods instead of guns.’”⁴ Reisman had intended his Nylon War to be satirical; however, soon after his article was published he received numerous letters asking about the status of Operation Abundance and inquiring how to keep abreast of its developments.⁵ Indeed, US foreign policy began to increasingly reflect Reisman’s fictitious offensive as the concept of peaceful coexistence gained momentum in the late 1950s. As a result, competition between the United States and the Soviet Union expanded to less militaristic endeavors: as the Soviets touted their successes in the space race, American politicians and newspapers highlighted their country’s abundance of consumer goods while criticizing Soviet living standards. In 1959, *Time* published an article arguing that peaceful coexistence was a serious tool in the Cold War, one that enabled the United States to “make Russians more restlessly aware of the gulf between U.S. and Soviet standards of living.”⁶ As the Soviet Union became a world leader, it became imperative that Soviet society represent socialism’s superior ability to provide for its people, and it was an increasing source of resentment and embarrassment for Khrushchev that the Western press consistently disparaged the living standards in the Soviet Union, especially when compared to the United States.⁷

In the Soviet Union, the emphasis on standard of living and consumption did not begin with Khrushchev. Shortly after Stalin’s death in 1953, Stalin’s heir apparent, Georgy Malenkov, launched a New Course that focused on the production of more consumer goods. In a speech in

⁴ Ibid., 54

⁵ Ibid., 57.

⁶ “THE NATION: Peaceful Coexistence,” *Time*, July 13, 1959, <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,8691111-1,00.html>.

⁷ Reid (2002), 223-4.

August 1953, Malenkov promised a dramatic increase in the production of consumer goods, arguing, “We have every possibility... to produce smart clothes and elegant footwear.”⁸ Malenkov focused on increased production of foodstuffs as well as durable consumer goods like refrigerators and washing machines. The New Course also sought to improve the Soviet consumer experience, which was often lacking in customer service. As Anastas Mikoyan, Minister of Foreign Trade, noted, “In the field of politeness we have much ground to cover . . . What is one to think if, in a Stalingrad department store, a woman shop assistant answers the question of a woman customer: ‘Where can one buy cheap cotton stuff?’ in this way: ‘I am not an inquiry office, citizen.’”⁹ Malenkov’s New Course was short lived, ending when Malenkov was forced to resign in 1955 to be replaced by Khrushchev. The ambitious consumption policies of the New Course were largely abandoned as Khrushchev struggled to consolidate his power and deal with the revolutions that were occurring within the Soviet Bloc (see Chapter 1). By the late 1950s, however, the focus on standard of living and consumption once again came to the fore, and Khrushchev became a vocal advocate for improving living standards for the Soviet population.

This new focus was evident in July 1959, when the United States and the Soviet Union held exhibitions as part of an exchange agreement signed in January of 1958. The Soviet exhibition at the New York Coliseum featured models of sputnik, a Stalingrad hydroelectric power plant, a steel mill, and other scientific and technological inventions. It’s opening was attended by President Eisenhower and his Vice President, Richard Nixon. When former New York mayor W. Averell Harriman toured the coliseum after having spent six weeks in the Soviet

⁸ “RUSSIA: The Man in Charge,” *Time*, August 17, 1953, <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,858159,00.html>

⁹ “Russia: Paradise by 1956,” *Time*, November 9, 1953, <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,819151,00.html#ixzz24TmW3Qd7>

Union, he acknowledged that the exhibition reflected what was happening in Russia in terms of science and heavy industry, but added that the United States was far ahead in terms of standard of living, stating, “By the time the Russians catch up, the United States will be way ahead again.”¹⁰ The *New York Times* commented that one fourteen-year-old visitor expressed dissatisfaction that the exhibition lacked things like bicycles that young people would enjoy.¹¹ In Moscow’s Sokolniki Park, consumer goods overshadowed the American exhibition’s obligatory cultural exhibits, the centerpiece of which was a six-room house colloquially dubbed “splitnik” because it was cut down the center to allow Soviet citizens to conveniently walk through. The house, which was intended to represent a typical American home, was said to cost \$13,000, featured a fully electric kitchen with GE appliances, and was outfitted with \$5,000 of furniture from Macy’s.¹²

It was in front of the splitnik kitchen in July 1959 that Richard Nixon, who was in Moscow for the opening of the exhibition, and Khrushchev engaged in what would later be called the “Kitchen Debate.” During this filmed debate, surrounded by numerous reporters and politicians, Nixon and Khrushchev disputed which economic system was better suited to provide for the needs of its citizens. In the course of the discussion, Khrushchev criticized splitnik and stated famously, “In another seven years we will be on the same level as America. When we

¹⁰ “Harriman Praises Soviet Exhibition,” *New York Times*, July 30, 1959.

¹¹ Peter Kihss, “Soviet Fair Here Draws Big Crowd,” *New York Times*, July 1, 1959.

¹² When the Soviet news agency Tass expressed skepticism as to whether or not splitnik represented a typical American home, *Time* responded by stating “The typical house, as Tass editors could have discovered if they had bothered to query their U.S. correspondents, is being built by All-State Properties, Inc. at Commack, N.Y., and will sell for \$13,000, including a complete electric kitchen. Houses in the splitnik's category account for 27% of all new U.S. homes.” “HOUSING: Worker’s Buckingham Palace,” *Time*, April 29, 1959, <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,864623,00.html>.

catch up with you, while passing you by, we will wave to you.”¹³ This was not the first time Khrushchev vowed to surpass the Americans in consumption. In April 1958 for example, he announced that the Soviet Union would outstrip the United States in consumer goods, stating, “Then we shall see who eats better and who has more clothing.”¹⁴ However, the Kitchen Debate helped to publicize consumption’s role in the competition between the Soviet Union and the United States. The *New York Times* described the Kitchen Debate as “perhaps the most startling personal international incident since the war,”¹⁵ and the *Chicago Tribune* described it as “an extraordinary verbal slugging match which broke all diplomatic precedent... Standing face to face and flanked by a refrigerator and washing machine, Nixon and Khrushchev aired their difference of opinion...”¹⁶ The public importance of the Kitchen Debate only increased when both Nixon and Khrushchev agreed to have the debate translated and broadcast on national television.

Khrushchev’s increased focus on consumption was not solely a reaction to competition from the West. As Stalinist techniques of consolidating and maintaining power had been discredited, the Soviet government focused on improving living standards for its citizens in order to gain popular support and legitimacy while maintaining a similar degree of power. In describing the new more consumer-oriented policies of his government, Khrushchev argued, “It is not bad if in improving the theory of Marxism one throws in also a piece of bacon and a piece

¹³ Greg Castillo, “Domesticating the Cold War: Household Consumption as Propaganda in Marshall Plan Germany,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 40 no. 2 (2005): 262, doi: 10.1177/0022009405051553.

¹⁴ William J. Jordan, “Khrushchev Sees Consumer Gains,” *New York Times*, April 11, 1958.

¹⁵ James Reston, “A Debate of Politicians: Khrushchev-Nixon Dialogue Proves Unusual Act on the Diplomatic Stage,” *New York Times*, July 25, 1959.

¹⁶ William Edwards, “Khrushchev, Nixon Debate,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, July 25, 1969.

of butter.”¹⁷ The economic plan for 1958-65 had the ambitious goal of the Soviet Union catching up with American living standards, and contained provisions to increase housing and consumer goods. During the 22nd Soviet Party Congress in October 1961, Khrushchev stated, “Comrades, the C.P.S.U. is advancing a great task – to achieve in the coming 20 years a living standard higher than that of any capitalist country and to create the necessary conditions for achieving an abundance of material and cultural values.”¹⁸ Attaining a high standard of living became one of the preconditions for the full transition into communism, and was associated with modern socialism as opposed to capitalism; however, Khrushchev also preached the importance of a toned-down “rational” consumption that would not degenerate into decadent, bourgeois greed.¹⁹ Khrushchev’s discussion of living standards often emphasized more heavily the role of public services like education and healthcare.²⁰ Nonetheless, by the end of the 1950s, improving consumption had become a key part of the Khrushchev government’s policies, a direction that many Soviet Bloc countries, including Hungary, chose to follow.

Early Standard of Living and Consumption Policy in Hungary

In many ways, the Hungarian early standard of living policies closely resembled those of the Soviet Union’s. Malenkov’s New Course in the early 1950s closely resembled Imre Nagy’s reforms of the same name, a policy put in place when Nagy was First Party Secretary from 1953-1955. Nagy’s New Course ended collectivization in Hungary and focused more on light industry with the goal of increasing the production of consumer goods, and was abandoned after Rákosi

¹⁷ Reid (2002), 221.

¹⁸ Nikita Khrushchev, *Documents of the 22nd Congress of the CPSU Volume II: Report on the Program of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union* (New York: Crosscurrents Press, 1961), 83.

¹⁹ Reid and Crowley (2000), 12.

²⁰ Reid (2002), 225.

was returned to power almost immediately after Malenkov's resignation. After 1956, MSZMP had reasons similar to the Soviet Union's for implementing an expanded standard of living policy in Hungary, and Khrushchev's acceptance of the importance of raising consumption levels provided a favorable atmosphere for Kádár's more consumer oriented policies. Unpopular both at home and abroad from the aftermath of the revolution, and eager to secure its legitimacy following the revolution (see Chapter 1), the pragmatic Kádár government shifted its focus to improving standard of living and providing more consumption goods to the Hungarian market. In 1961, the National Planning office put out a proposal echoing the Soviet Union's 22nd Party Congress plan, stating that by 1980, growth would be at such a level as to "not merely exempt our people wholly from problems of livelihood but allow the attainment of consumption targets... sufficient to satisfy the harmonious physical and intellectual needs of man."²¹ During MSZMP's Eighth Party Congress in November of 1962, Kádár announced, "Our party holds the principle that the construction of socialism must go hand in hand with a regular rise in the living standard of the working people."²² A resolution during the Congress stated, "The standard of living is rising, so the population is eating more nutritious food, wearing better and prettier clothes, and furnishing homes more comfortably." The resolution referenced the party's five-year plan (1960-65), which was intended to add to the Hungarian market 1 million bicycles, 215,000 vacuum cleaners, 128,000 refrigerators, 600,000 washing machines, 610,000 televisions, 240,000 motor bikes, and 43,000 automobiles.²³

Support for consumption and standard of living was not purely theoretical, even in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Although wide-scale reforms like the Varga plan had been shelved

²¹ Berend, 147.

²² Kádár (1965), 76.

²³ Vass and Ságvári, 594.

for political reasons, there were some small increases in wages and consumption. A Soviet provision of \$300 million dollars in goods and credit helped to increase consumption levels, as did cuts in the rate of investment and defense spending.²⁴ There was also an expansion of the extension of credit as the National Savings Bank (OTP) extended more and more purchase loans that enabled Hungarian citizens to buy more expensive consumer items (see Table 2-1). Between 1960 and 1965, the amount of purchase loans quadrupled from 301 to 1233 million forints. Furthermore, the 1960s saw a slow but steady increase in consumption of household appliances in Hungary (see Table 2-2). While automobiles still remained a rare item throughout this period,²⁵ household appliances like refrigerators and washing machines became more common in the average Hungarian household. Perhaps most impressive was the increase in the production and consumption of foodstuffs, largely a result of the reforms that had taken place in Hungarian agriculture, which continued throughout the 1960s.²⁶ The marked increase in food production meant that by the first half of the 1970s, Hungary's per capita agricultural output was the second highest in Europe.²⁷

Table 2-1 Purchase Loans in Millions of Forints²⁸

²⁴ The Soviet Union had all but disbanded the Hungarian Army. Judy Batt, *Economic Reform and Political Change in Eastern Europe: A Comparison of the Czechoslovak and Hungarian Experiences* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988), 85.

²⁵ According to Comecon rules, Hungary was not allowed to produce automobiles and therefore had to import all of its cars. An interesting development occurred in the 1950s, when Hungarian engineers created "microcars," or small multi-passenger vehicles that were too small to be classified as cars. See "The Marvelous Magyar Microcars," *Economist*, December 16, 2010, <http://www.economist.com/node/17722676>.

²⁶ Michael Marrese, "Agricultural Policy and Performance in Hungary," *Journal of Comparative Economics*, 7 no. 3 (1983): 332-339, doi: 10.1016/0147-5967(83)90102-6.

²⁷ Csaba Csaki, "Economic Management and Organization of Hungarian Agriculture," *Journal of Comparative Economics*, 7 no. 3 (1983): 318, doi: 10.1016/0147-5967(83)90101-4.

²⁸ *Statisztikai Évkönyv 1970* [Statistical Yearbook 1970] (Budapest: Statisztikai Kiadó Vallalat, 1971), 392. 1970 was the first year that credit data was listed in the statistical yearbook; therefore, data for earlier years is not available.

Year	1960	1965	1969	1970
Amount	301	1233	2150	2345

Table 2-2 Ownership of Household Appliances per 100 Households²⁹

Item	1960	1965	1970
Refrigerator	1.2	8.2	31.6
Washing Machine	14.7	37.2	49.7
Vacuum Cleaner	3.5	14.7	30.5
Automobile	1.0	3.2	7.0
Motor Bike	7.7	12.5	18.2
Radio	72.2	79.7	75.3
Television	3.4	26.7	52.7

Debates about Consumption

Despite the official policy to improve the standard of living and consumption, the Hungarian media published numerous social and political debates on the topic throughout the 1960s. Some appeared in literary periodicals and were started by writers or other cultural figures who were concerned that Hungarian citizens would not continue to fulfill their social responsibilities in the face of increased living standards. These debates were centered on various themes; however, a central issue was the role of consumption in a socialist economy, and whether this role was dangerous to building socialism. The majority of participants in the debates were intellectuals, including some hard-line cultural figures from the Rákosi era, who were distinguished by their strident antipathy to any increase in consumption in Hungary. However, the editors of the debates also strove to include letters from “everyday” Hungarian citizens, who often had a different, more realistic perspective on the increase in consumption. Similarly, the

²⁹ Ibid, 399.

editors' closing remarks often strove for a sensible, middle ground that was reflective of the Kádár government's stance on consumption. While certainly not every Hungarian followed the debates with interest, the increased circulation of literature magazines and reference to the debates in Hungarian dailies meant that most Hungarians were at least aware that they were taking place.³⁰ For the general public, the more popular of these debates were known less for their content and more for their nicknames, for example "Refrigerator Socialism" and "Kids Versus Cars," which would become symbols of the debates themselves and of the increasing role of consumption in Hungarian socialism.³¹ In large part, the government continued to pursue their policy independently of the conclusions drawn from these debates, once again reaffirming that cultural figures no longer had the defining role in politics that they had traditionally held in Hungary (see Chapter 1). Nonetheless, the consumption debates played an integral role in defining and solidifying the role of consumption in Hungarian state socialist society.

Refrigerator Socialism

One such debate was published in the Hungarian literary monthly *Új Írás* (New Writing) in October 1961 under the title "Culture and Lifestyle" (*Kultúra és életforma*). A Hungarian poet, Mihály Váci, started the debate by responding to the Soviet Union's twenty-year plan calling for the production of more consumption goods. In an article entitled "Neither Atom Bomb nor God," Váci argued that writers needed to come together to encourage a type of person, who, after attaining material security, "triumphs over himself as well." He went further:

What can we do so that in addition to a culture of existence, nourishment, apartments, heat, and entertainment, we create worthy cultural conditions for the person who has been supplied with everything in a communist society... so they welcome the six hour work

³⁰ Tamas Dombos and Lena Pellandini-Simanyi, "Kids, Cars, or Cashews?" in Bren and Neuburger, 29-30.

³¹ János Pótó, "A kommunizmus 'ígérete'" [The Promise of Communism], *História* 8 no. 5-6 (1986): 26.

day not solely because it leaves more time for listening to jazz, building weekend houses, attending sporting events, and fishing... Writers, where is our twenty-year plan?³²

Váci's introductory piece made it clear that he felt improving living standards would make it more difficult to increase the cultural and political awareness of Hungarian citizens, who would use better material conditions and more free time to participate in activities that had nothing to do with the more cultured pursuits that Váci argued would improve socialist consciousness. His article called on writers to craft a plan to redirect society's interests onto more intellectual, "cultural" endeavors in spite of its increased material wealth.

The editors of the debate took Váci's article further. As the standard of living increased, they noted, so too did the desire to purchase "personal requirements" like automobiles and weekend houses. This led them to ask the questions, "Don't the years of hard work to purchase a television, refrigerator, weekend house, and car develop into petty bourgeois temperaments? Doesn't this struggle for personal possessions strengthen selfishness, materialism, and social indifference?" The editors also suggested that such possessions may separate Hungarian citizens from society as televisions kept people in their apartments, cars separated drivers from pedestrians, and weekend houses discouraged more social activities. On the other hand, the editors argued, consumption goods were an important aspect of modern life that would improve the lives of Hungarian citizens. Thus as a counterargument to Váci's assumptions, the editors asked, "Why aren't these pleasures the right of the members of a socialist building society? Why would an electric water heater be bourgeois or petty bourgeois if the water it heats makes the life of a person in a socialist society more comfortable?"³³ The debate was to deal with these two disparate viewpoints. At the outset, the editors argued that they did not agree with those who

³² "Kultúra és életforma" [Culture and Lifestyle], *Új Írás*, 1 no. 10 (October 1961): 736.

³³ *Ibid.*, 737.

drew a direct line between increased material consumption and political and cultural indifference; however, they argued that the danger of increased material possessions was very real and needed to be addressed.

The almost yearlong debate received nearly 130 responses, of which twenty-five were published in the periodical.³⁴ These included articles from writers and other cultural figures as well as letters to the editor from *Új Írás* readers. Some argued that the new acquisitiveness of Hungarian citizens was dangerous to building socialism. According to János Földeák, “Does the increase in automobiles, weekend houses, and individual possessions in general push us toward imitating the bourgeois lifestyle? And does this increase the expansion of individualism? In my experience, yes!” He went further, “It is not inspiring that a future communist always squanders his time with small household problems, when the community’s greater strength and creativity can create more comfortable, cheaper, and more varied opportunities to spend one’s free time more suitably.”³⁵ Földeák suggested that people who should have been participating in community activities were far too concerned with purchasing household items when they could have been working with society to build socialism. Another participant in the debate noted that he already began to see signs of people withdrawing from society:

I read the debate’s introductory article. And I see in a living room light a satisfied owl-man huddled alone, withdrawn into his den of rotting principles... And I see a man turned blue, leaning on his elbow looking at the windows of televisions, thus making an outing in his own living room, and [I see] embarrassed, inflated balloon-faces in automobiles. What dangerous images in the century of expanding humanitarianism and technology!³⁶

³⁴ “Kultúra és életforma: A szerkesztőség zárszava” [Culture and Lifestyle: The Editors’ Closing Remarks], *Új Írás*, 2 no. 8 (August 1962): 903.

³⁵ János Földeák, “Hűség a néphez és a marxizmus-leninizmushoz! [Fidelity to the Nation and to Marxism-Leninism], *Új Írás*, 2 no. 1 (January 1962): 50.

³⁶ Tamás Nádor, “Van-e nyomor Magyarországon?” [Is There Poverty in Hungary?], *Új Írás* 1 no. 12 (December 1961): 937.

Authors who were most stridently opposed to the increase of consumption goods often pointed to the idea that the acquisition of goods meant for personal consumption cut people off from society. They argued that those who were too busy purchasing goods for their own use would not participate in those activities that would benefit society, nor would they engage in “high” cultural activities like going to the theater.

One particular source of concern with those who were most opposed to an increase in consumption was the lottery. As one letter stated, “When a lottery player excitedly waits for the radio to announce [the results of] Friday’s drawing, it is clearly not the prospect of communism that floats in his mind’s eye, but that villa, luxury car, and other worldly good that he can obtain with his winnings.”³⁷ Imre Takács, another contributor, added, “Would Marx have thought that 100,000 forint winnings would be so important after the collectivization of capital, amidst general health insurance, with the permanent end of unemployment, and with communism, which promises free apartments and free transportation, a couple steps away?”³⁸ For Takács, the lottery was indicative of the narrowing of Hungarian consciousness, which he saw being increasingly focused on consumption goods. Despite the great strides toward creating a socialist economy, Takács argued, the continued focus on material wealth meant that the average Hungarian was far from reaching the ideals of socialist consciousness. For Takács, the lottery and the government’s policy to improve consumption only exacerbated the problem of building socialist morality.

In contrast to those authors who argued that the new focus on consumption was dangerous, some authors argued that the new standard of living policy was not a cause for

³⁷ Dr. Ferenc Mészáros, “Az olvasók leveleiből” [From Readers’ Letters], *Új Írás* 2 no. 1 (January 1962): 55.

³⁸ Imre Takács, “Egyéniség és társadalom” [Individuality and Society], *Új Írás* 2 no. 2 (February 1962): 139.

concern. In his article, Ferenc Baktai referred to the debate's opening article, in which the editors stated that they didn't agree with those who stated that consumption goods led directly to a decrease in socialist consciousness. Baktai argued that this would be difficult indeed to agree with, because if one were to take that idea to its logical end, "the most revolutionary and most ideal consciousness would be the Central African bushman, for *he has nothing but a loincloth and a blowpipe*."³⁹ Another author disagreed with the argument that material wealth would lead to a decline in cultural interest, stating, "If we were to follow that conclusion, we would come to a result that would attack the main point of building socialism: the goal of maximum human prosperity."⁴⁰ Authors who saw little danger in the new wave of consumption pointed to the idea that one of the promises of socialism was to provide for the material needs of society. An improvement in the standard of living, they argued, only served to help fulfill this promise. These authors also disagreed with the idea that consumption goods would cut people off from other Hungarians. For Baktai, it was impossible to completely avoid society:

Even in the highest stage of communism there will be people who want to lie on their couches alone and read a book and the collective won't suffer damage from this. Later, another five thousand people would go together to a game, or go fishing, indeed, they may even listen to jazz or opera, or sing together, or travel to Venus – but whatever they do they *can't* avoid society.⁴¹

Some authors argued that the increase in consumption goods helped Hungarian citizens to build socialism. As one woman wrote, "An electric water heater will not make a woman who after work attends lectures, studies languages, and goes to the theater become bourgeois; on the contrary, an electric water heater and its counterparts make it possible to find time for culture."⁴²

³⁹ Ferenc Baktai, "Komplex élet" [Complex Life], *Új Írás*, 2 no. 1 (January 1962): 52.

⁴⁰ Eta Ádám, "Sok a Tisztáznivaló" [Much to Clear Up] *Új Írás*, 2 no. 6 (June 1962): 626.

⁴¹ Baktai, 54.

⁴² Erzsébet Vajta Ráczné, "Az olvasók leveleiből" [From Readers' Letters], *Új Írás*, 2 no. 1 (January 1962): 55.

For the letter writer, modern conveniences opened up free time for Hungarians to participate in cultural activities. This is especially true for women, who went to work in addition to taking care of the household tasks that had traditionally been under their purview. Similarly, István Markus, another contributor, argued that an increase in living standards was a reward for a society who had the important and difficult work of building socialism. For those who were living in an era where socialism was not yet built, consumer goods were important tools to enable workers to continue their task of creating a socialist society. As Markus explained, “We consider the personal aspiration for a family home, television, motor scooter, or car to be the driving force of building socialism: in this way it is socially and morally sanctioned, if real work is behind it. (Indeed, even if it is only filling out a lottery card).”⁴³ For Markus, workers desired a level of consumption that had been previously awarded to only a select few. That workers wanted a better life and were working to build socialism in order to attain it was for Markus a positive development.

Many authors acknowledged that the bourgeois attitude still existed in Hungary, and argued that Hungarian society needed to develop a socialist consciousness parallel to building a socialist economy. Author Endre Gergelyes saw the potential threat posed by the increased material goods, arguing, “It is a well-known phenomenon... that the increase in material goods derived from socialism can and often does result in non-socialist or even anti-socialist behavior.”⁴⁴ For Gergelyes, however, the danger was in the lack of socialist consciousness and ability to approach these consumption goods with a socialist mindset. “We must clearly and plainly see” he stated, “that the real danger is not found in the increase of material goods, nor

⁴³ Istvan Márkus “Már ma is a holnap készül” [Already Tomorrow is Being Built Today], *Új Írás*, 2 no. 4 (April 1962): 359.

⁴⁴ Endre Gergelyes, “Huszonegy Karóra” [Twenty-one Wristwatches], *Új Írás*, 2 no. 11 (November 1962): 839.

modern asceticism towards belongings; rather, there is a necessity for today's man to approach these goods with a modern consciousness."⁴⁵ For his part, József Berényi saw little connection between bourgeois behavior and the increase in consumption goods. Wrote Berényi, "Only a superficial observer can get the impression of a connection between the revival of bourgeois morality and the rise in living standards." Nonetheless, Berényi argued that along with improving living standards, there needed to be an effort to weed out the bourgeois mentality that was hindering the development of socialist consciousness, and that economists and cultural figures had to work together to create a well supplied, cultured society.⁴⁶ Regardless of their viewpoints on the root of the bourgeois mentality, many authors argued that a socialist consciousness was a necessary step in building socialism. For these authors, it was not the increase in consumption that was the issue; rather, the increase in consumption needed to be combined with socialist awareness.

A large number of participants also pointed to the fact that Hungarian society was in transition and thus socialist consciousness was not yet fully formed. In his article, Ferenc Baktai stated simply, "The most difficult are the transitional years."⁴⁷ Some argued that the government's standard of living policies made the transition to socialism more difficult. Takács suggested, "A spiritual direction is developing that is discordant with our social forms,"⁴⁸ arguing that the new standard of living policies were moving people away from the type of consciousness that was necessary to transition fully into socialism. The majority of contributors,

⁴⁵ Ibid., 842.

⁴⁶ József Berényi, "Anyagi javak – Kultúra és életforma..." [Material Goods – Culture and Lifestyle] *Új Írás*, 2 no. 4 (April 1962): 357.

⁴⁷ Baktai, 54.

⁴⁸ Takács, 159.

however, suggested that the transitional period meant that many of the dangers alluded to in the introductory article were just temporary, and would disappear in the process of building socialism. According to István Markus, “That the millions of formerly poor people want to live well and better is a natural and healthy thing. That today many snatch the tools and trappings of a better life greedily, competitively, sometimes blatantly, and unmindfully of others is a normal transitional occurrence in a transitional period.”⁴⁹ Pál Salamon argued that the desire to improve material wealth in this transitional phase could be used to improve social consciousness as well. “X thousand people will enroll in school because a five percent increase in pay means a bucket of whitewash for their weekend house. But the point is that in the process they will learn systematic thinking of society, themselves, and the world.”⁵⁰

The numerous responses to the *Új Írás* debate and the passion with which some authors argued their viewpoints seemed somewhat out of place given the relatively modest increases in consumption that occurred during the early 1960s. This is especially true with regard to the expensive durable goods that were highlighted in the course of the debate. At the end of 1962, there were 70.3 washing machines, 32.3 televisions, 7.2 refrigerators, and 5.3 automobiles for every 1000 Hungarians. This did represent an increase from the 1960 level,⁵¹ however, the rhetoric seemed to suggest that these goods were much more prevalent than the numbers would suggest. Some participants in the debate drew attention to this in their articles. “If we look at an average working family’s monthly income and expenses,” wrote György Asperján, “we can safely establish that they can only really meet the most necessary, most fundamental

⁴⁹ Markus, 359.

⁵⁰ Pál Salamon, “Mivel él az ember?” [With What Does Man Live?] *Új Írás* 1 no. 12 (December 1961): 935.

⁵¹ In 1960, there were 45.2 washing machines, 10.4 televisions, 3.8 refrigerators, and 3.1 automobiles per 1000 Hungarians. *Statisztikai Évkönyv 1965* [Statistical Yearbook 1965] (Budapest: Statisztikai Kiadó Vallalat, 1966), 285.

requirements for existence.” This idea is echoed by Imre Vári, a lamp factory worker, who suggested that for himself and many of his peers, the conversations regarding high priced consumer items seemed far from reality. Wrote Vári in a letter to the editor, “Now that my children are older, my wife also works, and we were able buy the house in which we live. It cost 80,000 forints, of which we pay one thousand forints per month. Where is the car, weekend house, etc.? They are but dreams.”⁵²

The last article of the “Culture and Lifestyle” debate, which became colloquially known as the “Refrigerator Socialism” debate, appeared in the August 1962 issue of *Új Írás*. In their article wrapping up the debate, the editors stated that they agreed with those debate participants who argued that there is nothing to fear from an increase in material goods, and that this was a healthy consequence of building socialism. However, the editors suggested that the contributors did not draw enough attention to the political and ideological factors that were in play in socialist Hungary. In capitalism, they argued, material possessions only served to reproduce bourgeois tendencies. By contrast, “A car, weekend house, refrigerator, etc. can produce bourgeois mentality and ambitions even in socialist conditions, but this mentality and ambition naturally collides with the strength of the socialist policy and ideology – and we should add the socialist economic system – that shapes the nation and is managed by the state.” Thus, the editors argued, “The favorable development of people’s opportunities in the past years is the result of socialist development, of which part is the increase in the standard of living and a very large part is the active contribution of the political direction.”⁵³ In this way, the editors of the Refrigerator Socialism debate argued that consumption in Hungary was nothing to fear because socialist

⁵² Imre Vári, “Tisztelt Szerkesztőség!” [Dear Editors,], *Új Írás* 1 no. 11 (November 1961): 842.

⁵³ “Kultúra és életforma: A szerkesztőség zárszava,” 904.

consumption differed politically and ideologically from capitalist consumption. Whereas capitalist consumption propagated bourgeois tendencies, consumption in a socialist context was in keeping with the Hungarian government's Marxist-Leninist ideology and helped to build socialism. The authors suggested that writers and other cultural figures had an important role in building a socialist consciousness, but nonetheless cautioned, "We should not lament that the worker building a weekend house shuts himself in a bourgeois stronghold; rather with our own tools and possibilities we should make it so the house-building worker builds a socialist worldview into his privately-owned dacha."⁵⁴

Kid or Car

A little over a year after the Refrigerator Socialism debate, another debate that dealt with standard of living emerged in Hungary's literary weekly, *Élet és Irodalom*, this one about Hungary's low birth rate. In an article entitled "More Bread – Less Children?" Ambrus Bor highlighted the fact that despite the increase in standard of living and the ensuing rise in optimism within Hungarian society, the Hungarian birth rate remained alarmingly low. In 1963, Hungary had the lowest birth rate in Europe with 13.1 births per one thousand population, a number that had declined steadily since 1956, when the rate was 19.8 births per thousand.⁵⁵ As Bor stated, "There is more bread. Nevertheless, with more bread and a promising future – there are less children." Bor cited a number of reasons for the fact that there were fewer children being born in Hungary, including urbanization, lack of apartments, women joining the workforce, the continued existence of the patriarchal family structure that put too much of the onus on women, and the end of the strict abortion policies of the Rákosi era. However, the reason Bor cited that

⁵⁴ Ibid. 905.

⁵⁵ Statistical Office of the United Nations, *Demographic Yearbook, 1963* (New York: United Nations, 1964), 534.

later became most associated with the debate was the increase in consumption. Bor suggested that the fact that demand for goods was rising meant that more people were putting off children in order to satisfy their desire for consumption goods. Wrote Bor, “The younger the people we ask, the more importance they place on meeting their own demands, and the less importance they place on having children.”⁵⁶ For some people, Bor argued, the increase of consumer products led to an increase in demand that could never be satisfied. This is especially true of the younger generations, who put off children until their unrealistic demands were met, and who thus had fewer children or no children at all.

The ensuing debate was published over four months in *Élet és Irodalom* under the title “Debate on Birth Rate Growth” (*Vita a népesedésről*). More than one hundred letters were received, of which the editors published sixteen complete articles and twenty-three excerpts.⁵⁷ While the debate discussed every facet of the decline in birth rate, a significant number of authors pointed to the increase in consumption and the ensuing demand that led people to forestall or completely stop having children. In her article, Éva Bozóky contended that the main reason for the declining birth rate was materialism. “In the past ten years our masses have begun to reach a bourgeois level of wealth,” Bozóky stated, “the demands, however, ran further: more greedy and more demanding than the possibilities.” These unrealistic demands led people to have fewer children, which was dangerous to building a socialist collective not only because there were less Hungarians, but because parents of only children would spoil their child. For Bozóky, “The demands and selfishness of an only child are immeasurable, and later only at an exceptional

⁵⁶ Ambrus Bor, “Tobb kenyér – kevesebb gyerek?” [More Bread – Less Children?], *Élet és Irodalom*, December 14, 1963.

⁵⁷ “Zárszó a népesedési vitához” [Closing Remarks on the Birth Rate Debate], *Élet és Irodalom*, April 25, 1964.

and painful price will he become a communal person, because his first experiences were ingrained in the concept of *mine* instead of *ours*.”⁵⁸

The idea that unreasonable demands were antithetical to building socialism was repeated by Károly Jobbágy, who argued that the lack of responsibility to the collective and the desire for things like automobiles and the “dolce vita” “stands against socialist morals, which requires of everyone a feeling of responsibility, not just to your close relatives, but to the entire society.” Jobbágy pointed to a debate within a high school homeroom class in Budapest, in which the three or four students who wanted two or more children were ridiculed by their classmates as “idealistic” and “idiotic.” The majority of young people, Jobbágy concluded, are eschewing parenthood in favor of more material pursuits.⁵⁹ András Sándor, expounded on the dangers of materialism when he stated, “A society doesn’t stop multiplying in poverty, but rather when it morbidly becomes obese.” Despite the fact that in Hungary there was officially no private property, Sándor noted that there still existed in Hungarian society a “middle class-culture” as evidenced by private household plots and the desire for consumption products. Sándor placed the root of the problem in the way socialism was represented to society and stated, “I think we made an error when we depicted socialism as solely coordinating the increase in the volume of consumption products.” Echoing Jobbágy, Sándor argued that the desire for consumption goods hampered one’s sense of responsibility to society, stating, “It is an alarming contradiction that the working class should lose even in socialism one of its most precious possessions: the developed social consciousness.”⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Éva Bozóky, “Magánügy vagy a köz gondja?” [Private Matter or Public Problem?], *Élet és Irodalom*, January 11, 1964.

⁵⁹ Károly Jobbágy, “Ezer év” [One Thousand Years], *Élet és Irodalom*, February 8, 1964.

⁶⁰ András Sándor, “Az ‘Utolsóelőtti Helyen’” [In the “Pre-Final Place”], *Élet és Irodalom*, February 29, 1964.

In contrast to authors who blamed the rise in demand spurred by consumption goods, other participants in the debate argued that families with many children often suffered in terms of standard of living. For Sándor Győrffy, the cause of the decline in birth rate was not due to society “becoming soft” with the introduction of material goods; rather, the cause was “real *economic factors*: our relative lag in apartment building and our lack of state support for child raising.” In order to demonstrate the real decrease in standard of living for large families, Győrffy pointed to the fact that the monthly per capita income of a family with no children was 1106 forints, whereas a family with four children had a monthly per capita income of 449 forints per month.⁶¹ Győrffy and many writers on all sides of the debate argued for an increase in the family allowance (*családi pótlék*), a monthly income the state would give to families with children. These writers argued that increasing the family allowance would help to close the income gap between families with children and those without, thus making parenthood more attractive. Some authors argued that the decision to have less children was not a bourgeois characteristic, but, according to respondent Edit Erki, “The number of desired children depends on how much this desire is consistent with life goals and interests.”⁶² Erki pointed to the idea that many women made the decision to have fewer children in order to be able to continue to participate in society and the workforce, which contradicts the idea that they lacked a socialist consciousness. She argued that examining the legitimate struggles that women faced in Hungarian society would lead to the conclusion that “The reason behind one or two children families is not unfailingly the refrigerator, the automobile, or too easy abortions, but rather the current, society-wide problems relating to the family question.”

⁶¹ Sándor Győrffy, “A családi pótlék emelésének lehetőségei” [The Possibilities of Increasing the Family Allowance], *Élet és Irodalom*, March 7, 1964.

⁶² Edit Erki “Ok vagy okozat?” [Cause or Effect], *Élet és Irodalom*, March 21, 1964.

Like with the Refrigerator Socialism debate, the editors of the debate strove for a middle ground in their closing article. While acknowledging that national income was consistently growing, they stated, “Families with children are handicapped in the most various areas of life compared to families without children.” They argued that since having children was instinctual, the best way of ensuring more children was to improve the material lives of families with children. “We are certain,” they argued, “that if we clear away the material obstacles and put an end to the disadvantages of apartment scarcity and income differences that make having families difficult, once again every healthy woman and man will sign up for motherhood and fatherhood.” Rather than arguing that an increase in consumption goods was causing people to forgo children, the editors argued that it was important to improve the standard of living for families with children to ensure that they could reach the same level of income as families with no children. At the same time, the editors didn’t deny that moral aspects of the debate also existed. To assist with these factors, they called upon writers and other cultural figures to instill a sense of responsibility to the community. “Indeed, the representatives of intellectual life and the professional shapers of consciousness must take a larger role in ensuring that responsibility to the growth of the population for the future of the nation has a proper place in society’s general consciousness.”⁶³

The debate in *Élet és Irodalom* was dubbed “Kid or Car?” (*Kicsi vagy kocs?*), a nickname that highlighted the debate’s focus on the idea that families were putting off having children in order to purchase consumer goods. The nickname was co-opted from a Tibor Róna sketch comedy show that appeared at the Vidám Szinpad in 1964, which also dealt with the themes of consumerism and the low birth rate in Hungary.⁶⁴ In one sketch, two men debate about

⁶³ “Zárszó a népesedési vitához.”

⁶⁴ Pótó, 28.

the birth rate. In the course of the discussion, one states, “Nobody thinks of the future! What will happen here twenty years from now if everyone has a car and a weekend house...” and the other interrupts, “Communism! You may have read about it!”⁶⁵ While intended as a comedy, the Vidám Színpad production highlighted the tension between the two sides of the debates on Hungarian living standards. On one hand, the introduction of mass consumption goods was associated with the West, and thus bourgeois tendencies; on the other hand, the promise of communism was to usher in modernity and provide for the material welfare of all Hungarian citizens, which included consumer goods. The editors of the debates often reflected the middle ground espoused by the Kádár government, arguing that within a socialist framework, the increase in consumption goods did not hold the same danger as it did within capitalism; however, some respondents viewed the increase in consumption with no little suspicion, even with the relatively small increase of living standards that occurred in the early 1960s.

The Socialist Consumer

The debates on consumption and the government’s promise to provide consumer goods to the Hungarian population brought into light the concept of a socialist consumer. Although many who participated in the debates argued against consumption, the government’s policy of improving the standard of living was largely touted by the Hungarian media as being in keeping with the principles of socialism. As the *Új Írás* editors stated, “The increase in material goods, the favorable evolution of living conditions, the freer breathing of the working man, and the policy that advances all of this is socialist policy, Marxist-Leninist policy.”⁶⁶ Within a socialist framework, they argued, consumption goods were used to improve the lives of the builders of

⁶⁵ “Párbeszéd a népszapoulatról” [Dialogue on the Increase in Population] in Tibor Róna, in *Több nyelven beszélünk* [We Speak Many Languages] (Budapest: Szépirodalmi Könyvkiadó, 1966),

⁶⁶ “Kultúra és életforma: A szerkesztőség zárszava,” 904.

socialism and were thus beneficial. Wrote *Új Írás*, “Already today there is a significant strata of our population who are far beyond this whole problem.”⁶⁷ Nonetheless, the Hungarian media portrayed socialist consumption in a certain way, advocating for a certain type of socialist consumerism that would reflect the modern trends of mass consumption but not turn into bourgeois acquisitiveness.

The Hungarian press often argued against consuming in excess, suggesting that one should not buy products in excess of what they needed. As Endre Gergelyes describes with regard to his students, “Travel, clothing, vacations, nutrition, etc. are wise and necessary attainments, if they are comprehensive. Six suits, going to the movies twelve times per month, having twenty to forty forints in pocket money, and Parker brand [watches], however, is a dangerous supply, and jumps into the category of oversupply.”⁶⁸ While a certain level of consumption goods was considered acceptable, overconsumption was criticized as falling outside of rational, socialist consumption norms. In one of his speeches, Kádár echoed this sentiment:

We approve if someone practices thrift with the wages earned through honest work and purchases a television set, a refrigerator, a motorcycle, a car or any other product, if they travel or build a family home. But we do not approve if their perception is distorted to the point that they derive satisfaction from dishonest work, and their life is devoted to the distinction thus gained, if their main purpose in life is gain, to collect like a hamster.⁶⁹

Consumption and overconsumption also appeared with relative frequency in the weekly cartoon periodical, *Ludas Matyi*.⁷⁰ The cover of one of its editions (Figure 2-1) shows a house with every modern consumption good available, including a television, a washing machine, and a

⁶⁷ Ibid., 905.

⁶⁸ Gergelyes, 840.

⁶⁹ Quoted from Tibor Valuch, “Everyday Life,” in Gyányi, Köver, and Valuch, 627. Similar discussions existed in the Soviet Union as well, and one Soviet official was quoted as saying, “Communism excludes those narrow-minded people for whom the highest goal is to acquire every possible luxurious object” in Reid (2002), 219.

⁷⁰ *Ludas Matyi* (Matyi the Goose Boy) was a Hungarian poem written by Mihály Fazekas.



Figure 2-1. Look, dear, there are two forints leftover... We could have bought something else in installments. *Ludas Matyi*, January 28, 1964.

refrigerator. A man sits at a table, with a long list of consumption goods and prices, while his wife, vacuum cleaner in hand, looks at him with bemusement. In his hand, the man holds a coin, and the caption reads, “Look, dear, there are two forints leftover... We could have bought something else in installments.” The implication is clear: the man is consuming too much, and his goal is to amass more consumer goods. Such behavior was not in keeping with the type of rational consumption espoused by the Kádár government.

The discussion of overconsumption was often associated with the idea of consumption for a purpose. As Pál Salamon stated, “The weekend house and the car – outstanding things. If they are an end in itself (*öncél*) – horrible.”⁷¹ Consumption was considered appropriate if the

⁷¹ Salamon, 936.

goods purchased would benefit the socialist individual or the collective. If one bought a refrigerator or washing machine in order to have more free time to participate in cultural activities, this was considered to be consumption for a purpose. If, however, one bought these goods because they were a symbol of prestige or solely for the purpose of amassing items, this was consumption as an end in itself.⁷² In his article in the monthly economic journal *Kereskedelmi Szemle* (Trade Review), Dr. Tibor Forgács enumerates his concerns with capitalist consumption. Producers must produce according to consumer demand, he argues, but at the same time they must create newer and newer demand to sustain the market, and therefore “rational needs cannot keep up with the pace dictated by the market.” Similarly, Forgács argues, consumers in capitalist societies consume “to satisfy their conception of happiness and to endeavor to conquer their inner anguish.”⁷³ In one article in the economic weekly *Figyelő* (Observer), Dr. Imre Bóc further distinguished between the “consumption society” of the capitalist West and a “society of consumers,” which embodied state socialist consumption goals. In a consumption society, everything is permissible as long as it increases consumption, “From deceptive false advertising to psychological manipulation that impairs the consumers’ selection possibilities and degrades their individuality, every tool is accepted, if it’s ‘effective,’ if it increases business.” In a society of consumers, by contrast, “the consumer is the kind of individual that seeks his own development and the development of his community

⁷² The idea of the socialist consumption is dealt with satirically in Róna’s *Kid or Car* comedy show. One sketch portrays a classroom setting where a student is asked to explain the difference between socialist and bourgeois consumption. He describes, “For a bourgeois person, these goods become an end in itself. A socialist buys a refrigerator so his wife can be a useful member of society. A bourgeois person [buys a refrigerator] only to store his food.” “Családi iskola” [Family School] in Róna, 251.

⁷³ Dr. Tibor Forgács, “A fogyasztás egyes kérdései a mai kapitalizmusban” [Several Questions of Consumption in Today’s Capitalism], *Kereskedelmi Szemle*, 8 no. 5 (1967), 27.

simultaneously.”⁷⁴ In Hungary’s society of consumers, therefore, the goal of consumers was not solely to purchase goods but to use those goods in order to improve themselves and society.

One interesting example of how socialist consumption was portrayed was in the Hungarian board game *Gazdálkodj Okosan!* (Economize Smartly!). Often described as “the Hungarian *Monopoly*,” *Gazdálkodj Okosan!* came out in the mid-1960s and enjoyed relative success within the Hungarian population.⁷⁵ According to the rules, the objective of the game was for the players “with proper management of finances” to secure an apartment and proper furnishings as quickly as possible. “Therefore,” the rules stated, “the winner in the game is the one who obtains an apartment and complete furnishings as well as having 2,000 forints in savings.” In the 1966 version of the game, the thirty-third square held the Hungarian electronics store Keravill, where one was required to purchase a radio, a washing machine, a sewing machine, and a vacuum cleaner. On the nineteenth square, one could buy an apartment for 30,000 forints or 31,000 forints on credit from OTP. Other squares, however, were meant to teach proper socialist behavior. The first square read, “You have stepped into the liquor store. Pay 400 forints. This is reckless, only drunkards behave in such a way that the first move leads to the liquor store.” Another square said, “Movies teach and entertain. Watch the newest film and pay 10 forints.”⁷⁶ *Gazdálkodj Okosan!* represented the kind of rational consumption espoused by the Kádár government in which consumption was acceptable as long as it met rational needs and was combined with continued responsibility to the socialist collective.

⁷⁴ Dr. Imre Bóc, “A fogyasztás művészete: Vásárolni tudni kell” [The Art of Consumption: You Must Know How to Shop], *Figyelő*, August 6, 1969.

⁷⁵ Valuch (2006), 143. Even today, *Gazdálkodj Okosan!* is still being produced in Hungary.

⁷⁶ Tibor Keresztes, *Gazdálkodj Okosan! Játékszabály* [Economize Smartly! Game Rules] (Budapest: Minerva, 1966).

The debates about consumption and other efforts to define socialist consumption and socialist consumers helped to place the Kádár government's standard of living policy within the framework of Hungarian state socialism. The government and many in the Hungarian media argued that an increase in rational, socialist consumption that was beneficial to the individual and the collective was an integral element of modern, socialist society. Indeed, many argued that one of the cornerstones of Marxist-Leninist theory was that socialism was to provide for the material welfare of its citizens. Nonetheless, debates about consumption continued throughout Kádár's tenure, and many hard-line elements of the party feared that the increase in consumerism would lead to bourgeois acquisitiveness and slow the transition to socialism. These fears were expressed even in the early 1960s, when there were only modest increases in the standard of living, and consumption goods were in short supply.

The New Economic Mechanism

In 1965, the cover of one issue of *Ludas Matyi* depicted Christopher Columbus on the shores of Hungary (Figure 2-2). Gazing at the sea of restaurants, cinemas, grocery stores, and other businesses, Columbus stated, "Behold! I have discovered America!" While the *Ludas Matyi* picture paints an overly optimistic picture of consumption culture Hungary during this period, the image nonetheless portrayed the level to which an increase in the standard of living had become a key characteristic of the Kádár government's policies in the 1960s. Despite the government's focus on living standards, however, it had become increasingly clear by the mid-1960s that the piecemeal economic reforms that the government had enacted were not sufficient to deal with the chronic problems plagued the Hungarian economy. Led by economist Rezső Nyers, economists within MSZMP proposed a more comprehensive reform, known as the new



Figure 2-2. Columbus in Hungary – Behold! I have discovered America.

economic mechanism⁷⁷ (NEM), which was the result of several years of planning and preparation, and was intended to give more autonomy to individual companies in order to alleviate some of the problems endemic to the command economy. NEM was never fully implemented; however the reforms enacted under NEM had implications for consumption in Hungary and brought Hungarian producers and sellers more firmly into the discussion of increasing living standards.

Impetus for Reform

By the mid-1960s, the widespread growth that had characterized the Hungarian economy since shortly after the Second World War had begun to decline. Much of that growth had depended on increasing the industrial labor force, and once the labor supply started to wane, so

⁷⁷ In Hungarian, the *új gazdasági mechanizmus*

too did the impressive growth figures that Hungary had maintained throughout the 1950s. Further growth in the economy was dependent on increasing productivity and efficiency, which posed a challenge for Hungary's command economy. Because incentives were given to meet the quantity targets of the five-year plan, many industries would produce unsalable goods, items that were of poor quality or that otherwise could not be sold, in order to fulfill or surpass the quota set out by the Planning Office. For example, in 1957 the Ministry of the Metallurgical and Engineering Industries exceeded its quota by 300 million forints. However, a report to the Politburo noted that the National Planning Office had estimated that only 70 to 80 million forints of the surplus could actually be sold on the domestic or international market.⁷⁸ While many goods were still in short supply in Hungary, industries were stockpiling large quantities of unsalable goods, a large proportion of which used raw materials that needed to be imported using hard currency. The surplus of unsalable goods was exacerbated by Hungarian companies' indifference to market forces. Because remuneration was based on centrally-dictated plan indicators, there was little impetus to improve the quality or selection of the goods produced. An alarming number of manufactured goods were deemed unfit for export, and many Hungarian-produced items required frequent repairs. In 1962, a Politburo report stated that half of all Hungarian-produced refrigerators would need to be repaired within six months, and a Hungarian-made television set would need repairing an average of three times while still within its warranty period.⁷⁹ These developments were devastating to the Hungarian economy. As Kádár stated in a speech to the 9th Party Congress, "The rate of growth of the national economy and on the basis of this, the pace at which the living standards increase, do not depend on a quantitative increase in

⁷⁸ Berend, 121.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 125.

industrial output but rather on the extent to which we succeed in manufacturing products which are very much in demand both at home and abroad at a lower cost, by using less material and labor.”⁸⁰

Also worrisome to the Kádár government was the increased trade deficits that Hungary had begun to amass, especially with non-Comecon countries that required hard currency. As a small country with few natural resources, Hungary was heavily reliant on foreign trade in order to maintain growth. Despite a modest improvement in terms of trade, debt to non-Comecon countries ballooned from 1,600 million forints in 1959 to 4,100 million forints in 1963.⁸¹ To repay these deficits, Hungary was often forced to use short-term credit, leading to a particularly dangerous period in the first half 1962, when the monthly export income was half that of the monthly debt repayments.⁸² The Hungarian policy of securing raw materials by trading them for Hungarian machines was not practicable on a large scale: many of the smaller, resource-poor Comecon countries were more in need of Hungary’s raw materials than its machines, and Hungarian machines often lacked the quality and technological advancements that were required for export to the West. Efforts to stem imports and increase exports had only moderate success and were unsustainable over the long term, while Hungarian industries continued to produce products that were all too frequently deemed unfit for export.⁸³ Thus the Hungarian government had reached an impasse: the overwhelming majority of Hungarian industry needed raw materials that had to be imported from countries that required hard currency. At the same times the goods

⁸⁰ Kádár (1985), 273.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 114.

⁸² Batt, 99.

⁸³ Many of these items that were rejected for export (*exportból visszamaradt áru*) were sold in Hungary. Some would joke that these items were still of a better quality than those produced for the domestic market.

these raw materials produced were often unfit to use as exports, which led to an ever-increasing trade deficit.

Although these problems were endemic to the command economy throughout the Soviet Bloc, Hungary managed to emerge from a Bloc-wide recession in the early 1960s in a comparatively better position than its neighbors. While the Kádár government faced many of the same problems as the other Comecon countries, its relative flexibility and willingness to rely on expert economists enabled it to stave off the most disastrous implications of the command economy while countries like Czechoslovakia remained more rigid in their approach.⁸⁴ Nonetheless, it had become clear by the mid-1960s that the piecemeal reforms and half measures that had been taken by the Hungarian government would not long hold back the increasing tide of debt and inefficiency that was characteristic of its economic system. Unlike in 1957, when the Kádár government summarily rejected the Varga Commission's comprehensive reform because of political concerns, by the mid-1960s, the atmosphere was more conducive to broad-scale changes to the economy. The Kádár government was able to consolidate power and occupied a more secure position with Hungarian citizens, the Soviet Bloc, and the international community. The agricultural reforms, which included financial incentives and allowed for relative autonomy of the agricultural sector, had been largely successful in establishing food security and provided a ready example for those advocating for reform.⁸⁵ Furthermore, the recession of the early 1960s had brought to light the shortcomings of the command economy throughout the entire Soviet Bloc, and many of Hungary's neighboring countries, including the Soviet Union, were preparing some kind of reform to their economic systems.

⁸⁴ Batt, 97-8.

⁸⁵ Zsuzsanna Varga, "Questioning the Soviet Economic Model in the 1960s," in Rainer and Péteri, 119.

Preparation for the Reform

The main architect of the reform was Rezső Nyers, who in 1962 was appointed as the Central Committee's secretary responsible for economic policy. In February 1964, Nyers published an article entitled "In the Middle of the Five Year Plan" in the monthly journal *Társadalmi Szemle*. An evaluation of the progress of Hungary's debt-fraught second five-year plan, the article was one of the first indicators to the public that comprehensive reform was forthcoming. In 1963, Nyers put together an informal board to discuss the economic difficulties in Hungary, with the solution overwhelmingly pointing to comprehensive reform. In his article, Nyers outlined some of the problems that required solving that affected the broadest section of the population. Among them, he stated, "We must increase the population's consumption in such a measure and in such a way that product supply and the level of performance progressively increase, and the choices expand."⁸⁶ Nyers argued that the system of centralized planning needed to be reformed, and a new mechanism needed to be put in place to manage the economy. He argued that such a reform was well in keeping with socialism:

The methods of economic directives and monetary interests must always be in accordance with the primary economic policy goals and economic organizational forms of a given period. It would be in no way correct to attach the socialist planned economy with a particular method of control. The widespread change of the control methods, or the periodic change in methods and mechanisms, has its place in – and moreover belongs to – the Marxist-Leninist economic conception of socialism.

Rather than prescribing more centralized control of the economy, Nyers argued, "The direction should rather be that we insure that companies have somewhat more independence and room to

⁸⁶ Rezső Nyers, "Az ötéves terv derekán" [In the Middle of the Five Year Plan], *Társadalmi Szemle* 9 no. 2 (February 1964): 16.

maneuver within the framework of the national economic plan, and with this more responsibility.”⁸⁷

Nyers oversaw an eleven-committee taskforce, whose purpose was to provide a comprehensive analysis of the economic mechanism along with recommendations for its modification. In March 1965, the taskforce produced a report on the economy, which it presented to the Central Committee. In May of that year, the Central Committee issued a resolution that discussed the report and its main criticisms of the economy. Entitled “Preliminary Directives for the Reform of the Economic Management System,” the resolution acknowledged at the outset, “From the critical analysis, we are unanimously and uniformly certain that significant changes are necessary.”⁸⁸ The Central Committee had thus officially recognized that half measures and piecemeal reforms were no longer sufficient to repair the chronic difficulties of the Hungarian command economy. The resolution argued that the problems plaguing Hungarian economy were complex and varied:

Objective, independent causes play a role in our economic difficulties, for example sharpening competition in the international markets. However, it can more significantly be said that our economic management system does not promote the optimal harmonization of individual, company, and society interests, it doesn’t attain the most rational distribution in the sphere of economic decisions, and it doesn’t adequately motivate the growth of economic efficiency; moreover it doesn’t sufficiently build worker initiative and active participation in company work.⁸⁹

The resolution argued that the current system of rigid central planning was overly paternalistic and advocated for a number of reforms, primary among them establishing more company

⁸⁷ Ibid., 19.

⁸⁸ “Az MSZMP Központi Bizottságának kiinduló irányelvei a gazdaságirányítási rendszer reformjára” [Preliminary Directives for the Reform of the Economic Management System], in Henrik Vass, ed., *A Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt határozatai és dokumentumai 1963-1966* [MSZMP Resolutions and Documents, 1963-1966] (Budapest, Kossuth Könyvkiadó, 1978), 235.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 240.

independence. The resolution also contained a section on the standard of living policy, reaffirming the government's dedication to improving the standard of living and consumption. "We must motivate and support those processes that improve the conditions for consumption," the resolution argued, further stating that in addition to improving the production of consumption goods, the Hungarian government would import the appropriate materials in order to improve the selection of mass consumer products for the Hungarian consumer.⁹⁰ Despite the relative urgency of the problems facing the Hungarian economy, the resolution also cautioned against rushing into reforms, and recommended that the comprehensive economic reforms be implemented on January 1, 1968.

In May of 1966, the Central Committee issued a second resolution on the economic reforms, this one a detailed description of the main principles of comprehensive reform. Once again, the importance of improving the standard of living was highlighted. "The political importance of the reform," stated the resolution, "lies in its ability to assure the faster increase in the mass's living standards."⁹¹ The resolution also emphasized the importance of individual companies having more autonomy than with the existing mechanism, and argued that the competition that this would create would be beneficial for the consumer. The resolution called for limited competition between companies, arguing, "This limited competition... has a large importance from the viewpoint of opening company independence, increasing economic efficiency, technical development, and better satisfying consumer demand."⁹² Upwards of one hundred and fifty pages and spanning seventeen chapters, the resolution outlined in detail the

⁹⁰ Ibid., 264.

⁹¹ "Az MSZMP Központi Bizottságának irányelvei a gazdasági mechanizmus reformjára" [MSZMP's Central Committee Guiding Principles for the Reform of the Economic Mechanism], in Vass (1978), 304.

⁹² Ibid., 318.

way in which the new economic mechanism would work to ensure more company autonomy. Naming this new reform proved to be challenging: while many of the economists who supported the reform wanted to call it “economic reform,” more conservative members of the party preferred “further development of economic direction.” The compromise solution, which was finally agreed upon, was the “new economic mechanism.”⁹³

NEM did not do away with central planning, and the yearly and five-year plans continued to play an important role in the economy; however, central plans no longer extended to company-level directives. Individual companies were allowed a certain degree of autonomy in both producing and selling products. Instead of specific quantity targets, NEM incorporated a relatively complex system of what were called “regulators”: taxes, rebates, wage regulation, and other methods to ensure that companies met the economic and policy targets that were elaborated in the central plans. Perhaps the most important regulator was the three-tiered price system. Prices for producer and consumer goods were split into three categories: those that were fixed, those that had a price ceiling, and those that were sold with free market pricing. In the old system, producer and consumer prices acted independently of each other and had little or nothing to do with cost of production. By contrast, the new price system and other regulators served to connect the two, which had the effect of making producers susceptible to market forces and consumer demand. With NEM, wage incentives were based on company profit instead of fulfilling plan targets, hence companies were more motivated to produce goods that the consumer would actually want, rather than easy-to-produce goods that would fulfill or over-fulfill the quantities outlined in the five-year plan.⁹⁴ NEM’s focus on company autonomy and

⁹³ Gough, 156.

⁹⁴ For a more extensive discussion of NEM’s primary characteristics, see Berend, 168-93.

profit signified that the Hungarian government recognized that the distinct interests of specific groups such as companies and collective farms were not in opposition to the socialist system, but rather were inherent to it.⁹⁵ As one article in the Hungarian journal *Társadalmi Szemle* described the monetary incentives under NEM, “The goal of a larger income is not inconsistent with the socialist social system; indeed it is a natural basis for the socialist law of distribution according to (the result of) work. There is no need to pass censure on it. There isn’t anything ugly in it. It is not incompatible with the interests of our nation.”⁹⁶

Although it was deemed necessary for economic efficiency, hard-line dissenters within the party were critical of many aspects of NEM. In May 1966, during the discussion and drafting of the reform’s guidelines, some of the more conservative members of the party openly expressed their reservations that such reform would disrupt the economy. At this time, Kádár himself seemed to express disquiet at the extent of reforms, and even seemed to suggest some form of tempering NEM, although later in that same meeting he implicitly backtracked from his earlier unease.⁹⁷ As preparations for the reforms continued, concern was raised about NEM’s potential effects on full employment. Because the economic problems in Hungary were the result of inefficient labor as well as inefficient use of resources, many feared that companies striving for efficiency would fire workers, thus causing a spike in unemployment. Throughout the process of NEM’s implementation, especially as the economic reforms in other Bloc countries were beginning to struggle, the government enacted certain modifications to the reform in order to reduce the potential social effects of NEM. One of these was to incorporate a series of

⁹⁵ Zsuzsana Varga, 123.

⁹⁶ “Három kérdés a gazdasági mechanizmus reformjáról,” *Társadalmi Szemle* 22 no. 2 (1967): 120.

⁹⁷ Gough, 155.

“brakes” in the reform that would slow or stop the process of NEM if it was deemed to be too disruptive to the economy or society.

Although he had expressed reservations about the reform, Kádár was consistent in arguing that NEM was in keeping with socialism, and even contended that the economic reforms were the next step in building socialism. In an interview with United Press International correspondent Henry Shapiro, Kádár suggested that the economic reforms signaled a new stage in creating a socialist economy. “The fact that we have entered a new stage of socialist development calls for a reform of our economic mechanism,” Kádár stated, contending that in the first decades after the Second World War, a high degree of centralization was necessary in order to rebuild after the war and overcome the backwardness of the Hungarian economy. However, he noted, “When we completed laying the foundations of a socialist society the initial stage of development ended. The new phase, one that relied on increasing efficiency and meeting demand, did not require such a high level of centralization.” In the interview, Kádár called the economic reforms “timely, expedient, and a factor of immense importance from the point of view of the economic and social development of the Hungarian People’s Republic.”⁹⁸ In a speech to the 9th party congress, Kádár echoed the importance of the new role of individual companies in the development of socialism, stating, “In principle the position occupied and role played by enterprises will undergo changes in the further developed, new system of the planned socialist economy.” He went further, “The goal of a socialist planned economy is to meet demand. Enterprise management can best serve the interests of society if their activities are focused on satisfying financially sound demands in the most economic manner and if they

⁹⁸ Kádár (1985), 248.

manufacture the goods needed by society.”⁹⁹ Thus, publicly Kádár argued that the increased focus on demand and efficiency signaled a new, more modern phase of building socialism. The fact that companies were gaining independence meant that Hungary had gone beyond the introductory phase in which strong central control of the economy was warranted.

Preparation for the reform began shortly after the Central Committee’s May resolution, and so to did propaganda. Public opinion regarding NEM was of key importance to the Kádár government, which made every effort to ensure that the public approved of the new economic policy. A number of public opinion polls were conducted, and Nyers and other advocates of the reform published articles in journals and magazines explaining the reform and its impact. These articles often tailored the information to specific groups of Hungarian citizens. In an interview for the Hungarian magazine, *Nők Lapja* (Women’s Magazine), for example, Nyers explained the reform’s effect on the female consumer, arguing, “It’s a fact that women are participating in production work in ever growing numbers, but this does not keep step with mechanization of households and the level of services. If we fix this, it must have a positive effect on family life and make a working woman’s household chores easier.”¹⁰⁰ Hungarian Radio and Television (MRT) also contributed to NEM’s propaganda efforts, and a number of different programs were created in order to inform Hungarian citizens about the changes that were to take place as a result of NEM’s implementation. Perhaps the most memorable of these programs was called “I Will Explain the Mechanism” (*Magyarazom a Mechanizmust*), the catch phrase of an animated character named Dr. Agy, who spent the program explaining NEM to the general public, often by using analogies like comparing the system of regulators to umpires in a soccer match.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 275.

¹⁰⁰ Irén Némethi, “Életünk hétköznapijai és a reform: Beszélgetés Nyers Rezsővel” [Our Everyday Life and the Reform: Conversation with Rezső Nyers] *Nők Lapja*, December 16, 1967, 3.

Propaganda efforts for NEM were aimed at every level of society, and intended to encourage all of Hungarian society to actively participate in the reform process. One of MRT's guidelines for program propaganda suggested, "We must strengthen the assurance that this is not a task for narrow group of professionals – economists, plant organization, etc. – but rather is a social matter."¹⁰¹ MRT and the Hungarian press were supposed to address the real concerns of the general public. One MRT document expressed the concerns of everyday Hungarians that needed to be addressed:

In public opinion, the desire was constantly expressed, that work, workplace, and wages will be stable, the supply of goods will be plenty, purchasing power of money will be stable, and living conditions will improve. The desire for stability is fundamental and natural. The numerous achievements of our socialist system have nowadays begun to become precious, even for those who were not aware of them until now.¹⁰²

Programs directed at the general public were intended to address and allay the concerns of the average Hungarian citizen, who feared the reform's effect on employment and prices. At the same time, NEM propaganda was supposed to reflect real expectations and difficulties resulting from NEM. In mid-1967, the Central Committee Agitation and Propaganda department put out a report on NEM propaganda, and stated that while the existing propaganda work was effective, especially with regard to the connection between the political and economic aspects of the reform, there were still gaps in the way NEM was represented. "In addition to demonstrating the reform's socialist characteristics and expected positive effects, the propaganda less effectively prepared the population for the possible difficulties," the report stated.¹⁰³ Propaganda on the

¹⁰¹ MOL XXVI-A-8-a box 26, "Írányelvek az új gazdaságirányítási rendszer műsorpropagandájával kapcsolatban" [Guidelines in Relation to Program Propaganda for the New Economic Management System].

¹⁰² MOL XXVI-A-8-a box 26, "Az új gazdasági mechanizmus megközelítése a műsormunkában" [Approaching the New Economic Mechanism in Program Work].

¹⁰³ MOL XXVI-A-8-a box 26, "Jelentés az Agitációs és Propaganda Bizottságnak: a harmadik ötéves terv és a gazdasági mechanizmus reformja propagandájának helyzetéről és az 1967 második félévi feladatokról" [Report to

reform was thus expected to promote the reform without fostering unrealistic expectations about NEM.¹⁰⁴

One of the primary goals of propaganda for NEM was to stress the socialist nature of the reforms and to encourage further development of socialist consciousness. As an MRT document on reform propaganda stated, “We often encounter fear about [NEM’s] socialist and social tenor. Our opponents build upon this anxiety, trying to use it to turn against us. In these circumstances, it is especially important that Radio and Television effectively transmits the new economic mechanism’s socialist character.”¹⁰⁵ Highlighting the socialist characteristics of NEM was a critical aspect of the reform’s propaganda, and like Kádár, newspapers and radio and television shows strove to identify and uphold NEM as being well in keeping with socialist tenets. As another MRT report explained further:

In the new economic mechanism, such new functional relations are being developed, such economic management methods come to the fore – market economy, customs duties, credit policy, etc. – to which we find greater or lesser similarities in capitalist economies. These outward similarities can easily give rise to the illusion – we have already encountered this – that we are not further developing the guiding tools of a socialist economy, and rather are drawing closer to the capitalism’s methods of economic management policy. Our programs must consistently assert the principle that where there are these superficial similarities, we definitively point to the differences.¹⁰⁶

Because some of the aspects of NEM could be misconstrued as elements of capitalism, the report argued, it was critical to show that the economic reforms in Hungary were decisively socialist.

Similar emphasis was placed on building socialist consciousness while promoting the

the Agitation and Propaganda Committee: On the Status of the Propaganda for the Third Five-Year Plan and the Reform of the Economic Mechanism and Tasks for the Second Half of 1967].

¹⁰⁴ Such unrealistic expectations were satirized in the cover of *Ludas Matyi*’s first issue of 1968, which depicted a young couple watching as a throng of commuters tried to board a crowded streetcar. The woman remarks to the man, “They’ve already worked four days in the new mechanism and they STILL don’t have cars...” *Ludas Matyi* January 4, 1968.

¹⁰⁵ “Az új gazdasági mechanizmus megközelítése a műsormunkában.”

¹⁰⁶ MOL XXIX-A-8-a box 26, “Műsorpolitikai irányelvek 1967-ben” [Program Policy Directives in 1967].

mechanism. A Politburo report about the propaganda tasks of the economic mechanism explained, “In addition to monetary interests, propaganda for the masses must firmly stress the great importance of consciousness, the interests of the working class, and responsibility to the nation. Propagandists must at all times keep in mind that in the new economic mechanism, monetary interests and moral factors must be in organic unity for it to succeed.”¹⁰⁷ The emphasis on building a socialist consciousness was considered a critical aspect of promoting NEM, and helped to ensure that the reforms remained firmly placed within government’s rhetoric on socialism.

Competition for the Customer

Whereas the early 1960s had featured numerous articles about the socialist consumer, the second half of the 1960s turned to Hungarian sellers. Because sellers and producers had a larger role in deciding what to produce, and profit incentives meant they meeting consumer interests was of primary importance, the government and media argued that NEM would serve to connect sellers and buyers on a more substantial level. This included improving sales methods within Hungary. As the Central Committee resolution on the reform stated, “To correct the relationship between the consumers and the trade workers, we must strengthen those elements of the monetary incentive system that encourage polite service and winning and keeping buyers.”¹⁰⁸ Newspapers heralded a “Competition for the Customer” that would arise from the implementation of the NEM, and producers were encouraged to engage in sales activities: market research, competition, and even advertising in order to “win” consumers. Hungarian customers were told that the shopping experience would be more enjoyable as more products would be

¹⁰⁷ MOL XXIX-A-8-a box 26, “Jelentés a Központi Bizottságnak a gazdasági mechanizmus reformjának előkészítéséről és az átmenettel kapcsolatos feladatok kidolgozásáról” [Report for the Central Committee on the Preparation for the Reform of the Economic Mechanism and the Development of Transitional Tasks]

¹⁰⁸ Vass (1978), 401.

available and more pleasant shopkeepers would greet them as they made their purchases. The media argued that the sellers market of the previous era would be replaced by one in which sellers were more attentive to buyer demands. While the average Hungarian shopper certainly did not experience the idealized version of commerce that was described in the media, the *Competition for the Customer* nonetheless signaled a shift in focus from the consumer to the seller, suggesting that the government was focused on creating a modern socialist version of commerce, one which defied the stereotypes of empty store shelves and cranky salespeople.

In order to promote the role of market competition in NEM, members of the Hungarian press in favor of the mechanism first had to justify the importance of competition in socialist society, where it was seemingly out of place. In his article on the market and competition, Imre Fenyő described the role of the economic reforms, suggesting, “From the economic reforms we expect that in the collective and harmonizing tendencies of the market and the plan, it will be possible to create balance [between purchasing power and supply].”¹⁰⁹ In capitalist countries, Fenyő argued, competition existed between large monopolies and oligopolies and the goal was maximizing profit. The purpose of competition between these companies was to eliminate competition, and in this atmosphere it was impossible to establish market balance. In socialist countries, however, there was a planned economy and workers were in possession of the means of production. “The ownership and state planning in a socialist economy creates the possibility for the socialist state to use the market to influence economic development that would express the interests of society as a whole.” The socialist market economy would be regulated in two ways: prior to production in the form of centralized planning, and after production in the form of profits and sales. This system allowed the market to act as a corrector to economic management

¹⁰⁹ Imre Fenyő, “Piac és verseny” [Market and Competition], *Kereskedelmi Szemle* 9 no. 1 (1969): 9.

while limiting its negative effects on society. However, as Fenyő suggested, “The advantages of the market mechanism can only be realized in a planned economy if the market participants engage in economic competition.”¹¹⁰ Like Fenyő, other authors highlighted the importance of competition within NEM. As one article stated, “From the point of view of trade, competition in production has an effect on product procurement, and within this, supply. It is our fundamental goal that products appear on the marketplace that meet the population’s demands in every respect.”¹¹¹ Competition was thus deemed an integral aspect of NEM that would help to establish equilibrium between supply and demand, and the role of competition in a socialist economy was highlighted as being different from that of the capitalist West, where cutthroat competition destroyed the equilibrium of the market.

“What is the biggest difference between the consumer and the customer?” an article in *Népszabadság* asked. The response: “According to data, reports, and per capita averages, the *consumer supply is generally satisfactory*, whereas the customer very often leaves the stores dissatisfied and annoyed.”¹¹² Indeed, despite the government’s focus on increasing standard of living and consumption, the average Hungarian customer had much to complain about. While the supply of basic staples such as food had become relatively plentiful by the mid-1960s, shortages still persisted in a number of consumer goods. Furthermore, Hungarian shops had a reputation among its citizens for having poor customer service. “*Buy it or don’t buy it, you won’t get*

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 10.

¹¹¹ Gábor Lacza, “A kereskedelmi versenyről” [On Competition in Commerce], *Kereskedelmi Szemle*, 8 no. 3 (1967): 11.

¹¹² Ferenc Bihari, “Mit kíván a kedves vevő?” [What Does the Dear Customer Want?], *Népszabadság*, July 25, 1968.

anything else,”¹¹³ stated an article in *Népszava* (People’s Word), “or rather, nothing else is offered: this is the experience. If someone comes into a store without a defined goal, they more often than not are forced to leave empty handed, and afterwards to go from shop to shop.”¹¹⁴ Indeed, shopkeepers seemed to care little whether or not customers bought items in their store or not, as they were paid regardless of store profit. As one article stated, “The main problem, which must change, is that the economic sphere with which the consumer is in contact does not, or does not adequately compete for the consumer’s money.”¹¹⁵ Once NEM was in place, the media suggested, a new “Competition for the Customer” (*Verseny a vevőért*) would make the shopping experience for Hungarian consumers more fruitful and pleasant. Hungarian citizens were told that the new economic reforms would take into account customer demand, and that shops would cater more to their customers. “In the new mechanism, customer desires and demands will play a deciding role in the company’s production plan and direction,” stated *Népszabadság*’s Imre Kapalyag, “Paying attention to the population’s demands, the customer’s words! One can only gauge what this means if one has (so many times) been disposed of by a less-than-polite salesperson with a curt “none,” or has gone to five-six shops to find a sought after shoe, dress, or perhaps soda siphon.”¹¹⁶ Encouraging sellers to be more engaged with the Hungarian customer was nothing new in Hungary; however, the Hungarian media argued that profit incentives under NEM would provide more of an impetus for sellers to engage in modern sales tactics that focused on consumer demand. Thus they argued that competition stood to benefit the Hungarian

¹¹³ The Hungarian phrase *eszi, nem eszi, nem kap mást* (eat it or don’t eat it, you won’t get anything else) was an expression used to mean “take it or leave it.” Some members of the Hungarian media used a turn on this phrase replacing the Hungarian verb “vesz” (buy) instead of “eszik” (eat).

¹¹⁴ Ildikó Kovács, “Veszi, nem veszi – nem kap mást” [Buy it or Don’t Buy it, You Won’t Get Anything Else], *Népszava*, April 11, 1965.

¹¹⁵ Dr. György Varga, “A Mechanizmus és a Fogyasztó,” *Figyelő*, May 4, 1966.

¹¹⁶ Imre Kapalyag, “Verseny a vevőért,” *Népszabadság*, July 22, 1967.

consumer, as shelves would be more dependably stocked and the shopkeeper would be more attentive and informative. As an article in *Népszava* argued, “The... goal of competition – in addition to improving product supply – is impeccable service to the consumer. The kind of service from which [the consumer] leaves contentedly.”¹¹⁷

The Hungarian media also provided guidance for sellers, whose role in the Competition for the Customer was to differentiate themselves from their rivals, a difficult task as many were operating within the same state-owned businesses and buying and selling the exact same merchandise. As Ferenc Bihari explains in his article in *Figyelő*, “The resourceful, enterprising merchant takes every opportunity to make the buyer or perspective buyer feel that this store is different than the others, that to buy in this store is somehow more advantageous. *The same* products can be shown and delivered to the customer and *the same* packaging material be used in so many ways.” Bihari encouraged shopkeepers to make use of a number of various “tools of competition” in order to persuade customers to patronize their establishment over others. These tools encompassed a wide range of activities from developing networks to the shop’s outward appearance. In describing how stores were to be organized, for example, Bihari described, “The setup should be such that it satisfies most profitably the customer and store personnel’s esthetical, comfort, and hygiene demands, and should be suitable for the store manager to incorporate his own ideas.” Bihari also highlighted the importance of price policy, although for many consumption goods, the prices remained fixed or had price ceilings. One of the key aspects of competition that Bihari and other members of the Hungarian media emphasized was the importance of purchasing appropriate goods. Stated one article, “One of the leader’s most important tasks is determining the purchase policy, or what, when, and from whom the retail

¹¹⁷ Mária Lukács, “Verseny a fogyasztók megnyeréséért: Beszélgetés a KPVDSZ vezetőivel” [Competition to Win Consumers: Conversation with the KPVDSZ leadership], *Népszava*, Jul 24, 1966.

company should buy.”¹¹⁸ Shopkeepers were encouraged to purchase products that would best suit their customers needs, either from Hungarian companies or from foreign, preferably socialist, countries, in order to maintain a supply of consumer goods that would meet their customers’ demands.

When discussing the role of sellers, the Hungarian media also highlighted the importance of establishing a connection between the customer and the salesperson. As one article in *Népszabadság* described, “If it’s true that commerce is not merely buying and selling, but rather a complex chain of human relationships, then behind the counter must be placed a person who is *capable of creating these relationships*. In other words: *capable of servicing customers*.”¹¹⁹ Vendors were encouraged to take an active role in studying customer behavior and demands in order to better serve their patrons. As Ferenc Kovács argued in *Kereskedelmi Szemle*, “Satisfying population’s growing and changing purchasing demands and developing more active retailing increasingly requires the knowledge of consumption behavior and its influencing factors.”¹²⁰ Kovács expanded on this argument several years later, stating, “A well-served customer in a shop or department store is satisfied and will come back. The customer to whom the salesperson attentively and civilly attends, to whom the salesperson shows other products, often buys more than originally intended... The vendor is assisted in all of this by the practical application of customer psychology.”¹²¹ The role of a good salesclerk was thus not only to sell goods, but to identify the buyer’s motivations and demands and to offer them products that would be most

¹¹⁸ Ferenc Bihari, “Verseny a fogyasztóért” [Competition for the Customer], *Figyelő*, February 28, 1968.

¹¹⁹ János Buzási, “Milyen ember a kereskedő?” [What Kind of Person is the Vendor?], *Népszabadság*, March 29, 1969.

¹²⁰ Ferenc Kovács, “A vevő, az eladó, és a lélektan” [The Customer, the Seller, and Psychology], *Kereskedelmi Szemle*, 9 no. 2 (1968): 25.

¹²¹ Ferenc Kovács, “Módszerek és szabályok a vevőlélektan alkalmazásához” [Methods and Rules for Applying Customer Psychology], *Kereskedelmi Szemle*, 13 no. 9 (1972): 33.

suited to them. Customer behavior was considered such a critical aspect of Hungarian commerce that the Domestic Trade Research Institute created a Customer Psychology Department in summer of 1967. “We believe,” argued Gyula Pál, “that all companies should make use of the observations of the Domestic Trade Research Institute’s customer psychology studies, for both their own interests and the interests of the consumers.”¹²²

Advertising

One of the main tools of the Competition for the Customer that was highlighted in the Hungarian media was the role of advertising. In one *Ludas Matyi* cartoon entitled “Battle for the Customer” (Figure 2-3), two businessmen are beating each other over the heads with signs that read “Advertisement” (*reklám*) as a perplexed buyer looks on. Advertising was an important aspect of both producer and shopkeeper activities, and was often highlighted as an integral part of the economic activities in Hungary. “Advertising is its own economic category,” argued László Kertész, “On one hand, because it is a part of trade work, and must follow the trade institutions, and on the other hand because it is a complex of artistic, technical, and psychological factors.”¹²³ While advertising had increased in Hungary throughout the 1960s, the introduction of NEM brought the role of advertising into the fore. An article in *Figyelő* stated, “In the New Economic Mechanism, advertising activities will be especially significant, when even in industry companies producing similar products can count on *healthy competition*.”¹²⁴ In June of 1967, MRT made plans to create an office that would focus on advertising on television and radio. The leaders of MRT stated that such an office was of critical importance:

¹²² Gyula Pál, “A vevőlélektani kutatások tapasztalatainak alkalmazása a budapesti játékboltban” [The Use of Observations of Customer Psychology Research in a Budapest Toy Store] *Kereskedelmi Szemle*, 10 no. 4 (1969): 29.

¹²³ László Kertész, “A Reklám az Új Mechanizmusban”, *Kereskedelmi Szemle*, 7 no. 3 (1966), 158.

¹²⁴ Győző Horváth, “A reklámról – reklám nélkül” [About Advertisements – Without Advertising], *Figyelő*, March 30, 1966.



Figure 2-3. Battle for the Customer. *Ludas Matyi*, January 29, 1970

In the new system of economic management, the demand for promoting products is increasingly apparent. MRT must prepare itself for the anticipated rise in advertisement or advertising programs. The preparation of advertisements for radio and television, and their effectiveness, relies in large measure on the knowledge of special possibilities. In the interests of the national economy, therefore, it is important that MRT carries out this activity.¹²⁵

The importance and increase of advertising was considered to be an essential tool in the functioning of NEM, and MRT wanted to be prepared to meet the demand of Hungarian merchants to promote their products and company on radio and television in a way that was both efficient and effective.

The Hungarian press argued that it was necessary for both producers and shopkeepers to engage in advertising, and encouraged the two groups to work together. As one article suggested, “Presumably, the common activities of producers and seller organizations will increase in advertising and propaganda work, and the content of retail advertisements will also change. In addition to product advertising, the use of *company advertisements* will come to the fore,

¹²⁵ XXIX-A-8-a box 25, “Tervezet: MRT. Kereskedelmi és Hirdetőiroda szervezésére” [Plan for the Organization of an MRT Commerce and Advertising Office].

because companies are primarily interested in promoting their own products.”¹²⁶ Whereas product advertisements promoted specific products being sold, company advertisements were intended to promote the company or store in its entirety. Because the contact with the consumers occurred in retail shops, advertising in stores was considered to be of prime importance. “Properly employed advertisements play an essential role in the competition between stores,” one article argued, “More than once has a clever, well-placed neon sign of the store’s name attracted customers.”¹²⁷ Stores were often tasked with displaying advertisements created by both the retail store and the producer. As an article in *Figyelő* argued, “A significant portion of advertising and propaganda occurs in shops. The retail manager is tasked with combining and organizing industry and store propaganda.”¹²⁸ Like product supply, shop organization, and salesperson attentiveness, advertising was considered to be a critical tool in the retail clerk’s Competition for the Customer.

As with competition, advertising was also justified within the framework of socialism. During a 1970 advertising conference in Budapest, deputy head of the Domestic Trade Ministry György Ribner stated, “Consumer advertising plays an essential role in socialist society to inform and appropriately influence consumers.”¹²⁹ In addition to influencing the consumer to purchase a specific product, advertisements were intended to inform the customer about the product, including the quality, price, and instructions for use. Advertisers were encouraged to engage in truthful, informative advertising while at the same time promoting their products,

¹²⁶ Fenyő, 13.

¹²⁷ Lacza, 11.

¹²⁸ Bihari, “Verseny a fogyasztóért.”

¹²⁹ Dr. György Ribner, “A hazai fogyasztói piac és a reklám” [The Domestic Consumer Market and Advertising], in Dr. Anna Sándor, ed., *II. Reklámkonferencia* [Second Advertising Conference], (Budapest: Műszaki és Természettudományi Egyesületek Szövetsége Szervezési Szövetsége Szervezési és Vezetési Tudományos Társaság Kereskedelmi Szakosztálya: Magyar Kereskedelmi Kamara Propaganda Osztálya, 1977), 170.

goals that were set out in 1957 during a Bloc-wide advertising conference in Prague.¹³⁰ However, under NEM, one study on advertising argued that a profitable economy was the primary motive, even in socialism, noting, “The main goal of socialist advertising is the increase in sales, the promotion of a profitable economy, and finally company profit.” The study argued that advertising was important for creating a modern socialist society, stating, “Today, advertising has already outgrown the framework of the market, and has become a social phenomenon, one that defines the modern population’s living conditions and their image of the world around them.”¹³¹ Thus while the study sought to define socialist advertising, it did so in a way that was different from its traditional socialist role informing and influencing. Indeed, in the closing address of the advertising conference, Ferenc Zala warned against trying to define socialist advertising:

Nowadays it is customary to attach the word “socialism:” socialist advertising, socialist consumption, socialist trade, socialist industry, and so on, so that nothing is omitted. Properly speaking, it is not important whether the advertisement is capitalist or socialist. At best it is possible to say that there are socialist expectations and demands. Socialist society creates different demands, but the essential characteristics of advertisements will perhaps not change.¹³²

Zala suggested that while advertising may look the same in socialist and capitalist countries, the important factor was that the consumers belonged to a socialist society, and therefore had different demands. Throughout NEM’s implementation, the discussion of sales and advertising served to legitimize sales activities under NEM as important symbols of the modern socialist economy.

Conclusion

¹³⁰ Hanson, 29.

¹³¹ Mrs. István Hoffman and János Buzási, *A reklám birodalmából* [From the Realm of Advertising] (Budapest: Kossuth Könyvkiadó, 1970), 55.

¹³² Ferenc Zala, “Zárszó” [Closing Words] in Sándor, 238.

An advertisement appearing in *Nők Lapja* in 1969 showed a man pushing a child in a baby carriage (Figure 2-4). The advertisement read, “Child or Car? It is no longer a question! Every child can have his own car!”¹³³ The advertisement exemplified the transformation of Hungarian consumption throughout the 1960s: after NEM was introduced, Hungarian sellers were using the tagline of what had been a serious debate in order to market a child’s stroller. In the 1960s, MSZMP’s focus on consumption and standard of living increasingly became a cornerstone of the Kádár government, and was a key feature of its new “he who is not against us is with us” direction, to the point where Khrushchev jovially described socialism in Hungary as “goulash communism.” The focus on consumption was not unique to Hungary, however. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, the Soviet Union and other Soviet Bloc countries began to focus more attention to improving living standards. In the Soviet Union, policies aimed at improving consumption and the standard of living were partly to compete with the West and partly to replace the hard-line Stalinist tactics with a form of soft power. In Hungary, the impetus for improving living standards and consumption was similar. The Kádár government, hypersensitive to public opinion following the revolution, began to implement policies that would improve the quality of life for average Hungarians in order to gain legitimacy among its citizens. This new policy was not without its detractors: numerous debates were carried out throughout the decade, which argued that a policy aimed at improving consumption would lead to the rise in bourgeois tendencies. Indeed, debates about consumption policies emerged almost immediately after the policy was announced, and the improvements in living standards were barely discernable. Nonetheless, leaders of MSZMP insisted that the government’s dedication to improving the standard of living for the Hungarian population was well in keeping with Marxist-Leninist

¹³³ In Hungarian, the word for “carriage” is the same as the word for “car.” Thus “baby carriage” in Hungarian could also be translated as “baby car.”



Figure 2-4. Child or Car? It is no longer a question! Every child can have his own car! *Nők Lapja*, August 23, 1969.

theory, and that indeed providing for society was one of the primary goals of building socialism. At the same time, they promoted the idea of the socialist consumer: a person whose consumption habits were rational and whose purchases were made with the intention of improving oneself and society.

By the mid-1960s, Hungary was suffering from problems that were endemic to the command economy: skyrocketing trade deficits, rampant inefficiency, and an overwhelming stock of unsalable goods had become characteristic of the Hungarian economy. When half measures and piecemeal reforms were no longer capable of improving these concerns, the government, led by Rezső Nyers, began to put in place a comprehensive reform, the New Economic Mechanism, which was intended to give more autonomy to individual companies, allowing them to produce the goods that would be profitable and that were in demand on both the domestic and international market. The first phase of NEM was implemented in January of 1968, and later phases were to take place in the early 1970s; however, by 1972, the more dogmatic elements of the party had gained ascendancy and the political conditions for reform

were no longer in place. Even as the reform was being put in place, the government built in a series of “brakes” to be applied if they perceived the reforms to be damaging to the economic or social landscape. Brakes notwithstanding, the implementation of NEM brought into focus the role of Hungarian sales, and sought to bring sellers in closer connection with the Hungarian consumer. The Hungarian media promised consumers that the Competition for the Customer would make shopping in Hungary a more pleasant experience, and shopkeepers were encouraged to compete for consumers’ money while selling the same things in state-owned businesses of the same name. The media encouraged sellers to examine consumer behavior and engage in consumer psychology in order to better identify and meet customer demand, thus satisfying consumers and increasing seller profits. An integral part of the Competition for the Customer was the role of advertising, as both producers and sellers were encouraged to advertise their products and their companies. By the end of the 1960s, the consumption landscape had been dramatically altered, and the consumer and seller were depicted as key figures in the modern Hungarian economy, which nonetheless was firmly rooted in the rhetoric of socialism.

Chapter 3

Socialist Popular Culture

As the economic sphere was changing in Hungary during the 1960s, so too was the field of culture. Throughout the 1960s, Hungarian culture underwent a dramatic transformation that was influenced by the Kádár government's policies as well as external developments in culture. As the Hungarian government increasingly began to separate the role of culture, especially literature, in creating policy and ideology, and the Three Ts became an enduring aspect of Hungarian cultural policy (see Chapter 1), a wider variety of cultural products began to appear in Hungary, including popular culture from the West. As the 1960s progressed, the government's increased focus on the economy facilitated the rise in Hungarian and Western popular culture, since meeting consumer demand was an important aspect of the Kádár's government's policies, even when the demand in question was for cultural items. Culture in Hungary was further transformed by the increase in tourism both to and from Hungary. As Hungarians were able to travel more easily, even to the West, and Hungary's burgeoning tourism industry began to attract more Western visitors, the increased contact with Western cultural products raised demand for similar cultural activities in Hungary. Finally, in Hungary, as in many other countries throughout the world, the introduction of new forms of mass media, particularly radio and television, became more widespread, and a larger percentage of the Hungarian population had access to cultural products than had previously been possible.

At the same time, as with consumption in general, the Kádár government attempted to create a specific type of Hungarian socialist cultural consumer, one who would choose to experience "tasteful" cultural products and who sought to continually expand his or her cultural knowledge. Rather than focusing on producing only those products that were considered to be of

high cultural value, MSZMP instead focused on public education, whereby improving the population's taste was a gradual process of teaching the public what was tasteful and what types of culture should be eschewed. This focus on education meant that the onus for producing and consuming tasteful culture was placed on the individual artist or consumer, and that culture that was considered to be less than ideal was allowed so long as the government continued to insist that "good taste" was being developed. Contact with the West posed another problem for the Hungarian government, and this contact was often tempered with ideological caveats that separated Hungarian citizens from their Western counterparts. Hungarian tourists were to be socialist tourists, in that they visited other countries in order to improve their cultural worldview rather than to purchase consumption goods that were rare or unavailable in Hungary. Further, the Hungarian government accused the West of trying to separate Hungary from the rest of the Soviet Bloc by focusing on the Kádár government's moderate policies, and of using peaceful coexistence to flood the Hungarian market with popular culture in order to make the West more agreeable to Hungarian citizens. While this policy didn't stop the flow of goods between Hungary and Western countries, it did justify the further development of Hungarian popular culture, which was to provide a more ideologically-acceptable alternative to its Western counterparts.

In this chapter, I discuss the changes in culture that occurred in Hungary during the 1960s, with particular focus on the spread of mass and popular culture. I examine the ways in which the government implemented policies that allowed culture to be viewed in part as a commodity, and thus subject to the forces of supply and demand. This is especially true during preparations for and implementation of NEM, whereby the cultural producers were made ever more aware of which products were profitable and which products existed because they were

most reflective of socialist ideals. Of course cultural products could never be completely analogous to the less ideologically charged consumer products like refrigerators or washing machines; however, as the creation of national ideology became more firmly under the purview of the government as opposed to the cultural elite, mass culture began to serve an ideological purpose that had nothing to do with its content and was more reflective of the Kádár government's pragmatism. Like with the economy, the Kádár government argued that popular culture was not inherently in opposition to state socialism, as long as it was consumed in a socialist manner. At the same time, the focus on public education with its gradual transformation of public taste, the attempt to create a specific type of socialist tourism and socialist cultural consumerism, and the increased criticism of the West's attempt to separate Hungary from the rest of the Soviet Bloc emphasized the government's adherence, at least in principle, to the traditional elevation of socialist realism and "high" forms of culture that existed throughout the Soviet Bloc.

Culture, Ideology, and the Economy

By the mid 1960s, the political role of cultural figures in Hungarian society had been dramatically altered. Rather than establishing a cultural elite that represented the voice of the party, the Kádár government chose instead to diminish the political importance of cultural figures and to allow non-socialist writers and artists to continue to produce under the more permissive atmosphere of György Aczél's Three Ts. While not denying the supremacy of socialist realism, the Kádár government argued that the transformation of culture was necessarily a gradual process, and would thus require more time than other socialist transformations, like that of the economy or agriculture. Because of this more gradual development, cultural policy makers argued that the existence of non-socialist-realist cultural figures did not counter the

building of socialism (See Chapter 1). As plans for NEM were underway, the role of culture and cultural figures was reexamined, this time in light of the impending economic reforms. In the summer of 1966, MSZMP's Cultural Theoretical Panel (*Kulturális Elméleti Munkaközösség*) published a study entitled "The Vocation of Literature and the Arts in Our Society" in the Hungarian journal *Társadalmi Szemle*.¹ In keeping with MSZMP's policy toward cultural figures, the study argued that writers and artists no longer had a direct political role in modern Hungarian society. Echoing Kádár's depiction of a struggle against both the "revisionists" who fought in the revolution and the Rákosi's dogmatists, the study argued that the concept of writers occupying a political position belonged to both groups, stating, "Even today, the continued, latent overvaluation of literature's political role can be traced jointly to the nationalist, revisionist interpretation of tradition and to dogmatism. Equally captive to the prejudice of insisting upon the distinct political role of literature are those who do so in opposition and those who do so in the supposed interest of [party] policy." This, the authors of the study argued, would lead to the misguided portrayal of "the poet as a 'legislator,' of the writer as a prophet, or as the cleric or leader of an orphaned nation, whose duty is to speak in place of [party] policy." The study stated further that these misconceptions were transferred to a broader spectrum of society, whereby many saw literature as having "an important or exclusive role in the nation's ideological cultural conditions," the content of which was "either dangerous or redeeming to the socialist system." While arguing that this viewpoint was rooted in society's perceived experience of writers in the revolution, the study suggested, "It would be incorrect to connect – even unconsciously – the role of some literature [during the revolution] to its role today. Since then the political conditions

¹ MSZMP's Cultural Theoretical Panel, "Az irodalom és a művészetek hivatása társadalmunkban" [The Vocation of Literature and the Arts in Our Society], *Társadalmi Szemle*, XXI no. 7-8 (July – August, 1966): 29-58. Also published in Vass (1978), 485-515.

have radically changed.”² By arguing that cultural figures no longer had the role of creating party policy or ideology, the study further reflected the Kádár government’s focus on separating artists from their traditional role as the voice of the nation. It associated literature’s direct role in politics with the past, and suggested that this role had no place in a more modern Hungarian society.

While focusing on the role of artists and writers, the study also highlighted the more “economic” aspects of culture, saying that it was important for cultural figures to create products that the public would consume. Since the study was published the same year as the comprehensive guidelines for NEM were introduced, it is no surprise that the economy would appear in a report about culture; however the focus on the economy in culture was also indicative of a Hungarian government that increasingly focused on science and reason and for whom the economy played a crucial role in party ideology.³ The authors of the study addressed the reforms directly, stating, “The most direct conclusion we can make from the economic reforms is that the development of artistic policy must account for demand.”⁴ By suggesting that art and culture had to take into account the cultural demands of Hungarian society, the study adopted a more economic view of the role of culture. No longer would cultural products be immune from the principles of economics; rather they were to answer to some of the same market-oriented mechanisms that affected other consumer goods. The study also suggested that the demand for culture that was entertaining was both acceptable and understandable. “In every working person lies the rightful demand for ‘lighter,’ humorous, entertaining, and cheerful works, books, plays,

² MSZMP’s Cultural Theoretical Panel, *Társadalmi Szemle*, 30.

³ Melinda Kalmár, “An Attempt at Optimization. The Reform Model in Culture, 1967-1973,” in Rainer and Péteri, 71.

⁴ MSZMP’s Cultural Theoretical Panel, *Társadalmi Szemle*, 49.

songs, films, TV programs, etc.,” stated the study’s authors, “Satisfying this reasonable demand to a high standard is among the primary tasks of our cultural and artistic life.”⁵ Thus, the study argued that it was important for culture to adhere to demand, and that this demand would rightfully include items of culture that were considered entertaining by the majority of the Hungarian population. In this sense, the works of artists and writers were to be considered as a commodity as well as an important cultural and social tool.

The idea that culture had a measurable, economic quality was further emphasized as the plans for NEM were being put in place. While preparations for reform were underway in 1966 and 1967, cultural figures and economists began to debate the role of economic reforms in the cultural sphere. In May 1967, Cultural Minister György Aczél and NEM architect Rézső Nyers helped to draft a proposal that was submitted to the Economic Policy and Agitprop Committees. Entitled “Cultural Questions of the Economic Mechanism,” the report aimed to apply some of NEM’s reforms to the cultural sector. “Annually, 10 billion forints of the state budget are devoted to cultural and sport institutions,” the proposal stated, “It is therefore in the interest of society that the use of cultural tools and the activities of cultural institutions become more efficient.”⁶ The proposal further reinforced the idea that culture would have to respond to economic forces. As the proposal argued, “In their activities and development, cultural companies and institutions must implement the most important elements of the new economic directive system.”⁷ László Ballai’s article in *Társadalmi Szemle* echoed this sentiment, stating, “As culture and the economy mutually depend on each other, the change of the functional

⁵ Ibid., 48.

⁶ MOL XXVI-A-8-a box 25, Előterjesztés a Gazdaságpolitikai és az Agitációs és Propaganda Bizottságokhoz a gazdasági mechanizmus kulturális vonatkozású kérdéseiről [Proposal to the Economic Policy and Agitprop Committees on Cultural Questions of the Economic Mechanism].

⁷ Ibid.

economic mechanism cannot leave cultural life untouched.”⁸ This included the cultural sector being more responsive to consumer demand, with profits serving both to replace centralized investment and to reward workers for producing items that could be easily sold. Early on in the discussion of cultural reforms, one report argued, “In the interest of satisfying cultural demands more completely and to a higher standard, we must examine whether we can create and encourage competition while eliminating and avoiding the development of monopolies.”⁹ Such reforms were representative of the Kádár era, and would have been unthinkable in earlier periods when culture and ideology were indelibly linked, and culture maintained its overtly political function. In an article in the literary weekly, *Élet és Irodalom*, writer Géza Molnár bemoaned the process of turning culture into a profit-seeking venture:

Even in the narrowest sphere of a writer’s occupation, in book publishing, at journals and weeklies, and even at the daily press, a general tendency of monetary interests, salability, and profitability will be palpable. Here too the market and competition will invade, more resolutely and more directly than before. The regulating role of the market is at issue: accordingly, what will take shape is that a wide proportion of audiences will buy primarily that which is more interesting, entertaining and readable: that which better serve the tastes of the masses.¹⁰

Molnár’s response to the introduction of the economic mechanism in the cultural sphere did more than highlight his disquiet at bringing profit considerations into cultural production. His anxiety that the economy would invade even those areas that belonged to writers reflected his unease at the diminishing role of writers in Hungarian society.

⁸ László Ballai, “Reformunk és a művelődés anyagi feltételei” [Our Reform and the Material Conditions of Culture] *Társadalmi Szemle*, XXII no. 8-9 (August – September, 1967): 33.

⁹ MOL XXVI-A-8-a box 25, Munkaprogram a “Kulturális jellegű anyagi termékek és szolgáltatások” c. anyagot feldolgozó gazdasági mechanizmus albizottság számára [Work Program for the Economic Mechanism Subcommittee Preparing “Cultural Monetary Products and Services” Materials].

¹⁰ Géza Molnár, “Az író és a mechanizmus” [The Writer and the Mechanism], *Élet és Irodalom*, December 9, 1967.

Molnár was not the only Hungarian to be concerned about the economy determining what was to be produced in the cultural sphere. MSZMP officials were careful to ensure that works that were in keeping with cultural policy would continue to be produced, even if they were not profitable. Thus, while certain types of culture were to answer to market forces, the Kádár government continued to maintain a significant degree of control over culture, and cultural products and activities that MSZMP deemed ideologically important were still produced with the financial support of the state. Those who were involved with drafting the reform proposals were wary not to allow too much autonomy when defining the relationship between culture and NEM. As one report argued, “In the preparation process, we must explore the negative and positive effects that the functioning of the economic mechanism in its entirety would have on the cultural sphere, and [determine] with what tools and methods it would be expedient to strengthen or neutralize these effects.”¹¹ Those engaged with Hungary’s reforms felt that similar reform plans in Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia had gone too far, and did not allow for sufficient, centralized oversight of culture.¹² To ensure that the same issues did not occur in Hungary, the framers of the cultural reforms spoke of a balance between the implementation of economic reforms in culture and the need to continue to produce cultural products that were critical to MSZMP’s cultural policy, which continued to prize socialist realism above all other artistic genres. As the May 1967 proposal argued, “The cultural objectives that are accompanied by monetary influence – as a part of the general social policy – must be defined harmoniously with economic policy in such a way that cultural goals are in optimal accord with the economic tools at society’s

¹¹ MOL XXVI-A-8-a box 25, Munkaprogram a “Gazdasági mechnizmus kulturális kérdései” c. anyag kidolgozására [Work Program for the Drafting of the “Cultural Questions of the Economic Mechanism” Materials].

¹² Kalmár (2005), 57-8.

disposal.”¹³ The close relationship between cultural and economic policy was an oft-cited facet of the cultural reforms under NEM, and policy makers argued for an optimal balance between appropriate cultural production and NEM’s market-oriented reforms. At the same time, they were quick to point to the specific ideological nature of culture, and worked to ensure that the government would still have a high degree of control to ensure culture that was critical to socialist ideology was still being produced. In his article, Ballai argued, “We wrote that with respect to its goals, the reform of the mechanism could not be foreign or removed from culture. We must complement this with the fact that – taking into account the sector’s peculiarities – even in the work of the cultural branch the *economic tools* are effectively usable.”¹⁴ This sentiment was similar to that of the reform proposal, which stated, “In the activities and development of their institutions, cultural companies – because of the close relationship between economic and cultural policy – must enforce the new economic directive system’s most important elements, and we must develop an appropriate system of economic regulators for the sector’s particular characteristics.”¹⁵

In keeping with the idea that it was important to continue to produce culture that was critical to the socialist ideal, those engaged in planning the reform of culture under NEM emphasized the importance of insuring that “those works that are fundamentally, ideologically, and culturally good, that are socialist, that pertain to the accumulated cultural interests of humanity, and that are important from a adult education perspective enjoy the same kind of aid as those products of the entertainment industry, from which we don’t expect anything but to tastefully entertain the people.” To that end, they argued for the government to “significantly

¹³ Előterjesztés a Gazdaságpolitikai és az Agitációs és Propaganda Bizottságokhoz...

¹⁴ Ballai, 40.

¹⁵ Előterjesztés a Gazdaságpolitikai és az Agitációs és Propaganda Bizottságokhoz...

subsidize those works that advance the actualization of socialist cultural policy, [and] support entertainment industry products only slightly or not at all.”¹⁶ Those fields that were considered to be essential to the socialist ideals, including education, sports and adult education (*népművelés*), remained outside of the first phase of the reforms and continued to be supported through the centralized budget.¹⁷ In other areas of culture, including popular culture, cultural works and organizations were to be split into categories similar to that of the Three Ts. One report divided culture into what was very necessary (*nagyon kell*), what was permissible (*megengedhető*), what was bearable (*megtűrhető*), and what was not necessary (*nem kell*).¹⁸ These categories were to determine the level of centralized support that individual works of culture or organizations would receive. Those works the government deemed to be very necessary would continue to be produced with support from the centralized system, and those that were merely allowable but that did not provide any distinct ideological benefit would rely largely on the company budgets of individual cultural producers for their existence.

In addition to continuing to fund those cultural works and institutions that MSZMP considered critical to building socialism, the framers of the cultural reforms created a Cultural Pool and a cultural contribution to incentivize cultural industries to produce those products that were considered to be more ideologically necessary. As the proposal to reform culture stated, “*One tool* of harmonizing company and society interests and influencing the public is support from the *Cultural Pool*, and a *second tool* is the levying of a *cultural contribution* on culturally

¹⁶ MOL XXVI-A-8-a box 25, Előszó a kulturális irányítás reformjának elveihez [Introduction to the Principles of the Reform of Cultural Directives].

¹⁷ Kalmár (2005), 60.

¹⁸ Előszó a kulturális irányítás reformjának elveihez.

acceptable products.”¹⁹ In this system, a tax would be imposed on those products that were deemed non-essential in order to pay for those that were considered necessary. Further, as an article in *Társadalmi Szemle* described, “It is possible to support only *individual or specific groups of products and services* from the Cultural Pool, not the entire working of a company.”²⁰ In this way, profits from the more lucrative cultural products would be used to fund those the government viewed as ideologically important. In theory, the Cultural Pool was intended to encourage firms to improve their selection of what products to produce. Argued one report, “The development of the new system of contributions and bonuses must ensure that it will be more worthwhile for intermediary agencies – trade, distribution, etc. – to procure more ideologically, artistically higher quality products than lower [quality products] from creators or creative workshops.”²¹ By contrast, the cultural contribution was intended to discourage the production of all products that were ideologically unimportant. As Ballai suggested, “The contribution can only become an effective regulating tool, it will only be able to counterbalance the negative effects of spontaneous demand, if it encompasses every production and distribution, and every consumer of these products.”²² Thus, the intention of the Cultural Pool and the cultural contribution was to provide further incentive for cultural companies to produce products that met the ideological standards of MSZMP, providing the cultural sphere with an extra layer of ideological protection that did not exist in other areas of the economy under NEM.

While the cultural reforms and particularly the Cultural Pool were intended to encourage the production of ideologically-sanctioned products as opposed to products that were merely

¹⁹ Előterjesztés a Gazdaságpolitikai és az Agitációs és Propaganda Bizottságokhoz...

²⁰ Ballai, 38.

²¹ Előszó a kulturális irányítás reformjának elveihez.

²² Ballai, 38.

tolerated by the government, they also served to acknowledge that culture that was profitable often did not coincide with culture that served a more ideological function. In general, Hungarian cultural demand leaned more toward entertainment than ideological growth. On one hand, because the government considered demand for entertaining culture to be natural, the reformers sought to ensure that certain types of entertainment remained in the sanctioned category. “We must theoretically clarify the concept of ‘consumer demand,’” one report argued, “so that with this knowledge, with respect to satisfying it, we can determine even in the entertainment sphere what we should support and to what degree.”²³ At the same time, they recognized that the majority of the population preferred culture that rested within the gray area of what was allowed in Hungarian culture. As the reform proposal stated, “In general, in the current stage of our society’s development, at the public majority’s present level of culture and taste, the culturally acceptable works are profitable, and works important from a cultural policy perspective require monetary support.” In this sense, the Cultural Pool served to identify which products were considered important independent of demand. “In the course of providing support from the Cultural Pool,” the report argued, “we must clearly distinguish between support of the product and support of the public.”²⁴ Those reforming culture as it related to NEM had to contend with a difficult situation that was unique to the cultural sphere: as a rule, culture that would be successful in the Hungarian market socialist economy – culture that would meet consumer demand – was oftentimes not the culture that MSZMP officially sanctioned, or that met the ideological goals of socialism. However, separating the profitable culture from the unprofitable culture helped to further the idea that culture was a commodity that was, at least in part,

²³ Előszó a kulturális irányítás reformjának elveihez.

²⁴ Előterjesztés a Gazdaságpolitikai és az Agitációs és Propaganda Bizottságokhoz...

responsible to the laws of the economy. Insofar as profit and demand were to become a factor in the cultural producer's decision in what to produce, and meeting consumer demand was an important ideological tenet of MSZMP's policies, the economic reforms allowed for the continued, accelerated introduction of popular culture in the Hungarian cultural sphere.

Taste and Education

Although MSZMP cultural figures allowed for room in the cultural sphere for products that were not officially sanctioned and supported by the government, cultural figures like György Aczél portrayed these measures as temporary in the process of building socialism. The 1966 study on the role of writers and other cultural figures in Hungarian society emphasized that the socialist transformation of culture would lag behind that of other areas. "Non-Marxist views can assert themselves less in political or economic life than in ideology; therefore the – expressly ideological in nature – cultural life is a 'collection center' for controversial viewpoints that exist in society but cannot be expressed elsewhere." For the authors, "If... in our cultural life we ensure that only socialist or nearly socialist artists have the opportunity to produce, we would create unwarranted tension between the country's general ideological situation and the ideological conditions of cultural life."²⁵ Like many discussions of culture in Kádár's Hungary, the study distinguished between party ideology and the ideology expressed by cultural figures. It also argued that the transformation of culture would be more gradual than in other areas of Hungarian life, and suggested that artistic figures who were not Marxist could still benefit Hungarian socialist culture. Stated the study, "In our cultural life, a lot of non-Marxist creative talent can be found among those whose life views were formed primarily between the two world

²⁵ MSZMP's Cultural Theoretical Panel, *Társadalmi Szemle*, 31.

wars, but who even today enrich our culture with their interesting works.”²⁶ The study argued that figures who had grown up before the Second World War had already formed their worldview before socialism was introduced in Hungary, and were still useful to Hungarian socialist society, even if they did not ideologically agree with socialism. This once again highlighted the gradual, transitional method of transforming culture that was espoused by cultural figures within MSZMP.

In addition to suggesting that the existence of cultural figures with different ideologies necessitated a more gradual transformation of culture, the 1966 study similarly argued that the transformation of Hungarian audiences was a process that could not be accomplished within a single generation. Like artists, the study argued, the Hungarian adult population had grown up in a period before socialism had been introduced, and therefore their taste in culture would not be ideal. Furthermore, shaping the taste of the Hungarian population was more difficult and entailed more complex factors than merely providing citizens with appropriate cultural products. The study stated:

We must take into consideration that taste crystallizes very early on and is influenced by many complex factors. In many respects it becomes an unconscious element of one’s personality, and therefore in the course of intellectual comprehension it is comparatively more difficult to form than a person’s entire conscious world of knowledge. This is related to why the cultural sphere has not succeeded in eliminating the harmful inheritance of the past in artistic taste.²⁷

The authors of the study stressed that transforming the taste of the population would necessarily take time. “The current taste level of the public provides a very complex picture. This is partly natural, and in large part a result of the fast-paced evolution of culture. It is also a consequence

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid., 47.

of our state of transition.”²⁸ When still in the transitional phase of building socialism, the study argued, it was natural that the Hungarian population’s level of taste would not be at the desired level. At the same time, the authors of the study presented an optimistic picture of the current state of Hungarian culture, arguing that the Hungarian population was hungry for culture that would shape their worldview. As the study stated, “Today in front of our artists stands a world waiting for revelation and creation, and an audience that expects from culture an expression of their directly experienced problems, information on the newly-formed humanity, and support for their society-creating activities.”²⁹ Thus, the study portrayed the process of shaping culture as one that was necessarily ongoing, but also one that had made progress and would continue to improve as socialism became more firmly entrenched in Hungarian society.

For cultural figures within MSZMP, the Hungarian population’s taste was an important social indicator, and improving the taste level of the average Hungarian was a critical aspect of the party’s cultural policy. As György Szabó argued in his article in *Társadalmi Szemle*, “In Hungary – as everywhere in the world – ideological questions as well as forming worldview (including taste) are important functions of the workers’ movement.”³⁰ Shaping of taste was also prominent in the 1966 study of MSZMP’s Cultural Theoretical Panel, with both Szabó and the 1966 study distinguishing the importance of shaping taste in socialism from the role of taste in bourgeois capitalism. As these reports argue, artists in capitalist bourgeois societies “are not particularly concerned with the public’s esthetic choices, nor are they generally concerned with the *public*; rather – in place of researching the deeper reasons – they resign themselves to the capitalist depiction of strained relations, the division of culture into “elite” and “consumer”

²⁸ Ibid., 49.

²⁹ Ibid., 33.

³⁰ György Szabó, “Ízlés és világnézet” [Taste and Worldview], *Társadalmi Szemle*, XXI no. 6 (June 1966): 48.

[categories].”³¹ While elite culture did not pay enough attention to the audience, consumer culture focused solely on providing consumers exactly what they wanted without thought to improving their taste or future cultural choices. The 1966 study argued that these categories existed in Hungary as well, as a legacy of the pre-socialist era:

The primary difference between the two [categories] is that bourgeois taste is in the mold of commercial, well-worn emotional and expressional clichés, and strives to preserve bourgeois content in the entertaining genres that are showy, humorous, and musical. On the other hand, snobbism maintains the antihumanism of bourgeois culture in the form of exaggeratedly eccentric, avant-garde, modernist variants. One according to its own words rules out morally and socially required culture with complaints of “public intelligibility,” the other does the same under the aegis of aristocratic snobbism.³²

The studies argued that socialist culture must strike a balance between meeting demand and providing high-quality culture. As Szabó stated, “A system that neglects (in the interest of profit) public growth, and then refers apologetically to the public’s taste cannot be an example for socialist society.”³³ Rather, the goal of socialist culture was to improve the public’s choices in culture, using taste as an indicator. In this way, cultural policy makers within MSZMP argued that the improvement of taste would eventually make it so that the public would demand government-endorsed, socialist culture as opposed to the government-tolerated products that the authors of the reform had labeled as profitable when the reform’s draft was being prepared. As Szabó stated, “Recognizing the importance of audience responsibility and active participation, as well as raising the culture and taste levels of the various audience strata, we create an audience in which the very best artists can find the support of the public.”³⁴

³¹ Ibid., 46.

³² MSZMP’s Cultural Theoretical Panel, *Társadalmi Szemle*, 47-8.

³³ Szabó, 47.

³⁴ Ibid., 50.

While thoroughly discussing the Hungarian population's level of taste, discussions of taste rarely delved too deeply in the vagaries of what culture would be considered "tasteful" in Hungarian state socialism. Certainly, socialist realism continued to occupy a preferred place in Hungarian culture when compared to other cultural art forms. In 1965, MSZMP's Cultural Theoretical Panel published an article in *Társadalmi Szemle* that once again reaffirmed the party's dedication to producing and spreading socialist realist culture. Here, too, the panel highlighted the importance of gauging the audience's reception of a particular artistic work:

The theory of socialist realism must direct much more attention to the interplay of culture and the audience. Using the experiences of cultural and adult education, this research must be more methodical in working with the tools of sociology of the arts, and must study the psychology of the esthetic effect's reception. At the same time, paying attention to the demands and perspectives of the cultural revolution, it must explore the audiences influencing role in the development of culture.³⁵

While the value of socialist realism continued to be a defining factor of MSZMP's cultural policy, cultural figures within MSZMP often emphasized the necessity for socialist citizens to be knowledgeable about culture from different countries, including that of the West. For the most part, what was considered to be tasteful often corresponded to the products of "high" culture, such as classical music, literature, and the fine arts. At the same time, the Cultural Theoretical Panel's 1966 study was quick to caution that dedication to improving taste was not tantamount to eschewing all forms of light culture. In addition to arguing that every working individual had the right to demand lighter, more entertaining culture, the study argued, "The greatest mistake – and this has occurred more than once – would be to conflate the struggle against bourgeois taste with condescension toward entertaining, lighter genres, or with pushing [these genres] to the background."³⁶ The study argued that the struggle against the kitsch and decadence of bourgeois

³⁵ "A szocialista realizmusról" [On Socialist Realism] in Vass (1978), 209.

³⁶ MSZMP's Cultural Theoretical Panel, *Társadalmi Szemle*, 48.

culture did not entail a culture that lacked products that were intended for lighthearted entertainment. Affirming the audience's right to these types of products, the study suggested that more work needed to be done to define precisely what would be allowed and in what form:

The primary task and obligation of the socialist state is to ensure the socialist artistic culture of the public. With this as a starting point, the leadership must decide what it is that they support, spread, and popularize, what it is that they acknowledge the existence of, and what it is that they reject. We should first grant support to interesting, socialist works that are valid to the greater public, and secondly to humanist works. At the same time, we must make it clear that there are certain directions that we don't support, but don't forbid. For these we must provide the possibility in their budget for the representatives [of these directions] to receive public space. However, there is no place in our society work for works that are politically oppositional, antihumanist, or rudely offensive to public morals.³⁷

In his article, György Szabó described the role of taste not so much as a particular like or dislike of a product, but as a way of looking at art. As Szabó argued, “[The socialist person] would view *beauty* (and such associated concepts as pleasurable, useful, true, and good) *not as a self-existent consumer good*, but as an *indispensable* support.”³⁸ Szabó's description echoed that of the Hungarian government's view on consumption, whereby purchasing a consumer good needed to serve a higher social or individual purpose, and could not be done solely for the sake of consuming (see Chapter 2).

In order to improve the Hungarian population's taste, MSZMP cultural policy makers stressed the importance of research and education. As the Cultural Theoretical Panel's 1966 study argued, “*Only realistic, well-founded, purposeful, and continuous efforts can produce results*, and always only in proportion to the progression of socialism. If we only take prohibitive measures, at best we would create shortages of the sought-after cultural products, but we would

³⁷ Ibid., 52-3.

³⁸ Szabó, 56.

not influence taste itself.”³⁹ The study argued that taste could only be formed in a gradual, measured way that corresponded to the level of socialism that was being built in Hungary. The ultimate objective was to transform taste, not to remove products from the market that were not considered tasteful. The need to provide a measured, scientific method of gauging taste was also highlighted. “We must quantify with scientific tools the distribution and condition of public artistic culture and taste in the same way as its direction of movement, exploring its material, social, lifestyle, and worldview conditions as well as its generational factors.”⁴⁰ In order to transform taste, the study argued, there needed to be an objective, scientific way of measuring it. This emphasized the growing importance of science and the economy in MSZMP’s main ideology, once again highlighting the fact that culture was no longer the main motivator of ideological considerations. Similar importance was placed on the role of educating the population on culture. This was often described in terms of bringing the public and the arts together in a more profound manner. Particular attention was devoted to the role of the mass media, as the 1966 study stated:

The extensive publication forums of mass influence, especially radio, television, and the daily newspapers, have an exceptionally large opportunity to deepen the connection between the public and the arts. With their close connection to the masses, their shows and columns provide good initiative for spreading artistic mass culture and improving taste. (Programs and columns like “The Fine Arts Belong to Everyone,” “Musical Clocks,” literature quizzes, “Why is it Beautiful?,” “How Should I Understand This?,” “Reading Anew,” etc.).⁴¹

The importance of improving the population’s taste was not lost on those who led the mass media organizations. In one report, Hungarian Radio described its particular role in shaping the cultural tastes of the Hungarian population:

³⁹ MSZMP’s Cultural Theoretical Panel, *Társadalmi Szemle*, 49.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 57.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 51.

It is a goal of our esthetic-artistic education that a continually growing audience is influenced by artistic beauty, by the demands, comprehension, reception, and enjoyment of the artistic treasures from humanity's millennial classics and today. It is our goal that art become an organic component of their lives, that people are enriched through it, and that they live a rich, substantial, cultured life. Through artworks they will learn more about the world, nature, humanity, and themselves, and through this they will become educated, cultured, well-rounded, humanist people.⁴²

Despite these lofty goals, leaders of MRT recognized that satisfying the listeners was also an important aspect of the radio's function, while at the same time expressing the need to improve the listeners' taste. "In radio, we must pay attention to artistic democratism, simple listening, and clarity" the report argued, "therefore we must ensure in our program policy that we are neither followers of the public nor snobs. We must have a relationship with our listening audience, we must respond to their demands, but we must always be a step ahead of the current demands and taste levels in order to develop."⁴³

The discussion of culture in Hungary was often associated with the Leninist principle that the socialist revolution was necessarily connected with a similar revolution in culture, which aimed to improve knowledge and socialist consciousness. In order to facilitate this revolution, studies that were aimed at improving the Hungarian population's cultural choice focused on taste rather than on removing the less ideal cultural products from the Hungarian cultural sphere. Continuing to argue that at its core, culture needed to satisfy the demand of Hungarian citizens, these studies suggested that by improving the population's taste, consumers would begin to improve in their choices of culture, and what the population demanded would increasingly coincide with what the government wanted them to consume. Taste was seen as a quantifiable, scientific gauge, the study of which would provide an objective measure of the public's reception

⁴² MOL XXVI-A-8-a box 26, A Magyar Rádió, mint művelődési központ: esztétikai nevelés a rádióban. [Radio as a Cultural Center: Esthetic Education on the Radio].

⁴³ Ibid.

of culture. While what was considered tasteful tended toward socialist realism and products of “high” culture like theater, literature, and the fine arts, cultural leaders continued to argue that Hungarians had the right to lighter forms of culture, and even a study on socialist realism stressed the need to examine the ways in which the population was connected to and influenced by culture. To improve taste, studies on culture suggested that educating the public on what was tasteful would bring the cultural work closer to its audience; however, these studies portrayed improving taste as a gradual process, one that was hindered by the fact that the majority of the population, including the artists, had formed their individual tastes and ideology prior to the institution of socialism. Taste could only improve in a way that was parallel to the pace at which socialism was being built, these studies argued, and therefore in a transitional phase it was only natural that the Hungarian audience’s level of taste was more primitive. Thus the continued existence of culture that the government considered to be less than ideal was a necessary facet of the fact that transforming culture was more difficult and more gradual than other areas of life.

Taste and Popular Culture

Shortly after the mechanism was introduced, the discussion of culture intensified within cultural circles. The implementation of cultural reforms and quest to scientifically measure the population’s level of taste led to an increase in reports that sought to present an accurate picture of the cultural sphere, and left many cultural leaders concerned. In May 1969, a report presented to the Agitprop Committee noted that the consequences of the reforms were not always in keeping with the reform’s objectives. In book publishing, there was a higher than expected growth in crime novels, audiences for films from the West rose while socialist films were less than successful at the box office, and imports of kitsch items, which were not subject to payment

into the Cultural Pool, increased in order to fill the decline in Hungarian production.⁴⁴ In other fields, too, artists who were enjoined to produce culture that was more in keeping with audience demand began to complain of the low cultural expectations of the audience. In one 1968 talk György Aczél addressed these concerns, stating, “We often hear complaints – more often from the artists and movie people, less often from musicians – about the people being ‘backward.’ Not only is this untrue in such a summary sense, we might also quote Brecht when he said on a different sort of occasion that people cannot be replaced. You can serve only the real people and not some kind of imaginary ideal.”⁴⁵ Despite Aczél’s comment, the media continued to publish articles that reflected the hard-line elements of the party and addressed what some considered a stagnated, even backward level of taste among the population. Some of the media’s criticism was aimed at a perceived increase in consumer culture, and popular culture was often criticized as being low-quality fare meant for pure entertainment. Cultural figures within the party grappled with meeting customer demand for entertaining culture and continuing to advocate for the type of “high,” socialist culture that these figures often pointed to as the marker of good taste. The solution, which was validated by MSZMP’s Tenth Party Congress in 1970, was to argue for the creation of some middle ground, to promote a type of socialist popular culture, which bridged the gap between elite culture and mass culture.

After NEM was introduced, the media subjected the cultural sphere to a new level of scrutiny that was often centered on the issue of developing taste. In an article in the Hungarian newspaper *Magyar Hírlap* (Hungarian Post), taste was described in terms of the economy, whereby “Demand reflects the existing level of taste.”⁴⁶ The connection of taste and demand

⁴⁴ Kalmár (2005), 69-70.

⁴⁵ György Aczél, “The People and the Intellectuals,” *The New Hungarian Quarterly* X no. 35 (1969): 8.

⁴⁶ “Ízlés és igény,” [Taste and Demand], *Magyar Hírlap* July 26, 1968.

emphasized the idea that culture was viewed, at least partially, as a commodity, and further represented the government's objective of viewing culture in a way that reflected the party ideology, which was increasingly centered on scientific methods and the economy. It also provided a way to gauge culture that was easy to quantify, which opened opportunities for analysis. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, a number of articles were published that were critical of the population's taste level. The article in *Magyar Hirlap* argued that despite the increased opportunities for culture, the population continued to select products that were less than desirable:

The accomplishments of our cultural revolution are invaluable: the attendance of galleries, concerts, and theaters, as well as interesting literature are examples of this. But still many seek the syrupy-worded items, the beach reads, and the short-lived hit albums, and at the flea markets they sell the trashy novels of their fathers' generation for exorbitant prices. We must see that the taste of a wide group of society is stuck at the lowest level, which the previous ruling class – at that time the sole recipients of the higher culture – consciously intended for them.⁴⁷

In his article, art historian Tivadar Artner echoed this sentiment, stating, “We cannot close our eyes to the facts: the general erudition of the public – with notable exceptions – is strongly lacking, and their taste is extraordinarily backward.” Like the article in *Magyar Hirlap*, Artner blamed this backwardness on Hungary's bourgeois past, stating that during that time, high-quality culture was the sole purview of the elite. Artner further argued that improving taste could not be solved solely by raising the standard of living, stating, “In truth, the increase in living standards did not automatically bring with it intellectual wealth, as we had earlier believed and hoped.”⁴⁸ Similarly, the article in *Magyar Hirlap* argued that only by transforming taste would the public's demand change. “Changing and developing taste develops demand as well. We can

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Open Society Archives (OSA) HU OSA 300-40-1-1248, Tivadar Artner, “Közízlés és korszerűség” [Public Taste and Modernity], *Kelet-Magyarország*, August 2, 1970.

offer kitsch at any price – it will find an owner. We want there to be no demand for [kitsch], and for people to not spend their money on trash or tripe in culture.”⁴⁹ Once again, the argument that removing products from the market was rejected, and improving taste was highlighted as the only viable option to insure the full transformation of culture. Products that were considered less than ideal would continue to stay on the market until there was no longer a demand for them. While these articles highlighted the importance of improving taste through more education, they also acknowledged that taste was often formed early on and transformation of taste would not happen overnight. As one article in *Népszabadság* suggested, “Taste is not solely an intellectual category. *Emotional* and psychological factors have a significant role in taste, which is linked – directly or indirectly, consciously or unconsciously – with *memories*.”⁵⁰ Some articles also recommended that producers develop products that would both meet demand and improve taste at the same time. The article in *Magyar Hírlap* cited as an example the Hollóházi Porcelain factory, which “plans for new, original trinkets that attract the buyer and speak to their demand, but at the same time develop taste.”⁵¹

The introduction of the economic mechanism also brought with it concerns from the hard-line elements of the party that free time was becoming more commercialized with items of popular culture that served no purpose but to entertain the population. Throughout the 1960s, as workdays became shorter and technology made household chores easier, the increase in free time was often cited as an important achievement of the government’s standard of living policy.⁵²

⁴⁹ “Ízlés és Igény.”

⁵⁰ János Komlós, “Ízlésnevelés – de mikor?” [Taste Education – But When?], *Népszabadság*, June 29, 1969.

⁵¹ “Ízlés és Igény.”

⁵² This emphasis was not unique to Hungary, and occurred throughout the Soviet Bloc. Reid and Crowley (2010), 30-31.

According to Marxist theory, free time should be used purposefully in improving the individual or society; however in Hungary during the 1960s, especially following the introduction of the economic reforms, some cultural figures within the party became concerned with the public's use of free time, suggesting it had become too focused on entertainment. In 1969, Andor Maróti published an article in *Népszava* (People's Word) that reflected these concerns, in which he stated, "With the rise in free time, entertainment has become a *trade* and has separated itself from culture." Maróti went further:

Ostensibly, [entertainment] continues to appear in the guise of culture, but it has broken away from that which is the essence of culture: to bring out from inside of us our individual character, and to make us into people who think on the scale of society; to bestow humanity's knowledge and experience; to teach us that we must spend our time changing ourselves and improving the social circumstances that are located inside of us, because only in this way can we become human beings.

Maróti suggested that this was the result of the introduction of commerce into culture, stating "Today in Hungary, the vanguards of the entertainment industry use the *demands of the public* as their authority, and this still has a democratic flavor. If somebody raises a word against it, in the interest of culture, aristocratism is quickly mentioned." He associated the rise in culture with a return of the bourgeois methods of culture. "The rehabilitation of the bourgeois world's large entertainments has strengthened," Maróti stated, "We organize referendums on rock music festivals, give publicity to career-starting dilettantes, and the justification is always the same: This is what the masses want! (But in what direction does this lead the masses?)"⁵³ Maróti's article highlighted the fear of the hard-line communists within MSZMP that culture was too focused on the demand of the consumer, and that this consumer culture was enabling the population to spend their free time on less than quality pursuits as opposed to improving themselves and society. By contrast, as with the consumption debates of the early 1960s (see

⁵³ Andor Maróti, "Hol a boldogság mostanában?" [Where is Happiness Nowadays?], *Népszava*, May 18, 1969.

Chapter 2), the majority of cultural figures took a more moderate stand on the role of consumerism in culture. In his article, György Fukász acknowledged the dangers of consumer culture, stating, “Many build on the misunderstanding of the nature of cultural consumption, and in doing so damage – or at least assisting [in damaging] – the public’s taste while preaching that ‘culture has become a commodity.’ This means that in place of culture, the people are supplied with false culture that produced on the conveyor belts of the entertainment industry.” At the same time, Fukász separated the concept of consumer culture from that of cultural consumption. While the former was associated with capitalism and fulfilling the demand of consumers without thought to their development, the latter was an important tool in assuring that the population had access to culture. As Fukász stated, “For the further development of the socialist cultural revolution, one fundamental question is undoubtedly how the *treasures of culture will reach* – and reach more *efficiently* – the public, with the mediation of the well-working institution of ‘cultural consumption.’”⁵⁴

The media’s discussion of the stagnation of taste and increase of consumer culture once again raised concerns of two types of culture in Hungary: an elite “high” culture that would be the purview of only a select level of society, and a popular “low” culture that was produced solely for profit and had no meaningful educational value. Once again, the need to battle against both kitsch and snobbism, both of which were associated with bourgeois capitalism, was brought to the fore. While continuing to argue the importance of education in improving the public’s taste, the media also argued for the creation of a middle ground, one that would satisfy the Hungarian population but still meet the qualifications of the party’s cultural policy. In his article, Fukász argued, “The given level of public taste also means that the refined satisfaction of

⁵⁴ György Fukász, “‘Konzumkultúra’ – vagy a tömegek művelődése” [Consumer Culture – or the Culture of the Masses], *Népszava*, September 12, 1970.

demands – for example, quality entertainment – is necessary. This, however, cannot provide a basis for the invasion of the entertainment industry or the acceptance of ‘consumer culture.’”⁵⁵

The need to provide a type of socialist popular culture was also evidenced in Iván Vitányi’s article in *Népszabadság*. Vitányi advocated a bridge between elite culture and mass culture that would facilitate the creation of unified popular culture:

How must we bridge, and later fill, the gap between the two types of cultures? The same way we would an actual abyss: we must start from the two sides. In other words, how one would build a tunnel: begin from the two sides of the hill in order to meet in the center. Two programs are also necessary to create unity in culture: we must create a path downward (especially by supporting those values that would recruit more followers to higher culture), and upward (especially by supporting activities in the popular genres that represent more demanding content and a higher level than previously).⁵⁶

In addition to advocating for improving the population’s taste, cultural figures within the party also suggested that it was necessary to create a “socialist” type of popular culture, one that would both entertain the population as well as satisfy to some degree the goals of socialist culture. This culture would replace both the elite culture as well as the entertainment-only mass culture. The transformation of culture to provide a middle ground is evidenced in MRT’s discussion of taste in their programming policy:

The two extreme cases of the design and programming policy’s chosen principles show that in one case the editors try to eliminate or at least decrease the *trashy low-quality* programs, or discriminate downwards from the high-quality material, whereas in the other case [the editors] spend their time selecting and maintaining the *high-quality material*, thus discriminating from the lower quality material *upward*. The author indicates that these two basic models extend beyond the “mass culture – elite culture” debate relating to mass communication tools; thus the chosen strategy worthy of socialist mass communication is simply that it is possible to *unify the two*. In this way the “mass culture – elite culture” dilemma becomes a nonissue.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Iván Vitányi, “Tömegkultúra – elitkultúra” [Mass Culture – Elite Culture], *Népszabadság*, August 30, 1970.

⁵⁷ MOL XXVI-A-8-a box 63, “Tájékoztató a Tömegkommunikációs Központ 1969. januárjában befejezett kutatásairól” [Report on the Mass Communication Center’s Research Conducted in January 1969].

The idea that there should be a socialist type of popular culture that represented a balance between high culture and mass culture was reflected in MSZMP's Tenth Party Congress Program in 1970. "We must stand up more resolutely against the spread of bourgeois decadence and cultural trash," the party resolution stated, "But we also must increase the spread of culture that speaks to the nation's masses, has high artistic quality, and creates lasting and entertaining artistic experiences."⁵⁸

The introduction of NEM and the support for a scientific method of examining culture allowed cultural figures to be able to gauge the demands, and thus taste level, of the population in a way that was quantifiable. Noting that the population's taste seemed stagnated and even backward, the Hungarian media expressed concern at what some perceived to be the creation of a commerce culture in Hungary, whereby the entertainment industry would produce only those products that met consumer demand and culture became viewed solely as a commodity. While agreeing that the average Hungarian's taste level left much to be desired, others argued that the introduction of commerce into culture allowed for a level of cultural consumption that had heretofore been unthinkable. During this period, debates about the existence of both elite and mass culture continued to advocate for improved education of the Hungarian population, but also argued for a middle ground: the creation of a socialist popular culture that would be a hybrid of both elite and mass culture by improving the public's taste while still meeting their demands. Thus, not only would the Hungarian population's taste improve to prefer items of culture that were considered acceptable, culture, too, would have to change to accommodate the different levels of taste that existed in Hungary.

⁵⁸ "Az MSZMP X. Kongresszusának határozata a part munkájáról és a további feladatokról" [MSZMP's Tenth Party Congress Resolution on the Party's Work and Future Tasks], in Henrik Vass, ed., *A Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt határozatai és dokumentumai: 1967-1970* [The Resolutions and Documents of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party: 1967-1970] (Budapest: Kossuth Könyvkiadó, 1974), 705.

Peaceful Coexistence, Tourism, and Fellazítás

Another aspect of Hungarian life in the 1960s that dramatically affected cultural policy was the Hungarian population's increased contact with the West under the policy of peaceful coexistence. Throughout the 1960s, trade with the West increased, including in items of culture. In 1969, for example, a review of Hungarian television programming noted with concern that in 1968, 104 of the 152 films and television plays that were aired on Hungarian television were from Western countries, and only 16 were made in Hungary.⁵⁹ Even Kádár was known to prefer lighter American films during his Friday afternoon film parties, which were attended by the Politburo and other high party officials.⁶⁰ In addition to the influx of cultural products from the West, Hungary's policies for tourism both to and from Western countries were relaxed during this period, allowing more Hungarians to come in contact with Westerners. Tourism within Hungary had increased to such a level that by the mid-1970s, Hungary, a country whose population of ten million was fairly stagnant, became one of the most tourist-saturated countries in Europe (see Table 3-1).⁶¹ Both types of tourism were considered important for the Kádár government: while tourism from Hungary to the West was a symbol of the government's more moderate policies aimed at improving the population's standard of living, Western tourists to Hungary provided an important source of income that was necessary to supplement Hungary's hard currency accounts. However, the government encouraged a specific type of socialist tourism, whereby Hungarians would travel to the West to experience other cultures rather than to

⁵⁹ "Megjegyzések a Televízió műsorpolitikai irányelveihez és észrevételek a szórakoztató műsorok néhány problémájáról" [Remarks on the Guiding Principles of Television's Program Policy and Reflections on Several Problems of Entertainment Programs], in Cseh et al., 426.

⁶⁰ Gough, 198.

⁶¹ József Böröcz, "Hungary as a Destination, 1960-1975," *Annals of Tourism Research* 17 no. 1 (1990): 21, doi: 10.1016/0160-7383(90)90112-5.

consume Western goods. To support this idea, the media published articles discussing the proper way to be a tourist and criticizing those people who tried to smuggle in goods at the border. In addition to concerns about how travel to the West would affect Hungarian tourists, cultural figures within the party discussed the ideological dangers of increased contact with Western life, accusing Western countries of *fellazítás*, or of using the improved relations with Hungary to end socialism from within. *Fellazítás* was cited as a factor in all aspects of Hungarian cultural life that dealt with the West, especially in tourism and mass media. In his article in *Társadalmi Szemle*, György Aczél discussed the role of increased contact in the ideological struggle against the West:

The conditions of the ideological struggle that accompanies *peaceful coexistence* – as a long-term political concept – have significantly changed in the course of a decade. To point to only a few phenomena that alter domestic conditions and can be seen even on the surface: every year, more than six million tourists travel to or pass through Hungary; in Hungary, more than one third of the country can watch foreign – even Western – television programs; every year, almost a quarter of a million people travel from Hungary to capitalist countries, and so on. It is evident, that the situation stemming from the policy of peaceful coexistence and modern technology, symbolically the acceptance of the “blowing winds,” must lead us to deduce new consequences in the *struggle against fellazítás*.⁶²

While the struggle against *fellazítás* was often discussed in terms of building the Hungarian population’s socialist consciousness, it also included the creation of Hungarian culture, especially popular culture, that would serve as a replacement for Western goods.

Table 3-1 Tourism Rates in Hungary (in Thousands)⁶³

Year	Tourists to Hungary			Tourist from Hungary		
	From	From non-	Total	To	To non-	Total

⁶² György Aczél, “Kulturális politikánk és a változó valóság” [Our Cultural Policy and the Changing Reality], *Társadalmi Szemle*, XXVI no. 11 (1971): 10.

⁶³ The rate of tourists to Hungary also includes those travelers who came to Hungary en route to another country. *Statisztikai Évkönyv 1972* [Statistical Yearbook 1972] (Budapest: Statisztikai Kiadó Vallalat, 1973), 205; *Statisztikai Évkönyv 1966* [Statistical Yearbook 1966] (Budapest: Statisztikai Kiadó Vallalat, 1967), 365.

	Socialist Countries	Socialist Countries		Socialist Countries	Socialist Countries	
1960	452	72	525	264	35	299
1961	561	104	665	329	44	373
1962	654	121	774	399	55	454
1963	717	204	921	462	107	570
1964⁶⁴	1,522	278	1,800	1,329	157	1,486
1965	1,706	430	2,136	728	165	893
1966	2,536	490	3,026	811	142	953
1967	3,837	499	4,336	852	143	995
1968	3,778	529	4,307	778	151	929
1969	5,461	608	6,069	828	169	997
1970	5,584	736	6,320	822	185	1,007
1971	5,230	875	6,105	867	216	1,083
1972	5,398	988	6,386	1,116	250	1,366

During the 1960s, the Kádár government's policies on tourism were relaxed, giving more Hungarians the opportunity to travel abroad, even to the West. Allowing the Hungarian population to travel, especially to non-socialist countries, was a privilege that had been awarded only to a select few prior to the revolution, and was another indication of the government's goal of ensuring legitimacy by allowing more relative freedoms and improving the standard of living for the average Hungarian.⁶⁵ In the early 1960s, travel to the West was available in three main ways: Hungarians could either visit their relatives who had emigrated from Hungary, they could participate in a group tour organized by the Hungarian tourism company, IBUSZ, or they could

⁶⁴ The large increase in tourism rates to and from socialist countries that occurred in 1964 is largely due to a relaxation of the travel restrictions between Hungary and Czechoslovakia. In that year, 747,846 Czechoslovak tourists came to Hungary, accounting for 57.4% of all tourist traffic to Hungary, and 1,068,616 Hungarian tourists visited Czechoslovakia, which accounted for 71.9% of traffic out of Hungary. *Statisztikai Évkönyv 1964* [Statistical Yearbook 1964] (Budapest: Statisztikai Kiadó Vallalat, 1965), 214.

⁶⁵ Tibor Dessewffy, "Speculators and Travellers: The Political Construction of the Tourist in the Kádár Regime," *Cultural Studies* 16 no. 1 (2002): 49, doi: 10.1080/09502380110075252.

travel using an individual visa.⁶⁶ In the first case, visa applications had to include a letter of invitation from the host relatives, guaranteeing that they would cover all the costs of the trip. In the second case, Hungarians would travel on a group passport and be allowed twenty dollars in hard currency. In the third case, citizens would receive a tourist visa and hard currency from the national bank; however, this opportunity was limited to “extremely justified cases.”⁶⁷ In 1963 and 1964, the opportunity to travel to the West on a tourist visa was expanded, and in February 1964, the rules for Western travel that would remain, with some changes, throughout the 1960s were set in place. Those wanting to visit Western countries on a tourist visa had to first apply to the Hungarian National Bank for a hard currency allowance, which could be no more than seventy dollars.⁶⁸ People applying for this hard currency allowance could do so only every two years. If the bank agreed to issue the currency, Hungarian citizens would then apply to the Interior Ministry for a passport. The passport was theoretically valid for two years, but increasingly stringent restrictions meant that by the end of the 1960s, the passport holder could only travel once with the given visa. Nonetheless, the relaxing of the visa restrictions meant that an increasing number of Hungarians had the opportunity to travel to the West. Shrugging off fears of mass emigration, one newspaper article argued, “The Hungarian state is strong enough that it can bear it if, of the tens of thousands that travel to the West, a dozen don’t come back. Also, qualified authorities should find a method that protects the state’s security without

⁶⁶ IBUSZ stands for Idegenforgalmi, Beszerzési, Utazási és Szállítási Részvény, but is rarely referred to in its full form.

⁶⁷ István Pintér, “A külföldi utazási lehetőségekről, a kérelmek intézéséről nyilatkozik a útleveosztály vezetője” [The Head of the Passport Office Discusses Opportunities for Foreign Travel, Management of Requests], *Népszabadság*, December 23, 1962.

⁶⁸ In May 1969, this amount was changed to one hundred dollars.

depriving people of the possibilities and pleasures of foreign travel.” The article also portrayed the ability to receive a visa as primarily a question of the available currency:

Today the granting of a passport is not primarily – and on a mass scale is by no means – a matter of state security. In principle, everyone can receive a passport, and there an ever-decreasing number are refused the right to travel for state security reasons. No one would object, for example, if we don’t give a passport to a dangerous criminal who has been freed from prison, or who had recently been convicted of spying. If not everyone can travel outside the country, this is not for political reasons, but financial ones.⁶⁹

Thus by 1964, Western travel for the individual tourist was not limited to those with justifiable reasons for traveling to the West: instead, the Hungarian press portrayed travel in general as a right that was afforded to all Hungarian citizens, and the ability to travel to the West as something that was limited almost exclusively by currency availability. While this was certainly an overstatement of the average Hungarian’s ability to travel to the West, the rate of travel to non-socialist countries increased sevenfold between 1960 and 1972 (see Table 3-1).

Although the Hungarian press argued that the public had a right to travel, even to the West, they argued against those who traveled outside of Hungary for the purpose of purchasing goods. Cultural figures argued that there was an important, socialist aspect to foreign travel. “To travel – even if our burden is the occasional intrusion of various Western propaganda organs – is in the long run pleasant and useful entertainment,” wrote Tamás Pálos, “Awareness of different countries and cultures, social systems and folk customs broadens one’s knowledge and horizons.”⁷⁰ The media also suggested that tourism would make Hungarians realize the benefits of socialism. “Already many examples have shown that the Hungarian citizens who travel abroad – as it happens, to the West – see more clearly their place in the world. The sights of the West do

⁶⁹ László Szabó, “Útleveél ma: Turisztikai lánreakció, Ami új a rendeletekben” [Passport Today: Tourist Chain Reaction, What is New in the Laws], *Magyarország*, February 1, 1964.

⁷⁰ Tamás Pálos, “Az idegenforgalom a békés kapcsolatok és a fellazítás szolgálatában” [Tourism in the Service of Peaceful Relations and Fellazítás], in Bedő János et al., eds., *Az Imperialisták Fellazítási Taktikája* [The Fellazítási Tactics of the Imperialists] (Budapest: Kossuth Könyvkiadó, 1968), 180.

not confuse them; on the contrary, they are freed from their undeniably false illusions and they better appreciate Hungary.”⁷¹ To ensure Hungarian citizens were making the appropriate use of their time and money, tour guides were published that described the best way to explore European countries on the Hungarian National Bank’s limited hard currency allowance. Magazines and newspapers featured travel journals of Hungarians visiting the West that were often filled with commentary about the superiority of socialist life. In the Hungarian women’s magazine, *Nők Lapja*, one author discussed how an interview with Dutch female intellectuals led her to discover that most women in Holland quit their jobs after getting married, and those who did not were considered eccentric. “After this,” she wrote, “I was no longer surprised that even in this so-called ‘loftier’ social category, the women’s sphere of interests were as narrow as among the petty bourgeois.”⁷² Thus, the press portrayed a type of socialist tourism that was focused on improving the tourists’ cultural understanding of the world and their place in it. They distinguished this type of tourist from the type that wanted to travel in order to purchase goods. As one article described, “In the foreground of tourism is those tourists who are hungry to see the sights and want to collect memories. On the other hand, however, there are those customs violators who speculate for personal gain and who sell on the black market, as well as tourists who commit currency crimes.”⁷³ Another article echoed this sentiment:

We know of two different types of tourists. One type travels solely to collect experiences and memories, and to discover unknown beauty. This type sees everything that must be seen, obediently following the guidebook’s instructions. The other type is not interested in the flowers by the wayside, the mysterious mountains in the distance, the stars shining in the sky, or the monuments and sights of the city; rather [he or she is interested] in just

⁷¹ Szabó.

⁷² Piroska Szemes, “Nyugateurópai útinaplo 3” [Western Europe Travel Log 3], *Nők Lapja*, February 20, 1965.

⁷³ OSA, HU OSA 300-40-1-469, Judit Fenákel, “Turisták vagy vásárolók? Idegenforgalom ‘balkézről’” [Tourists or Shoppers? The Wrong Side of Tourism], *Csongrád Megyei Hírlap*, June 16, 1966.

one thing: what can be carried out, what can be brought in, and what money can be made with travel. IF he or she can succeed in cheating customs...⁷⁴

This distinction, what Tibor Desewffy describes as the separation of the “Enlightened Traveller” from the “Speculating Tourist,” was discussed in the media throughout the 1960s. Newspaper articles featured stories criticizing those who tried to get past the border with smuggled goods, oftentimes not distinguishing between smugglers and everyday travelers who sought to bring back items for personal use.⁷⁵ Thus while the government allowed and even encouraged travel to the West, they advocated for a specific type of tourism, one that was about expanding the tourist’s socialist consciousness as opposed to purchasing goods.

At the same time as tourism was being expanded out of Hungary, the Hungarian government also encouraged travel into Hungary, particularly from countries with hard currency. Throughout the 1960s, the government began to eliminate some of the financial and administrative restrictions that had made travel to Hungary prohibitive for Western tourists.⁷⁶ Western tourism was considered important from a financial prospective, helping to augment Hungary’s hard currency accounts. “Hard currency from tourism plays a significant role in Hungary’s currency exchange,” stated one article in *Kereskedelmi Szemle*, suggesting that by 1975 income from tourism would amount to \$45-50 million.⁷⁷ Throughout the 1960s, the government worked on increasing the number of hotels and camping grounds in Hungary as well as improving Hungary’s hospitality industries in order to present the country as a viable tourist

⁷⁴ OSA, HU OSA 300-40-1-469, Dezső Pataky, “Határesetek” [Border Cases], *Heves Megyei Népijság*, January 26, 1966.

⁷⁵ Desewffy. 54-55.

⁷⁶ Maxwell Johnson, “Hungary’s hotel industry in transition, 1960-1996,” *Tourism Management* 18 no. 7 (1996): 443, doi: 10.1016/S0261-5177(97)00055-1.

⁷⁷ András Kolacsek, “Idegenforgalmunk nyugati piaca” [Our Tourist Industry’s Western Market], *Kereskedelmi Szemle* XII no. 5 (1971): 25-29.

destination. As one article stated, “There is a [traditional] conception among foreign tourists that Hungary has an atmosphere in which they will enjoy themselves. We must satisfy this expectation for our country to be competitive in the domain of international tourism.”⁷⁸ In addition to being an important source of hard currency, the media also portrayed tourism as having an important political function. “*Tourism contributes to the Western tourist becoming acquainted with our county based on their own experiences,*” stated one article, “In this way the lies of imperialist propaganda are dissolved. The Western press cannot write about us without restraint as they could have several years ago.”⁷⁹ Another article argued similarly that tourism fostered better relations, stating, “We say that tourism is a path to peace. For this reason we consider the development of tourism to be not only an economic but a political task as well. We view with pleasure those that want to know our country, ourselves, and our current truths.”⁸⁰ Pálos described this important political role of tourism by pointing to quotes from the foreign press following a 1966 camping congress in Hungary. In his essay, Pálos quoted one Western German camping magazine as saying, “Many did not want to go to Hungary because of their belief in Churchill’s Iron Curtain of twenty years ago. However, the camping congress was a good opportunity to get to know Hungary. Thousands of children and adults greeted the campers with flowers. We hadn’t experienced that kind of warm hospitality anywhere.”⁸¹ To assist in assuring that Western tourists left Hungary with the appropriate impressions of Hungarian life, the media touted the role of the tour guide, whose was to provide the appropriate experience for

⁷⁸ OSA, HU OSA 300-40-1-469, László Huba, “Külföldi Turisták Magyarországon” [Foreign Tourists in Hungary], *Élet és Tudomány*, June 30, 1967.

⁷⁹ Béla Beszteri, “Az idegenforgalom politikai tanulságai” [The Political Lessons of Tourism], *Pártélet*, April 1966, 80.

⁸⁰ OSA, HU OSA 300-40-1-469, József Birkás, “Az idegenforgalom ‘hátsó’ frontjáról” [On the “Rear” Front of Tourism], *Veszprém Megyei Napló*, April 23, 1967.

⁸¹ Pálos, 166-67.

tourists. Tour guides led both foreigners in Hungary and Hungarians outside of Hungary. They were required to know at least one foreign language, and had to go through an appropriate training program in order to be able to conduct tours. When showing foreigners Hungary, one article in *Népszava* argued that tour guides had an important political role, stating, “The leader of the Austrian group is *unobtrusively politicizing* when she shows subway builders or field workers, but so is the twenty-year-old tour guide, when she describes the life of Hungarian youth to American students – *with sincere enthusiasm*.”⁸²

Although tourism from the West was considered to be important, the media nonetheless highlighted the dangers of increased contact with Western citizens. As one article stated, “In some respects, the tourists arriving from developed capitalist countries promote the strengthening illusions about the West. Their behavior, attitudes, and lifestyles exhibited in Hungary give a glorified impression of the Western way of life.”⁸³ Accusing some Western tourists of acclaiming life in the West and bringing bourgeois ideas into Hungary, the media argued that these actions were evident in nearly everything the tourist did. “The glorification of the Western lifestyle is evident even in places of entertainment,” argued one article, suggesting that Westerners, particularly Hungarian émigrés returning to Hungary would say loudly to their acquaintances, “Everyone is my guest: I have money now, not like [when I lived] in Hungary.”⁸⁴ The Hungarian government dubbed such activities “*fellazítás*,”⁸⁵ associating them

⁸² Pál Vándor, “Mit mutat meg mai életünkben az idegenvezető?” [What Does the Tour Guide Show From Our Life Today?], *Népszava*, August 11, 1966.

⁸³ OSA, HU OSA 300-40-1-469, T.P., “Az idegenforgalom és a fellazítás” [Tourism and Fellazítás], *Somogyi Néplap*, August 11, 1966.

⁸⁴ Birkás.

⁸⁵ There is no appropriate translation for “*fellazítás*” in English. Some English translations use the terms “relaxation” or “loosening up,” but these terms do not accurately depict the way in which this policy was defined as the Western governments’ deliberate, well-organized attempt to defeat socialism.

with deliberate actions of Western governments to use peaceful coexistence in order to defeat socialism from within Hungary. In his essay, Pálos argues that the goals of *fellazítás* in tourism were extensive:

The imperialist agencies... strive to draw in Western tourists arriving in Hungary, Hungarian émigrés living in the West who visit Hungary, and functionaries and tourists traveling to the West. Their goals are the following: developing public opinion against the system, reviving the illusions of capitalism, connecting the opposition in and outside of Hungary, creating opportunities for ideological penetration, and continuing their intelligence activities.

The media also argued that *fellazítás* was further evidenced in tourism because Western visitors to Hungary were not reflective of the average citizen in these countries. As one article argued, “It can occur that those who misunderstand the image provided by tourism will think that the guests that arrive in Hungary from capitalist countries represent the average citizen of the capitalist world. Based on the guests being entertained here, they believe that in the capitalist world everyone is this wealthy.”⁸⁶ Another article echoed on this idea, stating, “The majority of those from capitalist countries who visit Hungary are those who have money; the less wealthy workers, peasants, or personnel stay home.”⁸⁷ Thus while the media often touted the benefits of tourism for Hungarian society, they also suggested that such benefits were accompanied by the danger of *fellazítás*.

Tourism was not the only area where members of MSZMP accused Western countries, especially America and West Germany, of engaging in *fellazítás*. In April 1966, the Politburo released a resolution on *fellazítás*, arguing that these tactics were the largely the result of increased connections between Hungary and the West and the introduction of peaceful

⁸⁶ OSA, HU OSA 300-40-1-469, T.P., “Nytított szemmel a világban” [With Open Eyes in the World], *Délmagyarország*, June 13, 1972.

⁸⁷ OSA, HU OSA 300-40-1-469, “Az idegenforgalom és a fellazítás” [Tourism and Fellazítás], *Veszprém Megyei Napló*, October 2, 1966.

coexistence. The report stated, “In the field of cultural and scientific relations *fellazítás* is aimed at opening up a path for bourgeois ideology and products in the name of peaceful coexistence.”⁸⁸ This statement was expanded by a study on *fellazítás*, which argued, “One of [the main goals of *fellazítás* in culture] is to create a free space for bringing bourgeois cultural products into socialist countries and in every way awaken nostalgia toward ‘Western culture.’”⁸⁹ Officials argued that *fellazítás* could occur even in mass media, especially radio, whereby, as András Tardos argued, “Today, in the era of the transistor pocket and portable radios, cheap radio and television sets make it possible for propaganda to reach hundreds of millions of people through the ether.”⁹⁰ In addition to spreading propaganda about the West, the 1966 resolution argued that the goal of *fellazítás* was also to create discord among the Soviet Bloc countries:

American – in close cooperation with West German – imperialism has advanced with the greatest strength, using the greatest material and technical tools. They attempt to turn the socialist countries against the Soviet Union and each other, to disintegrate the socialist system from within, and to awaken dissatisfaction in the party and in government towards the social system. In this way, they prepare for the reestablishment of capitalism in socialist countries. All this they try to achieve with the widespread exploitation of foreign affairs, economic, cultural, scientific, and personal connections as well as with powerful anticommunist propaganda.⁹¹

Fellazítás thus involved nearly everything that involved relations with the Western countries, even when the West would praise Hungary, which MSZMP argued was an effort to distinguish Hungarian socialism from that of the rest of the Soviet Bloc. Stated one Politburo study, “Several years ago, a falsely objective tone has replaced the imperialists’ earlier, frantically inciting propaganda. They point out the liberalization of our policies, our development, and the

⁸⁸ “Az MSZMP KB Politikai Bizottságának határozata az imperialisták fellazító politikája elleni harc néhány kérdéséről” [MSZMP’s Politburo Resolution on Several Questions on the Battle Against *Fellazítás*] in Cseh et al., 536.

⁸⁹ István Darvasi, “Előszó” [Introduction], in Bedő et al., 23.

⁹⁰ András Tardos, “Fellazítás az éterben” [*Fellazítás* in the Ether], in Bedő et al., 23.

⁹¹ Cseh et al., 536.

democracy of our public life. They set this ‘Hungarian socialism,’ which they identify as liberal, against the Soviet Union and the other socialist countries.”⁹² Thus the concept of *fellazitás* was broad sweeping, including both praise and criticism, and extending to nearly all aspects of Hungary’s contact with the West.

In order to combat *fellazitás*, the Politburo report argued that an important goal was to keep the positive aspects of Western contact while counteracting the negative. As the report argued:

The development of relations with capitalist countries and the increase in tourism have had fundamentally positive effects in the political, economic and cultural sphere. The Politburo considers it necessary that in addition to maintaining our policy’s primary line, we decrease the expanding negative effects of relations with the West and end the errors, irresponsibility and abuse that has occurred in this area with a braver and better-coordinated ideological and political struggle and appropriate administrative institutions.⁹³

Thus the government was not focused on decreasing connections with the West, which they deemed necessary from both an economic and political standpoint; rather they argued for increased efforts to counterbalance the effects of *fellazitás*. The Politburo report argued that the best way to respond to *fellazitás* was to continue the building of socialism, stating, “The most important condition in successful struggle against the *fellazitás* tactic is the successful work of building socialism, the development of the socialist democracy, the strengthening of party and state discipline, the reinforcement of relations between socialist countries, and our internationalist policy discussing the unity of the international socialist movement.”⁹⁴ When discussing counteracting *fellazitás* in tourism, one article suggested that Hungarians needed to be aware of their position in the world, stating, “We must teach... that we have something to be

⁹² Ibid., 538.

⁹³ Ibid., 540.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

proud of, that the tempo of our development in two decades, our social security, our public health, and our school system can compete with any developed capitalist country.”⁹⁵ In addition to further building socialism, however, the struggle against *fellazítás* also included diverting the Hungarian population from the Western cultural products that were considered to be tools of *fellazítás*. This was especially true in mass media. In discussing Hungarian radio’s efforts to decrease the number of Hungarian listeners of Radio Free Europe, one MRT report stated, “The primary basis of our developing tactics against RFE is to draw away listeners with programs that are richer, more colorful, more interesting and more engrossing.”⁹⁶ When MSZMP’s Central Committee Secretariat put out a report on the achievements of the struggle against *fellazítás*, the study noted, “Radio and Television carried out undeniable changes in their program policy and structure. For example, radio has introduced rock music and youth programming which has succeeded in drawing listeners from Radio Free Europe, and television more carefully examines the socialist and capitalist films to be broadcast.”⁹⁷ Instead of jamming popular radio programs that emerged from the West, the government focused on replacing them with a Hungarian variant that would succeed in winning over the Hungarian population. Thus the struggle against *fellazítás* provided MSZMP with another motivation to provide items of popular culture to the Hungarian citizens.

Conclusion

⁹⁵ Beszteri, 83.

⁹⁶ MOL XXVI-A-8-a, “Javaslat a SZER adásainak ellensúlyozására” [Recommendations for Neutralizing RFE Broadcasts].

⁹⁷ “Az MSZMP KB Titkárságának határozata az imperialista fellazító politika elleni harcról szóló vergehajtásáról” [MSZMP Central Committee Secretariat Resolution on the Accomplishments of the Resolution Discussing the Battle Against *Fellazítás*] in Cseh, 552. For a broader discussion of the role of *fellazítás* in Hungarian rock music, see Chapter 5.

Throughout the 1960s, the role of culture in Hungarian society changed dramatically, and this role was frequently examined by the media and the Kádár government. As science and the economy replaced culture as MSZMP's main ideological influences, and cultural figures were increasingly stripped of their traditional role in creating ideology, the Kádár government began to examine the role of culture in a more scientific, economic light. This is particularly evident in the discussion of culture under NEM, whereby culture was to respond, at least partially, to the demands of the Hungarian population. While culture no longer occupied its exalted position in party ideology, framers of cultural reform nonetheless recognized culture's unique role in Hungarian society. They also acknowledged that those items of culture that were profitable generally did not belong to the socialist realist, "high" cultural genres that the party preferred. They therefore created Cultural Pool, which would skim profits off of popular cultural items in order to fund those items that were considered ideologically necessary. While the reforms of culture during NEM were intended to alleviate some of the negative aspects of making culture responsive to the market, they nonetheless separated profitable and unprofitable culture, which led to culture to be identified, in part, as a commodity that could – and indeed should – meet the demand of the population.

In order to bridge the gap between what was profitable and what was considered high-quality culture, cultural figures advocated improving the Hungarian audience's level of taste. Taste was defined as a measurable, scientific way of gauging the public's cultural level. While acknowledging that people had the right to culture they considered entertaining, most cultural figures nonetheless advocated for a type of "high" culture that included socialist realism and the more traditional artistic genres. Rather than removing cultural products that were popular with Hungarians, however, cultural policymakers suggested that public education was the only way to

ensure a long-term transformation of public taste and culture. At the same time, these policymakers suggested that taste was often formed at an early age, and that the tastes of the average Hungarian adult were formed prior to socialism being introduced in Hungary, and therefore would remain largely backward. Throughout the 1960s, but particularly after the NEM were introduced and the ability to quantify demand, and therefore taste, was more readily available, certain cultural figures began to criticize more harshly the Hungarian population's taste level, arguing that culture had become too influenced by consumer demand. This criticism led to the reemergence of the distinction between elite culture and popular culture, a division that associated with the capitalist environment in which there was a "high" culture that was enjoyed by a small group of elites, and a kitsch culture that the majority of the population appreciated. The government attempted to bridge this gap by advocating for the creation of a middle ground: culture that would be enjoyed by the average Hungarian, but that would also meet the government's standard of what was considered "tasteful."

Further complicating the role of culture was the increase in tourism that began in Hungary in the early 1960s. The ability to travel, even to the West, was portrayed as an important right that was given to the Hungarian citizen by the more permissive Kádár government, and was symbolic of MSZMP's policy of improving the population's standard of living. While Hungarians were encouraged to explore other countries, the government nonetheless advocated for a certain socialist type of tourism that was aimed at expanding the tourists' knowledge of the world and their place in it. This stood in contrast to those tourists who sought travel for the sole purpose of purchasing goods. Western tourists into Hungary were also encouraged, both from a political and an economic standpoint. At the same time, the government argued against Western *fellazitás*, which was seen as the attempt of Western governments to

destroy socialism from within. *Fellazítás* involved all areas of Hungarian life, including mass media, and while the government argued that continuing to build socialism was the primary way to counteract *fellazítás*, they also encouraged producers of popular culture to create products that would turn audiences away from Western variants. Thus, by the end of the 1960s, the changes in culture led to an increased focus on meeting audience demand in a high-quality, Hungarian manner, a policy that led to the creation of Hungarian popular culture, especially culture that was aimed at Hungarian youth.

Chapter 4

Youth Culture

In 1964, a cartoon with the headline “How young people are viewed by...” appeared in the Hungarian newspaper *Népszabadság* (Figure 4-1). In the panel titled “The Youth Leader,” the cartoonist mimicked socialist realism, depicting stalwart young people leading the socialist movement. The panel labeled “The Neighbor” shows a tape recorder playing loudly as two young people dance the twist. In “The Police Reporter,” the panel depicts a young male and female with a black bar over their eyes, and the last frame entitled “The Parent” portrays two young toddlers. The cartoon exemplifies the complex perception of Hungarian youth in the 1960s, and the way in which various groups in society appropriated the youth question in Hungary. In Hungary, as in most countries, the 1960s were characterized by a growing youth culture that was significantly different from that of earlier generations. A baby boom coupled with the strict anti-abortion policy of Anna Ratko, Minister of Health during the Rákosi era, meant that by the first half of the 1960s, roughly forty percent of the Hungarian population was born after the Second World War.¹ As consumerism became a cornerstone of the Kádár government, young people were among the first to participate in the expanding cultural and material possibilities that were being offered in Hungary. Hungarian youth watched American and West European films and traveled to the West, either with their parents or as part of tour groups organized especially for young people. They wore blue jeans, grew their hair long, and copied Western expressions, even appropriating the word “teenager.”

At the same time, the expectations placed on Hungarian youth were high and often contradictory. For the party, the importance of young people in the 1960s went beyond the

¹ Tibor Valuch, *Magyarország társadalomtörténete a XX. század második felében* [A Social History of Hungary in the Second Half of the 20th Century] (Budapest: Osiris Kiadó, 2005), 38.



Figure 4-1. How young people are viewed by... Top Row (left to right): The Youth Leader, The Police Reporter; Bottom Row: The Neighbor, The Parent. *Népszabadság*, March 29, 1964.

traditional Leninist assertion that the youth were important allies of the socialist revolution. Too young to have played a major role in the revolution, this generation of young people was the first to come of age in the more permissive atmosphere of Kádárism, which made them important symbols of the Kádár government. For the parents who had raised their children through the hardships of the Second World War and the Rákosi period, young people also had important significance. As one article in the *Guardian* explained, “Such parents have high hopes for their children. They have few worldly goods to leave them and instead wish to bequeath a heritage of

bourgeois morality and family tradition cherished in their minds throughout the last twenty years of their isolation in Eastern Europe.”²

In this chapter, I describe Hungarian youth culture in the 1960s, and the discourse that surrounded its development. “Youth culture” in this context is defined as popular culture that is consumed primarily by young people³ and is therefore informed by and reflective of their particular tastes.⁴ Youth culture is most prominently associated with the strong emotions characteristic of adolescence, and is therefore largely non-verbal. It can be seen in particular preferences in dress, mannerisms, politics, dance, and music, although this list is by no means exhaustive.⁵ However, while “youth culture” is a convenient term to describe the various youth activities in Hungary, it is not intended to suggest that there was one single homogenous culture in which all Hungarian youth participated. In addition to the official youth culture advocated by the Hungarian Communist Youth League, there were a variety of subcultures, which were often demonized by the Hungarian media and relentlessly pursued by the Hungarian police. In between were the majority of Hungarian youth. They did not count themselves among the vanguard of communism but nonetheless distanced themselves from those they considered to be hooligans. Each group was reflective of the changes within Hungarian society following the revolution, and each interacted in its own way with national and international movements that were occurring simultaneously throughout the period.

² Elisabeth West, “Hungary’s new generation.” *The Guardian*, December 4, 1963, 11.

³ Here I refer to youth between the ages of fourteen and twenty-six, the ages for membership in the Hungarian Communist Youth League.

⁴ Schildt and Siegfried, 5.

⁵ Stuart Hall and Paddy Whannel, *The Popular Arts* (London: Hutchison Educational, 1964), 282.

Equally complex is the discourse that emerged as a result of the development of disparate youth cultures. Government officials argued that youth culture could be consumed within the context of socialism, and that young people could participate in youth activities while simultaneously improving themselves. The Hungarian Communist Youth League organized youth events incorporating youth culture while focusing on education and taste. At the same time, heavy prison sentences and harsh criticism were meted out to youth subcultures that failed to fit within the socialist framework. The government associated subcultures with problems endemic to Western youth, arguing that rather than improving themselves, Hungarian subcultures were using youth culture in order to give the illusion of rebellion without bringing about real change. Youth associated with these subcultures consumed many of the same products as other Hungarian youth, but were doing so outside the official socialist discourse. As for the majority of Hungarian youth, the government argued that the participation in and consumption of youth culture in Hungary signified Hungarian youth's desire for something new, an indication of their effort to find a different, socialist path to modernity.

Discourse about Hungarian youth was further complicated by generational conflict and disagreements among youth groups. Hungarian periodicals cautioned older generations not to judge young people too harshly, and portrayed government youth leaders as the sort of tolerant, open-minded individuals to whom young people should listen. The party re-characterized the generational debates not as a disagreement between adults and youth, but between the old and the new, and portrayed its leaders as representative of the modernism that young people sought. At the same time, debates about "these kids today" (*ezek a mai fiatalok*) appeared frequently in Hungarian periodicals, and were even ubiquitous within the youth community. Opinions about behavior, consumption, and relationships with older generations and with the state often defied

categorization. The Communist Youth League represented official communist youth culture, yet it promoted taste that was redolent of bourgeois morality. Those who were dubbed hooligans by the Hungarian press often had opinions on consumption that rivaled those of the most hard line party officials. Altogether this created a picture of young people that was often hard to define or classify.

KISZ

On March 21, 1957, the Hungarian Communist Youth League (KISZ) was established for young people, effectively replacing the Rákosi era's Youth Worker's League (DISZ), which had dissolved into several independent youth organizations in the course of the revolution. In early March 1957, MSZMP's Provisional Central Committee issued a resolution, which was also printed in the March 17 edition of *Népszabadság*. The resolution acknowledged that while DISZ did have some achievements, it failed to sufficiently prepare its members to fulfill their responsibilities as socialist leaders, and a new organization was necessary: "We must now establish a youth organization that uses the experience of DISZ and other youth organizations, but does not make their mistakes. An organization is necessary that will incite and inspire Hungarian youth to participate in the continued heroic struggle for a socialist Hungary."⁶ The rhetoric used in the *Népszabadság* article was similar to that of MSZMP's general treatment of the Rákosi era, and emphasized the Kádár government's desire to separate itself from the pre-revolutionary leadership. The formation of KISZ was intended to place the various youth leagues more firmly under the control of the party; however its new name and the criticism of its more

⁶ MOL 288f.4/6 ő.e. Az ifjúság nevelésének néhány kérdése és a Magyar Kommunista Ifjúsági Szövetség megalakítása [Several Questions on Youth Instruction and the Formation of the Hungarian Communist Youth League].

dogmatic Rákosi-era counterpart was intended to distance KISZ from the actions of its predecessor.

KISZ membership was intended for Hungarian youth between the ages of fourteen and twenty-six. Like the Soviet Union's Komsomol, the organization of KISZ was very similar to that of the communist party. Its main leadership was the KISZ Central Committee, which was led by the First Secretary. The central leadership of KISZ, including the First Secretary and the Central Committee Secretaries, were members of MSZMP. This committee/leader structure was mimicked in progressively lower levels of KISZ, which could be as small as individual schools and workplaces. Lower level KISZ leaders were themselves members of KISZ, and belonged to the same age group as the members they led. KISZ membership was open to Hungarian youth regardless of class origin and was intended for those who planned to become party members. Potential KISZ members were tested to demonstrate ideological knowledge and maturity before being accepted. Becoming a member of KISZ was not obligatory; however, it was an implicit requirement for certain pursuits, most notably acceptance into university. In its first five years, KISZ membership grew steadily: in October of 1957, there were 170,000 members, and by 1960, that number had increased to 500,000. By the end of 1962, KISZ reached a membership of 800,000 young people,⁷ a number that remained steady throughout the 1960s.⁸ The rise in KISZ membership was facilitated by the Kádár government's more tolerant attitude toward youth that had been marginalized during the Rákosi era. On November 20, 1962, Kádár announced at the Eighth Party congress that Hungarian universities would no longer restrict access to students

⁷ In 1965, there were 1,984,396 Hungarians between the ages of 14-26, meaning roughly 40% of Hungarian youth were members of KISZ. Központi Szociális Hivatal. *Statisztikai Évkönyv 1965* [Statistical Yearbook 1965] (Budapest: Statisztikai Kiadó Vallalat, 1965), 5.

⁸ Zoltán Tóth, Aliz Tóth, and György Ambrus, eds., *Hungarian Youth Over Four Decades: Recollections and Documents from the History of the Hungarian Youth Movement* (Budapest: Budapest, 1984), 36.

with parents of bourgeois origin. According to Kádár, “The youth who is going to apply for admission to secondary school or university next year was born after the Liberation, under our system. It would be unjust to restrict these young people in their opportunities for education because of the class position of their parents before their birth.”⁹ This increased permissiveness was reflective of KISZ’s more inclusive nature. During a speech to KISZ’s First Party Congress, Kádár stated, “The masses of youth who are attracted to socialist ideas and engaged in building socialism signify a natural and healthy rising generation for KISZ. These youth must be drawn into membership without any factionalist isolation or bureaucratic wrangling. Every decent youth who wants to be a communist has a place in KISZ.”¹⁰

KISZ was also tasked with appealing to a broad variety of young people, and was intended to be an organization that provided activities for all youth, not just KISZ members. In his article in the Hungarian journal *Ifjú Kommunista (Young Communist)*, KISZ Central Committee secretary Ferenc Várnai noted, “KISZ can only say of itself that it truly fulfilled its calling as a communist organization if the party’s ideology, policy, and resolutions materialize in its work. At the same time it is also possible to extend its influence over youth as a greater whole, and to draw them in to realizing these goals.”¹¹ The idea that KISZ was to speak to the majority of youth as well as those wishing to become members of the party was consistent throughout this period. In 1970, Kádár stated, “The Communist Youth League, or using its entire name the Hungarian Communist Youth League, is an organization of the Hungarian Socialist Worker’s party and at the same time a mass organization of Hungarian youth. Every task must be

⁹ Kádár (1965), 69. Kádár also stated that this new policy “did not meet with the approval and agreement of certain comrades.”

¹⁰ Ferenc Várnai, “Minden Jóra való fiatalnak helye van a KISZ-ben, aki kommunista akar lenni” [Every Youth Who Wants to be a Communist has a Place in KISZ], *Ifjú Kommunista* 5 vol. 2 (1961): 8.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 8.

judged on this premise: at the same time it must be both, the party's youth organization and Hungary's mass organization of youth." Because KISZ had multiple functions, Kádár stated that KISZ needed to be attract a wide variety of Hungarian young people. "When we say that KISZ is a organization of Hungarian youth, an organization of the party, and a mass political organization, then it must work unconditionally, it must be such an organization that is attractive and acceptable to young people," Kádár argued, "It must work in such a way that seizes and captivates youth."¹² In order to attract a greater variety of young people, the government tasked KISZ with incorporating all activities that were considered important to Hungarian youth, and in doing so bringing wider range of youth under its influence. As György Aczél stated:

We believe that we should not create an organization that deals with only politics or only dance; rather, as we already stated, the specific characteristics of youth are such that they are interested in policy and music, dance, study and sport, science and camping. To satisfy these manifold demands, we must envision the educational characteristics of these activities as bringing the wide masses of youth closer to the communal ideal.¹³

Thus while part of the purpose of KISZ was to educate Hungarian youth in socialism, its nature as a mass organization meant that it had to have broad appeal to a wide spectrum of Hungarian youth in order to attract young people, both members and non-members of KISZ, into participating in KISZ-sponsored activities.

KISZ, Demand, and Free Time

To strengthen the role of KISZ in the lives of everyday young people, the government sought to provide Hungarian youth with activities that would be both an enjoyable and purposeful use of their free time. Similar to its focus on free time within the general Hungarian population (see Chapter 3), the government considered young people's purposeful use of free

¹² MOL 288f. 4/104-105 ö.e. A párt ifjúságpolitikájának néhány kérdése [Several Timely Questions of the Party's Youth Policy].

¹³ Ibid.

time to be a key component to its youth policy. Young people were considered particularly susceptible to the misuse of free time. In 1964, the KISZ Central Committee issued a report analyzing Hungarian youth's use of free time, stating:

The interpretation of free time is not homogenous. Some consider free time the entirety of time spent out of work, others consider it only that time that is free from every type of more demanding activity: so-called "idle" relaxation. Large portions of young people share this opinion: they only consider those hours spent dancing, wooing, or loafing to be free: time spent studying, participating in amateur artistic and study circle activities, and engaging in other useful occupations – *no*.¹⁴

The KISZ report suggested that a large proportion of youth were disinclined to view purposeful pursuits as being a part of free time. Additionally, the government argued that without KISZ-sponsored activities, young people would spend their free time engaged in less acceptable pursuits. A Central Committee report on youth policy noted, "We do not pay enough attention to the fact that young people are most inclined to acquire after-work relaxation, social life, entertainment, and culture in the area in which they live. If there is no socialist, legal organizational forms for this, then they form new groups, with meanings and methods that are not desirable to us."¹⁵ Numerous articles in the media criticized the lack of entertainment spaces that were suited to young people. One article in *Magyar Nemzet* argued, "In the present case, we open immense opportunities to youth in the area of study, career choice, and finding employment, but precious few in the area of pleasant, cultured and cheerful entertainment."¹⁶

The media was also quick to note that young people had different demands and spent their free time differently than their adult counterparts. One article *Iffjú Kommunista* stated, "With

¹⁴ MOL 288f. 35/1964/8ö.e. A szabad idő felhasználásának tapasztalatai a művelődés, pihenés, szórakozás néhány fontos területén [Observation of the use of free time in several important areas of culture, rest, and entertainment].

¹⁵ "Az MSZMP Központi Bizottságának állásfoglalása ifjúságpolitikai kérdésekben" [MSZMP Central Committee's Position on Youth Policy Questions], in Vass (1974), 489.

¹⁶ Géza Baróti, "Szórakozni tudni kell" [One Must Know How to Have Fun], *Magyar Nemzet*, February 27, 1967.

reference to the role of free time, age group characteristics have a sizeable role in the lives of young people. Stemming from this, particular forms of free time activities are conspicuous among youth: dancing, hiking, sporting, watching sports, and in certain groups taking part in teaching or self-teaching activities.”¹⁷

One of the goals of KISZ was thus to meet youth demand for activities that would be both entertaining and purposeful. In its introduction, the 1964 report on free time noted, “The suitable, useful spending of the increasing amount of free time has become a standard of the youth organization’s authority and contact with the masses. Principally, this will allow KISZ to become in truth a popular, attractive organization of the majority of youth.”¹⁸ KISZ’s free time policy was focused on all Hungarian youth, not just members of KISZ, and focused on encouraging young to spend their free time engaged in KISZ activities. To that end, these activities had to meet the demand of young people for entertainment. As the KISZ report’s recommendations argued, “The more colorful, lively, and substantial KISZ’s everyday activities are, the better it can fulfill its calling in young people’s communist education and profitable use of free time.”¹⁹ A 1966 KISZ Central Committee report further argued that providing popular forms of culture was an important aspect of educating Hungarian youth:

Young people are predisposed to the new, but together with socialist influence easily accepts everything that seems new or modern, often even ideas and styles that support the bourgeois lifestyle and outlook. It would thus be harmful if the KISZ organization’s

¹⁷ György Fukász, “Az ifjúságpolitika és a növekvő szabad idő,” [Youth Policy and the Increase in Free Time] *Ifjú Kommunista*, 16 no. 6 (1972): 18-19.

¹⁸ MOL 288f. 35/1964/8ö.e. A szabad idő felhasználásának tapasztalatai...

¹⁹ MOL 288f. 35/1964/8ö.e. Színes, eleven, tartalmas életet minden KISZ szervezetben: Magyar Kommunista Ifjúsági Szövetség Központi Bizottságának határozata és ajánlása a fiatal szabad idejének célszerű, hasznos eltöltéséhez [Colorful, Lively, Substantial Life in Every KISZ Organization: Central Committee of the Hungarian Communist Youth League’s Report and Recommendation on Young Peoples’ Practical, Gainful Spending of Free Time].

successful development of artistic and educational activities sporadically limited the satisfaction of “fashionable” entertainment demands.²⁰

The KISZ Central Committee argued that young people’s demand for the new and modern meant that KISZ had to provide activities that young people considered trendy. At the same time, this demand had to be met in such a way that would combine both political and entertainment goals. In his speech on youth policy, György Aczél argued, “We must take into account with the initiative and specific mass demands of youth that young people demand politics and culture, study and entertainment simultaneously, and we must strive more resolutely to fulfill these expansive demands, and gradually ensure the necessary frameworks in order to do so.”²¹ Kádár similarly argued that with regard to youth culture, politics and entertainment had to be combined such that “a Marxist seminar cannot truly be a Marxist seminar, nor can entertainment truly be entertainment.”²²

As with society as a whole (see Chapter 3), taste was considered to be an important facet of the youth cultural activities, and shaping taste was considered an critical to KISZ’s policy on free time. “Every KISZ activity must be put to use forming the consciousness and taste of young people and filling their free time purposefully,”²³ suggested the KISZ Central Committee report on free time. The 1966 KISZ Central Committee report echoed the importance of KISZ’s role in shaping taste, arguing, “The ideological struggle against the drift toward bourgeois ideology and against bourgeois and petty bourgeois views demands from KISZ efficient work in forming

²⁰ “A Magyar Kommunista Ifjúsági Szövetség Központi Bizottságának állásfoglalása a KIDSZ munkájának néhány időszerű kérdéséhez” [The Hungarian Communist Youth Organization Central Committee’s Position on Several Timely Questions of KISZ’s work], in Vass (1978), 525.

²¹ MOL 288f. 4/104-105 ö.e. A párt ifjúságpolitikájának néhány kérdése.

²² Ibid.

²³ MOL 288f. 35/1964/8ö.e. Színes, eleven, tartalmas életet minden KISZ szervezetben.

youth taste and developing their sense of beauty and interests.”²⁴ Forming the taste of Hungarian young people was considered an important aspect of improving society’s overall taste level. As János Komlós argued in his article in *Népszabadság*, “Taste education has a territory that promises more success and is even more decisive from a future perspective: the taste education of children and youth.”²⁵ This idea was echoed by the KISZ Central Committee report on taste, which stated, “The development of [young people’s] taste is built together with the level of public taste in the age group and in society.”²⁶ Because the government argued that taste was formed early on in life, the importance of shaping young people’s taste was considered to be critically important in improving public taste as a whole. The report on free time also noted that young people who had better taste spent their free time in more purposeful pursuits:

The concordant observations of the use of free time demonstrate that the interests of young people with *developed taste* are varied and manifold: they have high standards in reading, music, entertainment, and every facet of life. Conversely, the interests of those with *less developed tastes* are pitiable, they are undemanding in spending their free time, and they choose lightweight pleasures in both culture and entertainment. And although minimal cultural demand exists in *every* youth, the number of the latter group is significant.²⁷

Shaping taste was thus considered one of the most critical aspects of youth policy. As the KISZ report stated further, “Not one institution, organization, or person can have a more noble task than continuously keeping alive and cultivating the coming generation’s cultural desires as well as contributing to the development of their consciousness, taste, and interest.”²⁸

²⁴ Vass (1978) 525.

²⁵ János Komlós, “Ízlésnevelés – de mikor” [Taste Education – but When?], *Népszabadság*, June 29, 1969.

²⁶ MOL 288f. 35/1964/8ö.e. A szabad idő felhasználásának tapasztalatai...

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

KISZ leaders argued that young people could engage in the activities they enjoyed as long as they did so in a tasteful fashion. The focus on the way activities were carried out can be seen in KISZ and the media's depiction of dance. According to *Magyar Ifjúság* (*Hungarian Youth*), "Young people's most demanded entertainment is the *modern social dance*. Dance is an enjoyable pastime, and it suits the particular age characteristics of young people. Dance activities help one find one's bearings in the written and unwritten laws of behavior and social coexistence."²⁹ Dance was well suited to socialist youth culture with its combination of group activity, physical exertion, and culture. Its popularity with young people made dance an integral aspect of KISZ's youth program. Stated one article, "As one of the most significant forms of youth entertainment, we must concern ourselves with dance."³⁰ KISZ leaders even encouraged popular modern dances as long as they were done in a tasteful fashion. The KISZ report on free time argued, "Dance develops, changes, and modernizes together with life. It is understandable that young people pleurably dance to fast modern dances with pulsating rhythms. Young people have a natural right to dance whatever dance they enjoy, *but there is already a question of taste: how?* Every dance can be danced gracefully and tastefully, and every dance can be danced without taste."³¹ Dancing without taste was often attributed to the lack of proper education.

According to the KISZ report:

The dances of certain young people – often in the influence of erotic music with exaggerated rhythms – scandalize people of good taste. In every case, however, the reason for uncultured dance can be found in the underdevelopment of the dancer's

²⁹ "Művelődés, Pihenés, Szórakozás: A KISZ KB értékelése és határozata a szabad idő felhasználásának tapasztalatairól és a KISZ-szervezetek feladatairól" [Culture, Relaxation, Entertainment: KISZ Central Committee's Assessment and Resolution About the Observation of the Use of Free Time and the Duties of KISZ organizations], *Magyar Ifjúság*, April 25, 1964.

³⁰ Mihály Padisák "Tánc és viselkedés: Klub foglalkozás" [Dance and Comportment: Club Business] *Ifjú Kommunista* 7, no. 8 (1963): 38.

³¹ MOL 288f. 35/1964/8ö.e. A szabad idő felhasználásának tapasztalatai...

esthetic taste and in the lack of a culture of movement that is necessary for graceful dance. A large proportion of young people want to dance tastefully, but many – especially in the villages – do not have the necessary knowledge and practice at their disposal, and have difficulty acquiring it.³²

This idea was echoed in an article in *Ifjú Kommunista*, in which the author stated, “A good portion of young people – however oddly it sounds – merely dance, but don’t know how to dance. From this arises the exaggerations and tastelessness. Dance, like everything else, must be studied.”³³ The discussion of how young people danced and the importance of education thus implied that Hungarian young people could easily participate in the activities they enjoyed while still improving themselves. Dancing to the music they loved was acceptable as long as it was done so tastefully and correctly.

To ensure that young people engaged in activities they enjoyed while still participating in tasteful, purposeful pursuits, KISZ leadership placed critical importance on the role of the youth club. “Colorful, lively, substantial KISZ life is inseparable from clubs and club meetings,” wrote the KISZ report on free time, “Club life is the unity of culture, entertainment, and relaxation, with possibilities of using the acquired experience in theaters, cinemas, concerts, exhibits, and trips.”³⁴ The importance of the youth club was echoed by *Magyar Ifjúság*, which stated, “The most important [youth entertainment] is the *club movement*, admittedly one of the most large-scale, most modern, and most popular forms of cultural education and substantial spending of free time.”³⁵ Youth clubs were places where Hungarian young people, whether or not they were members of KISZ, could go and engage in youth activities under the watchful eyes of KISZ

³² Ibid.

³³ Mihály Padišák, “Ifjúsági foglalkozások a klubokban” [Youth Activities in Clubs] *Ifjú Kommunista* 7, no. 3 (1963): 46, (emphasis added).

³⁴ MOL 288f. 35/1964/8ő.e. Színes, eleven, tartalmaz életet minden KISZ szervezetben.

³⁵ Ágnes Somos, “Szabad idő a mérlegen: Hétezer felelet” [Free Time in Balance: Seven Thousand Responses], *Magyar Ifjúság*, February 7, 1969.

leaders. According to the KISZ Central Committee, “A good club creates an intimate and friendly atmosphere, brings color and morale to young people’s everyday life, entertainingly educates and teaches, and makes satisfying the demands and desires of youth possible.”³⁶ Clubs were separated into “free” and “programmed” days. During free days, young people would engage in whatever activities they enjoyed: reading, listening to the radio watching television, and “other useful occupations.” The programmed days were intended to “satisfy young people’s interests varyingly and with a high standard, and provide a place for the best forms of culture, relaxation, and entertainment,” such as lectures, debates, films, television shows, and dance lessons.³⁷ In addition to general clubs, youth clubs were organized around specific topics, from literature and film to tape recorders and television. KISZ youth clubs exemplified the core of its youth policy: young people could participate in a cultured way in activities they enjoyed, which educated them on how to spend their free time purposefully. As an article in *Ifjú Kommunista* stated, “A central task of public education work is to pay marked attention to youth culture and cultured entertainment. It must support young people’s realistic initiative, which youth clubs direct toward entertainment and the creation of appropriate areas of refinement.”³⁸ Kálmán Takács, head of the adult education department of the Ministry of Cultural Affairs, echoed the important educational aspect of youth clubs stating, “We consider the youth club activities to be extremely important... In part because the club is a modern educational form, which is

³⁶ MOL 288f. 35/1964/8ö.e. Színes, eleven, tartalmas életet...

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Dr. Vilmos Holka and Béla I. Tóth, “Kultúrházak, klubok, kocsmák” [Culture Houses, Clubs, Bars], *Ifjú Kommunista* 16 no. 6 (1972): 55.

particularly suited to young people's age characteristics and collective requirements, and it can assure the realization of youth's cultural and entertainment demands."³⁹

KISZ and the Production of Youth Culture

In addition to the activities organized by youth clubs, KISZ sought to provide its own version of youth activities and culture that would ensure that young people would spend their free time engaged in purposeful and tasteful pursuits. Regional KISZ organizations offered youth activities, such as dances and concerts, intended to appeal to a wider variety of young people. Outside of Budapest, these entertainments generally took place in cultural houses (*művelődési otthonok*), where KISZ leaders would often hire local guitar bands to play while young people danced. Within Budapest, events were organized in a number of different locations throughout the city. The most popular KISZ-operated location for youth to gather in Budapest was Youth Park (*Ifjúsági Park*), a large open air space that operated five months out of the year. Youth Park opened its doors in the summer of 1961, and was located on the Buda side, at Ybl Miklós Tér, quite close to the Danube and easily accessible to Hungarian youth living in Budapest. Generally on the weekends, young people would come and dance to popular Hungarian bands, and on Tuesdays amateur bands would be invited to play. "Everyone can enter here," quoted *Népszabadság*, "but only in tasteful, cultured clothing."⁴⁰ Tastefulness was highlighted frequently when discussing the entertainment at Youth Park. As the KISZ report on free time stated, "In the summer and winter, Budapest's Youth Park has become a home for modern dance culture, tasteful dress, and cultural entertainment."⁴¹ The article in *Népszabadság* went further, "Youth Park is an interesting, exciting pedagogical experiment. Thousands of young people

³⁹ Gábor Borbély, "A Klubokról," [On Clubs], *Magyar Ifjúság*, February 16, 1968.

⁴⁰ Sándor Szalkai, "Ifjúsági Park, Budapest" [Youth Park, Budapest] *Népszabadság*, July 12, 1964.

⁴¹ MOL 288f. 35/1964/8ö.e. Színes, eleven, tartalmas életet...

come here regularly and study taste, collective feelings, and cultured entertainment.”⁴² Youth Park had strict codes of comportment and a dress code that denied entrance to young people with long hair or those wearing blue jeans. These rules were considered important for ensuring that Hungarian youth would conduct themselves in an appropriate manner. As an article in *Magyar Ifjúság* stated, “The interests of the majority of youth requires that Youth Park be a place of entertainment where young men and women dance in a cultured manner and pleasurably fill their free time... There is nothing odd about the leadership of a dignified entertainment place establishing house rules, either in the defense of good taste or for any other interests.”⁴³ In Youth Park, the strict rules were enforced by park manager László Rajnák, nicknamed Rajnák the Boss (*Rajnák, a Góré*), a former wrestler who walked around the park with a rubber baton to make sure that everyone was obeying the rules and making “cultured” use of their free time, and to keep out those young people who didn’t meet the park’s requirements.⁴⁴ Despite its restrictions, Youth Park sought to meet the entertainment demand of Hungarian young people in a regulated, tasteful manner. In 1969, in addition to organizing concerts and dances that featured popular Hungarian bands, Youth Park was also one of the first locations in Hungary to serve Coca-Cola, in an unsuccessful attempt to encourage young people to stop drinking beer. Throughout the 1960s, Youth Park continued to be an extremely popular place for young people to gather in Budapest, whether or not they were members of KISZ. Indeed, in May of 1969, Youth Park welcomed its millionth guest.⁴⁵

⁴² Szalkai.

⁴³ M.D., “Jó Ízlés és szórakozás” [Good Taste and Entertainment] *Magyar Ifjúság*, May 21, 1971

⁴⁴ János Sebők, *Volt Egyszer Egy Ifipark* [Once There Was a Youth Park] (Nyíregyháza, Hungary: Nyírségi Nyomda, 1984), 21.

⁴⁵ Horváth (2009a) 29-30.

KISZ also sought to tastefully and purposefully meet the demands of young people in its creation of a youth magazine that was intended to provide Hungarian youth with information they would be interested in. Separate from *Magyar Ifjúság*, KISZ's official newspaper, the KISZ Central Committee argued that it was important "to give in content and form a colorful, interesting journal for 14-18 year-olds – 45% of KISZ – that would speak specifically to that age group, and from which young people could receive an appropriate answer to their questions."⁴⁶ Whereas *Magyar Ifjúság* focused on official KISZ activities and interests, *Ifjúsági Magazin* published articles on modern style and featured popular rock musicians from Hungary and the West (see Figure 4-2), often with full-page photographs that Hungarian youth would tape onto their walls. In 1972, *Ifjúsági Magazin* even featured several advertisements for Coca-Cola. After the first appearance of *Ifjúsági Magazin* in 1965, the Secretariat of the KISZ Central Committee noted, "Young people received the magazine with great approval. Within several days the editors received several hundred letters... The majority called IM 65 'our paper' after the first publication, and expressed hope that the quality and interest level would not decrease in the future as well as concern that it would do so."⁴⁷ Despite this popularity, the AgitProp Committee criticized the magazine's first two issues, stating that "The disproportionateness and political problems of [the magazine's] first two editions would lead one to believe that the editors only wanted to satisfy the demands of a segment of our youth, doing so without criticism."⁴⁸ Pointing out these issues, the Secretariat of the KISZ Central Committee nonetheless argued, "With this a large political responsibility is imposed on both the editors and the KISZ Central Committee,

⁴⁶ MOL 288.f.41/52ö.e. "Feljegyzés az Ifjúsági Magazin első két számáról" [Notes on Ifjúsági Magazin's First Two Issues].

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ MOL 288.f.41/52ö.e. Jegyzőkönyv az Agit.Prop. Bizottság 1965.december 22.-i üléséről [Minutes from the AgitProp Committee's December 21, 1965 Meeting].



Figure 4-2. 1972 cover of *Ifjúsági Magazin* featuring Janis Joplin. *Ifjúsági Magazin*, May 1972.

because in the creation of the appropriate political and pedagogical proportions, in the matter of determined and resolute behavior, and in the direction of youth interests, we must strive to increase the magazine's freshness and level of interest." The editorial staff of *Ifjúsági Magazine* thus strove to both educate Hungarian youth and provide them with material that young people would find entertaining. Throughout the 1960s, it continued to feature popular fashion and music trends, although these were often coupled with political caveats relating to the government's youth policy.

Television programs aimed at the Hungarian youth audience were also significant to KISZ's leisure program. Radio and television were considered to be important educational tools for Hungarian youth. According to the KISZ Central Committee, "Radio and television –

together with other achievements of modern technology – are essential elements of young people’s political, moral, and ideological education.”⁴⁹ However, many noted the dangers in mass media’s influence on Hungarian young people. As one article in *Népszava* argued:

It is unnecessary to demonstrate the enormous influence mass communication and mass entertainment tools have on young people. If the community uses them according to social goals, it would be an enormous service to the moral and political education of youth. At the same time, [these tools] can destroy as well if we don’t employ them in the service of socialist education, wreaking havoc on the youth spirit.⁵⁰

In order to ensure that television programs would not be harmful to Hungarian youth, KISZ worked with the youth department at the Hungarian Radio and Television in order to create programming that was both entertaining and educational for the youth audience. Among the most popular programs were the talent competitions in which everyday young people participated. As one article stated, “In the area of youth programs... television can build on young people’s strong willingness, desire to show themselves, and more developed consciousness in addition to competitive spirit.”⁵¹ One such competition was *Ki mit tud?* (Who Knows What?), a talent competition that highlighted the cultural abilities of Hungarian youth. Young people would sing songs, recite poetry, dance, do comedy routines, or showcase other cultural abilities. Throughout the 1960s, tens of thousands of young people tried out for *Ki mit tud?* and still more avidly watched the competition on television. According to Hungarian Radio and Television, the goal of *Ki mit tud?* was “to present our youth in a colorful, interesting, exciting framework, and to

⁴⁹ MOL 288f. 35/1964/8ö.e. A szabad idő felhasználásának tapasztalatai...

⁵⁰ Jenő Gerencséri, “Sajtó, rádió, televízió és az ifjúság” [Press, Radio, Television, and Youth], *Népszava*, December 13, 1969.

⁵¹ Béla Kovács, “A Televízió és ifjú közönsége” [Television and its Youth Audience], in *Rádió és Televízió Évkönyv: 1968-1969* [Radio and Television Yearbook: 1968-1969], ed. Béla Lévai (Budapest: Minerva Budapest, 1968), 239.

demonstrate their refinement, talent, and love and interest in the different branches of the arts.”⁵² Another report stated, “[*Ki mit tud?*]... represents that our youth truly prepare for the future with work, study, and an increase in general cultural refinement in order to meet the modern requirements of our modern age.”⁵³ However, the benefits of *Ki mit tud?* went beyond showcasing exceptional young people. “*Ki mit tud?* doesn’t just regularly plant its hundreds of thousands of viewers in front of the TV set, it also mobilizes numerous young people across the country,” noted one report, adding that in the first two years of *Ki mit tud?*, nearly 18,000 Hungarian young people tried out for the program.⁵⁴ Young people watching *Ki mit tud?* and other competition programs would be encouraged to try out, necessitating preparation, which was considered an excellent use of their free time. As one report stated:

We believe that for young people, the greatest outcome of the developed, popular contests and competitions... is not that onscreen outstanding young people compete with each other in different fields for serious prizes, which often existentially affect them; rather, [the greatest outcome] is that many tens of thousands of young people work hard to prepare for these competitions. They show themselves to be clever with poetry and music; study special subjects, languages, and behavior; and train their consciousness and will.⁵⁵

Young people would not only watch competition programs, the report argued, many would be inspired to improve themselves in order to appear on the programs themselves. Thus *Ki mit tud?* and other competition programs met KISZ criteria for proper use of free time in addition to meeting youth demand.

⁵² MOL XXVI-A-8-a box 14, “Zárójelentés az 1965. évi *Ki mit tud?*-ről” [Closing Report on the 1965 *Ki mit tud?*].

⁵³ MOL XXVI-A-8-a box 38, “Javaslat a Magyar Televízió ‘*Ki mit tud?*’ c. ifjúsági műsorának továbbfolytatására” [Recommendation on Hungarian Television’s Further Continuation of the Youth Program *Ki mit tud?*].

⁵⁴ MOL XXVI-A-8-a, “Jelentés a 1962/3 évi ‘KI MIT TUD?’ versenyekről és tervezet az elődöntők, döntők, valamint a jutalomutazás lebonyolítására” [Report on the 1962-63 *Ki Mit Tud?* Competition and Plan for the Arrangement of the Semifinals, Finals, and Reward Trip].

⁵⁵ Kovács, 240.

Throughout the 1960s, KISZ argued that its youth activities and cultural products were aimed at ensuring that young people engaged in the activities they enjoyed and at the same time spent their free time purposefully. For KISZ, meeting youth demand was important not only from the perspective of improving the taste of young people living in Hungary; rather, providing activities that young people enjoyed also ensured that an ever-increasing number of Hungarian youth would participate in KISZ-sponsored events, whether or not they were members of KISZ. KISZ's role as an organization that represented Hungarian youth as a whole meant that its programs had to appeal to a broad spectrum of young people, not just those who planned on becoming members of MSZMP. In order to ensure that their free time was spent properly, KISZ sought to combine popular aspects of youth culture with an emphasis on taste and the purposeful use of free time. Young people could dance at Youth Park, read about their favorite bands in *Ifjúsági Magazine*, and watch competition shows on television, because doing so would also improve one's tastefulness and level of culture. Participation in KISZ clubs would similarly provide a combination of both education and entertainment. Thus KISZ's youth policy reflected that of MSZMP as a whole: it stressed the importance of providing young people with the culture they demanded while simultaneously highlighting the role of education and developing taste as critical elements of the purposeful use of free time.

The Great Tree Gang and Youth Subcultures in the 1960s

During concerts at Youth Park, a number of young people gathered around the Great Tree (*nagyfa*), a large tree that was located above the park. Young people who did not meet the strict dress code of Youth Park and those who couldn't afford or did not want to pay the entrance fee⁵⁶

⁵⁶ The entrance fee for Ifjúsági Park was 5 forints, 10 on days popular bands were being showcased. The cost was not a financial hardship for the majority of Hungarian youth, but some preferred to spend their money on beer, which cost 8 forints 60 fillér per bottle. *Statisztikai Évkönyv 1965*, 392.

gathered here to listen to the music that was playing in the park. Dubbed the “Great Tree Gang” (*nagyfa galeri*), regular members of the group greeted each other with “Heil Hitler!” or “Long Live Szálasi!”⁵⁷ In July 1969, Hungarian youth gathered around the Great Tree to listen to the band Sakk-Matt (Checkmate). When a concert was canceled due to inclement weather, those who were at the Great Tree – around eighty to one hundred young people – decided to go for what they called a “hippie walk.” The original course was to St. Stephen’s Basilica on the Pest side to hold a mass in memory of Rolling Stones guitarist Brian Jones, who days earlier had been found dead in his swimming pool. When the group arrived at the Basilica only to find it closed, they headed to nearby Freedom Square (Szabadság Tér) where the American Embassy was located. To the group, Brian Jones, although British, represented American hippies. On the way to the embassy they sang a German SS song they had learned from the American film *The Battle of the Bulge* – earlier they had been singing Hungarian children’s songs. The police came as the group had almost reached their destination, and was only able to arrest four people – the rest had scattered. Following the “hippie walk,” the police scrutinized the Great Tree Gang, collecting information about hundreds of possible members and recruiting informers. In 1970, ten members of the gang were convicted of subversive activity and received jail sentences of up to two years.⁵⁸

The concern about youth delinquency and subcultures was not solely a Hungarian phenomenon, nor was it limited to the state socialist countries. Since the 1950s, concern about various youth cultures had been endemic in a large number of countries throughout the world,

⁵⁷ Ferenc Szálasi was the leader of the Arrow Cross Party, the Hungarian National Socialist party, which was in power in Hungary during the last months of the Second World War. He was executed in 1946 for war crimes and high treason.

⁵⁸ This “hippie walk” has been discussed extensively in secondary source literature, see for example Horváth (2009a), 25-53; Sebők (1984), 29-35.

even prompting a UN Report on Juvenile Delinquency in 1960, which linked the increase of youth crime to a variety of social, economic, and psychological factors.⁵⁹ In Hungary, the depiction of youth subcultures in the 1950s and 1960s can be divided into two distinct periods. During the Rákosi period, the *jampec* was a youth figure that was associated with overt and extreme manners of consumption.⁶⁰ Like the Soviet *stilyagi*,⁶¹ *jampec* culture was associated with an exaggerated outward appearance that was adapted from American culture. The media depicted youth participating in *jampec* behavior as copying “bourgeois” Western consumption patterns with their colorful, gaudy manner of dress and their attraction to underground jazz clubs. They were shown in Hungarian movies as ridiculous figures that attracted susceptible youth with their outrageous behavior.⁶² In the 1960s, as consumption became a clear facet of the government’s standard of living program, deviance became more associated with behavior than with outward appearance. Throughout the 1960s, youth subcultures were identified as gangs (*galerik*), hippies (*hippik*), and hooligans (*huligánok*). The term hooligan had existed during the Rákosi period as well, and in both periods was associated more with explicit criminality than were the *jampec* or hippies. In the 1960s, the terms “hooligans” and “gangs” were used more or less interchangeably – gangs, in essence, were groups of hooligans. Hippies, on the other hand,

⁵⁹ Wolf Middelndorf, *New Forms of Juvenile Delinquency: Their Origin, Prevention, and Treatment* (New York: United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 1960), 75-82.

⁶⁰ The Hungarian *jampec* were similarly in style and dress to the American zoot suiters.

⁶¹ See for example Gleb Tsipursky, “Citizenship, Deviance, and Identity: Soviet youth newspapers as agents of social control in the Thaw-era leisure campaign” *Cahier du Monde Russe*, 49 no. 4 (October-December 2008): 629-649; and Yurchak, 170-175. For outside the Soviet Union, see descriptions of the Polish *bikiniarze* in Poland in Katherine Lebow, “Kontra Kultura: Leisure and Youthful Rebellion in Stalinist Poland” in Reid and Crowley (2010), 71-94; and the German *Halbstarke* in Uta G. Poiger, “American Music, Cold War Liberalism, and German Identities” in Heide Fehrenbach and Uta G. Poiger, eds., *Transactions, Transgressions, Transformations: American Culture in Western Europe and Japan* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2000), 127-147.

⁶² For more on *jampec* culture see Horváth (2009a), 53-63; and Karl Brown, “Dance Hall Days: Jazz and Hooliganism in Communist Hungary 1948-1956,” *Trondheim studies on East European cultures and societies* 26 (October 2008).

were most often portrayed as those who blindly adopted the behaviors of American hippies without thought for the meaning of their behavior.⁶³ Often the lines between hippies and hooligans were blurred: as one newspaper article writes, “A crowd of hippies occasionally behaves like hooligans, and some hooligans fill their gangs with hippies.”⁶⁴ Both hippies and hooligans were associated with laziness, dirtiness, and general disregard for hard-working members of society. Youth subcultures were frequent subjects of newspaper articles and appeared regularly on the popular television show *Kék Fény* (Blue Light), a show that showcased the everyday life of Hungarian police.

Characterization of Subcultures

The continued existence of youth problems was highlighted with some frequency both within the government and in the Hungarian media. However, youth subcultures were not associated with state socialism in Hungary, but rather with the fact that Hungary had not fully transitioned into socialism. As one article stated, “In Hungary, hooliganism has no true social ground. The former ruling classes are completely disappearing, and the declassation process is ending. Hooliganism is alien to the essence of socialism.”⁶⁵ In his speech on youth policy, Aczél echoed this idea, stating, “In Hungary, young people have serious problems; however these are connected to the development of our entire society and not to a short circuit in our political work.”⁶⁶ As the 1960s progressed, fewer young people could lay claim to memories of the pre-socialist era, or even to the 1956 revolution; however the press argued that these eras still had an

⁶³ The term “hippie” also emerged in the late 1960s, later than “gang” or “hooligan.”

⁶⁴ Judit Kovács, “Magyar Hippik” [Hungarian Hippies], *Magyar Nemzet*, June 11, 1968, 5.

⁶⁵ Miklós Szántó, “Gondolatok a Huligán-Kérdésről” [Thoughts About the Hooligan Question], *Magyar Hírek*, March 1, 1961.

⁶⁶ MOL 288f. 4/104-105 ő.e. A párt ifjúságpolitikájának néhány kérdése.

effect on their development. In the early 1960s, one article noted, “Today’s 16-20 year olds absorbed horror and dread with their mother’s milk,” suggesting that earlier periods still had a profound effect on young people.⁶⁷ The KISZ Central Committee article on free time emphasized the fact that young people still lived in a transitional society, stating, “Young people live together with society in a transitional age, removed from the capitalist past and approaching the socialist human ideal of the future. The goal is clear, but the path is long and laden with thorny opposition.”⁶⁸ The role of family life was also considered an important factor of youth problems. Youth coming from homes with divorced or indifferent parents were considered especially susceptible to becoming delinquent. As one article stated, “Where we find uneducable, antisocial young people, we can unerringly establish that the parents did not look after their children or in some other way caused the deformation of the youth’s character.”⁶⁹ In one *Ifjúsági Magazin* article, Sándor Hankóczy interviewed several runaway youths who were living in poor conditions in Budapest. When asked if he had wanted to live this way when he was young, one youth replied, “No. At that time I wanted to be a chemical engineer. But meanwhile my mother got divorced, and my father said he would take me in, but his new wife didn’t want to. I already said how my mother was. After that my grades became mediocre, good for nothing.”⁷⁰ Another reporter interviewing three members of the Great Tree Gang stated, “The three lives are eerily similar. Broken family, institution, running away, theft, dangerous vagrancy, rowdiness, illegal entry – in and out of prison from fourteen years old.”⁷¹ Thus youth delinquency, while still

⁶⁷ Szántó.

⁶⁸ MOL 288f. 35/1964/8ö.e. A szabad idő felhasználásának tapasztalatai...

⁶⁹ Szántó.

⁷⁰ Sándor Hankóczy, “A kiskanál és a Duna” [The Teaspoon and the Danube]. *Ifjúsági Magazin*, August, 1968, 16.

⁷¹ L. Tamás Puskás, “Toronyiránt a Letjőn” [Beeline Downhill]. *Ifjúsági Magazin*, May, 1970, 45-46.

considered problematic in Hungary, was associated with elements that were alien to the socialist movement, and were attributed to the continued influence of earlier eras and the fact that Hungary had not fully transitioned into socialism.

The government and Hungarian media also portrayed youth subcultures as being particularly susceptible to Western influence. As the Central Committee report on youth policy stated, “An unfavorable opinion has been developed in Hungarian youth of capitalism as a system of exploitation. However, since they don’t have personal experience and their knowledge is contradictory, a segment of youth harbors false illusions toward the world-leader capitalist countries, regarding them as some kind of welfare state and consumer society.”⁷² Such illusions were considered to be one factor in hindering the ability to build socialism in Hungary.

“Inactivity, false objectivity, uncritical western worship, and underestimating the battle of opposing ideology harm the interests of the nation,” argued a KISZ Central Committee report, “They render more difficult the working class party’s revolutionary battle for socialism.”⁷³ The government also considered Hungarian youth to be among the groups that Western *fellazítás* specifically targeted (see Chapter 3). “*Fellazítás* cannot achieve its fundamental goal in Hungary; however we cannot disregard its undeniably harmful influence,” stated the Politburo report on *fellazítás*, “This influence can be experienced particularly in the ideological and political sphere and in the development of public opinion. First and foremost, the main targets of *fellazítás* can be seen in certain circles of the intelligentsia, young people, and the petty bourgeois.”⁷⁴ Some members of the Hungarian media argued that Western culture that was being brought into Hungary was having an increasingly negative effect on young people. In his article,

⁷² Vass (1974), 491.

⁷³ Vass (1978), 524.

⁷⁴ Cseh et al., 538.

Jenő Gerencséri argued that in Hungary, films, TV shows, and radio programs that reflected the Western lifestyle “sometimes without any particular comment” had a negative effect on youth development. “I am not convinced,” Gerencséri wrote, “That our young people are always drawing the appropriate lesson from these ‘works.’” Gerencséri argued that the import of kitschy, trashy programs from the West was especially damning, stating, “Together these ‘works’ naturally spread the most extreme Western style, bourgeois morals, and bourgeois lifestyle, which has an enormous effect on young people.”⁷⁵ In his article, Andor Mároti echoed this sentiment and included all popular culture that seemingly emulated the Western style: “Entertainment – after the Western pattern – searches out the least critical people, adolescents, in order to make them the best consumers of its products. In their taste, young people are by no means the ripest or most qualified to be an example for all of society.”⁷⁶

Although most of the media did not blame Western-style youth culture as a whole, many portrayed certain groups of young people as adopting Western youth activities blindly and without thought to the activity’s meaning within a socialist context. By reacting uncritically to Western issues that didn’t exist in Hungary, hooligans, hippies, and gangs were portrayed as ridiculous caricatures who aped their Western counterparts and failed to bring about any real change. Such a parody is seen in the cartoon entitled “Rebellious Youth” that was published in the weekly comic magazine, *Ludas Matyi* (Figure 4-3). In the image, a young, longhaired couple is lying on the floor as the young woman’s parents sit in armchairs, reading the paper and knitting. The father is facing the young woman and asking “Tell me daughter, do you think even armchairs are a petty bourgeois invention?” “Petty bourgeois” is a term that was used frequently

⁷⁵ Gerencséri.

⁷⁶ Mároti.

by the Hungarian government; of course, the cartoon is not intended to indicate that the young woman is planning to become a member of MSZMP. Rather, the cartoon suggests that the daughter has adopted the rhetoric of American hippies without thought to its meaning within the Hungarian socialism. Rather than bringing about real social change, the young woman criticizes the furniture, and in doing so looks ridiculous in comparison to her parents. In another cartoon, a longhaired bearded young man is standing on his head in his room. When his parents enter, the father asks “NOW what are you rebelling against, my dear boy?” Here, the artist shows that the act of rebellion and the method in which the young man chooses to rebel is ridiculous. Rather than bringing about actual change, the young man is adopting the pretence of rebellion without any real message. The artist suggests that the young man is spoiled as well as ridiculous – he mimics the behavior of Western youths without cause, to the obvious befuddlement of his hard-working parents. These cartoons emphasize the idea that while it was fine to consume products of youth culture, doing so in a way that brought about no real improvements in society or oneself was counter to the tenets of socialism. Young people who were rebelling for the sake of doing so were participating in the Western type of rebellion that reinforced the status quo as opposed to improving it.

The idea that some young people blindly adapted Western behavior without improving themselves can also be seen the media’s discussion of the hippie button trend in Hungary. In May of 1968, the Budapest police issued a police report about Hungarian hippies, which cataloged a number of slogans that were worn as buttons by Hungarian youth, including things like “Make Love not War!”, “Hippie Power!”, “Don’t Work, Sleep!”, and “I like LSD!”⁷⁷

⁷⁷ Budapest Főváros Levéltár (BFL), 15-0399/1968, “A Budapesti Rendőkapitányság tájékoztatója a beat-hippi jelenségről és a bevezetett rendőri intézkedésekről” [The Budapest Police Captain’s Report on the Hippie Phenomenon and Established Police Precautions].



Figure 4-3. Tell me daughter, do you think even armchairs are a petty bourgeois invention? *Ludas Matyi*, July 15, 1971.

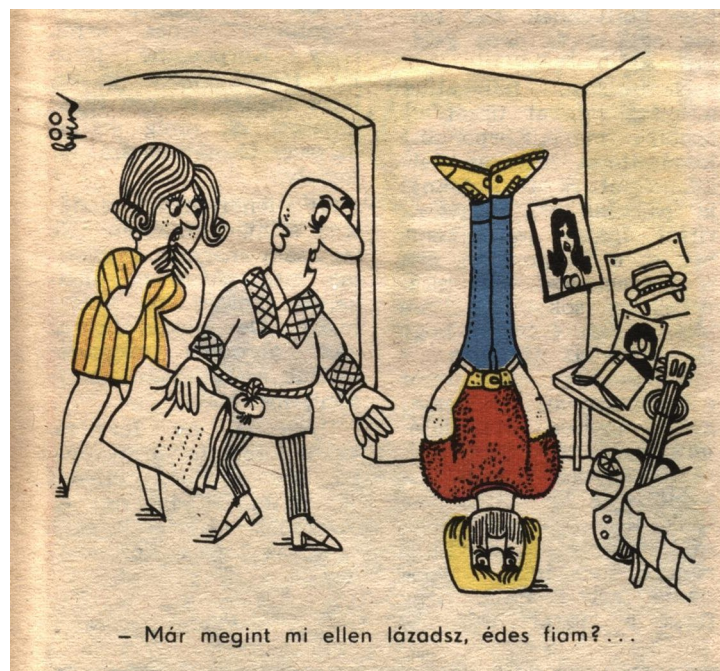


Figure 4-4. NOW what are you rebelling against, my dear boy? *Ludas Matyi*, February 2, 1971

Members of the Hungarian press, who had been given copies of the report, analyzed these slogans, which were written in a number of languages including English and Hungarian. The articles argued that the slogans made little sense in Hungary. As an article in *Magyar Nemzet* suggested:

The buttons with “Drink Beer, Don’t Study!”, “Don’t Work, Sleep!”, “Nothing Matters To Me!”, “Leave Me Alone!”, and “I Need Your Money!” written on them better express the *real hippie ideology*, which originated in large part when American youth grew disgusted with their fathers’ ruthless scrambling for money and symbols of power. For this reason [these young people] don’t work or bustle about, but rather they panhandle and go to soup kitchens. Do these buttons express an alien social truth in Hungary? Not just this... In Hungary there are also lazy and indifferent people. But isn’t it insolent to glorify idleness in a society in which the worker has the highest respect? Of course it is. And for this reason these buttons ring more negatively here than in the United States.⁷⁸

The article suggests that whereas in the West, hippie slogans represent a misguided effort to counteract real social problems, in Hungary they have no meaning, because the social problems that they address do not exist. Therefore if someone is lazy or apathetic it is particularly galling within a socialist state where work is highly valued. For István Ivanics at *Magyar Ifjúság*, buttons that represented sexuality and alcohol were particularly concerning “because they refer to real possibilities.” While certain buttons were ridiculous, Ivanics feared buttons that said “Kiss Me!” or “Virginity is a Luxury” might transfer into actual behavior, and that Hungarian society must keep a watchful eye on these movements: “We must take into account the dangers, even if for the time being they present themselves in the form of an ‘innocent hobby’ or ‘playful buttons.’”⁷⁹ While condemning the hippie subculture in Hungary, Western hippies also came under the scrutiny of the Hungarian press to reinforce the idea that even the rebellion of Western

⁷⁸ “Magyar Hippik.”

⁷⁹ István Ivanics, “Hippik a Körúton” [Hippies on the Boulevard], *Magyar Ifjúság* June 21, 1968, 3.

youth lacked resonance. Following the translation of an article from the French magazine *Paris Match*, The editors of *Ifjúsági Magazin* commented:

From the information in *Paris Match*, it is completely clear that the hippies' overbold, utopian undertaking – notwithstanding their sympathetic humanist and anti-war behavior – is untenable in the long term. We call your attention to one basic contradiction: Those clothes that are donated must be woven, cut out, and sown in a factory. Farmers must produce foodstuffs from the soil... The whole of society cannot turn its back on large-scale production, on the giant mechanism of industry and agriculture, trade, and the educational system. A few thousand people can do this, but an entire society cannot. The hippie movement *expresses* the crises of the American lifestyle – however it clearly cannot solve them.⁸⁰

According to *Ifjúsági Magazin*, hippies were considered to be an outward manifestation of the crises of American capitalism; however, the method through which American hippies chose to express their frustration could only work if the American industrial system was still functioning. Hippies in the West were in effect propagating the system they were so vehemently rebelling against. This idea was echoed by Kádár, who stated, “the behavior of young people from developed capitalist societies reflects the universal rejection of capitalist ideology, policy, social systems, and practices.” However, he cautioned, “I must add... that this endeavor is often accomplished with very archaic, undeveloped forms and slogans.”⁸¹ The criticism of American hippies only served to bolster the argument against their Hungarian counterparts. Even in America, where hippies were a meaningful symbol of decadent capitalist regimes, hippie rebellion failed to make meaningful changes to the American system.

In addition to depicting youth subcultures as participating in false rebellion without causing real change, the Hungarian media also suggested that some youth subcultures adopted

⁸⁰ “Hippyk” [Hippies] *Ifjúsági Magazin*, March, 1968, 13.

⁸¹ MOL 288f. 4/104-105 ő.e. A párt ifjúságpolitikájának néhány kérdése.

extreme manifestations of otherwise acceptable behavior.⁸² In a *Ludas Matyi* cartoon entitled “Restless Youth” (Figure 4-5), two young people are in an apartment with a telephone, a television, and modern furnishings, and balcony that overlooks the Buda Hills. The young couple, a longhaired bearded man and a young woman with a short miniskirt, looks dejected amidst their luxury. In the doorway of the apartment stands an older couple, and the older woman is asking, “You have an apartment, furniture, a car... why are you so despondent?” One of the youths replies, “The phone isn’t red.” Young people were seen as being particularly vulnerable to the dangers of overconsumption, which made them spoiled, self-centered, and foolish. While consumption and youth culture were accepted when carried out in an approved socialist manner, the young people in the cartoon represent taking consumption to an extreme, improper, level, which is characterized by the type of unbridled consumption that was associated with the bourgeois consumer society. Rather than consuming for improving themselves or society, they were consuming for the sake of consuming and therefore stood in opposition to proper, socialist consumption (see Chapter 2).

Interestingly, despite their association with Western deviance old and new, many Hungarian youth subcultures lacked any concrete Western anti-communist message. When asked about their politics, one member of the Great Tree Gang responded, “We greeted each other with Heil Hitler. It wasn’t allowed, but we did it. We weren’t interested in politics.” Another responded similarly, “Politics? I think everything is stupid...”⁸³ Indeed, while many of the youth subcultures identified themselves as figures of “counterculture,”⁸⁴ few espoused any coherent

⁸² A similar discourse can be seen in the Soviet Union, where the Soviet government depicted *stilyagi* in such an excessive way that it was the excess that was seen as the problem. See Yurchak, 198-202.

⁸³ Puskás, “Toronyiránt a Letjőn,” 45.

⁸⁴ Sándor Horváth “Patchwork identities and folk devils: youth subcultures and gangs in socialist Hungary,” *Social History* 34 no. 2 (2009): 171, doi: 10.1080/03071020902879598. Henceforth (2009b).

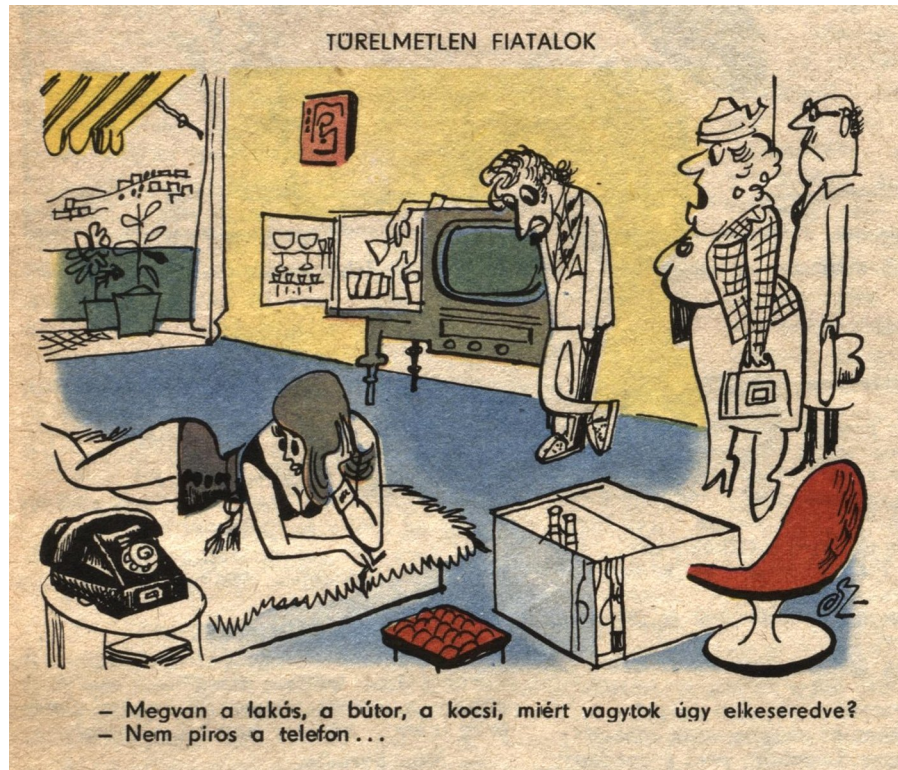


Figure 4-5. You have an apartment, furniture, a car... why are you so despondent? – The phone isn't red.

anti-socialist message or advocated for any real government change. Those who did criticize the government often suggested that the Hungarian socialists were not socialist enough. When asked about his political views, Great Tree Gang member Prince (*Herceg*) stated, “Mao Tse-tung, him I’m interested in. The Chinese are constructing real socialism, only they are carrying out Marx’s ideas. There are no class differences like here.”⁸⁵ Another Great Tree Gang member, Duck (*Kacska*), wrote in his diary, “Hey, office-clerk, do not hide yourself!... You do not speak; you are just stroking your Trabant-car which was a bargain.”⁸⁶ Duck’s critique of consumerism resembled far-left members of MSZMP, who argued vehemently against government reforms. In the 1960s, the Kádár government did not criticize Hungarian subcultures for their poor cultural

⁸⁵ Puskás, “Toronyiránt a Letjőn,” 45.

⁸⁶ Horváth (2009b) 173.

choices – the Great Tree Gang, after all, had gathered around the Great Tree in order to hear KISZ-approved musicians who were playing in Youth Park. Rather, the criticism of youth subcultures focused on behavior: Hungarian subcultures, the government argued, were using youth culture in order to give the impression that they were rebelling without actually changing society or themselves. The Great Tree Gang did not want to participate in a cultured evening of tasteful dancing; they wanted to listen to music, loaf, and drink beer. Their participation in youth culture was unacceptable. It lacked the socialist emphasis on purpose and improvement that was espoused by the leaders of KISZ.

The Kádár Government and Everyday Youth

In addition to discussing the excesses of youth subcultures, the Hungarian government and members of the Hungarian media also devoted attention to everyday Hungarian youth. In the Dear IM section of *Iffúsági Magazin*, one youth writes:

I am 17 years old. I work. I would like an answer to my problem. Are we hooligans if we go dancing, to the movies, or to have fun together, or if we wear blue jeans and have big hair? We've heard so many varied opinions on the radio, television, and newspapers that say we don't know how to behave ourselves. I think this is true with the behavior of hooligans, but never did they "earn" this title with outward appearance.⁸⁷

The youth distanced himself from hooligans by suggesting that while he enjoyed many types of youth activities, he and his friends knew how to behave themselves. Like the young letter writer, the overwhelming majority of Hungarian young people did not associate themselves with youth subcultures, nor did they consider themselves to be part of the vanguard of the KISZ socialist movement. Many went to events at Youth Park or were members of a KISZ club, but at the same time they participated in non-KISZ sponsored activities, spending time in restaurants and coffee shops, and devoting attention to the latest fashions. In general, the government adopted a tolerant

⁸⁷ "Huligánok Vagyunk?" [Are We Hooligans?], *Iffúsági Magazin*, January 1966, 2.

attitude toward these young people, albeit with important caveats on behavior. The editorial staff of *Ifjúszági Magazin* acknowledged the letter writer's concerns, stating, "You are right when you say that one must judge a person based on their actions and inner character." However, it noted that the picture was slightly more complex, arguing, "Everything in its own time and its own place! Because "jeans" are very comfortable and are good attire for work, excursions, and sport, but they are not for an elegant restaurant or dance park."⁸⁸ The editor's response echoed the government's policy toward youth culture in general: while encouraging young people to engage in activities that they enjoyed, they urged Hungarian youth to do so appropriately and tastefully.

The Hungarian government often highlighted the idea that overall the majority of Hungarian youth behaved in an appropriate manner. As one KISZ Central Committee report stated:

The majority of youth consider every form of exploitation to be immoral: they condemn imperialist aggressiveness and the Vietnam War, and actively participate in building socialism. The majority of our young people are sincere, open, cultured, and respectful of learning. They establish relaxed relationships with adults and with their leaders, they courageously and passionately criticize deficiencies, disdain false respect for authority, and judge world affairs critically and with young people's characteristic sense of justice.⁸⁹

Such a sentiment was echoed by MSZMP's Central Committee, which stated, "It is observable that the majority of youth honestly study, work, and discharge their duties. They are responsive to socialist ideology, which largely forms their thoughts."⁹⁰ For the government, young people did not have to be vanguards of the socialist movement to be considered important elements in building socialism. In his speech on youth policy, György Aczél argued that an important aspect of building socialism was to do honest work:

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Vass (1978), 521.

⁹⁰ Vass (1974), 490.

In order to avoid misunderstanding, I would like to establish that the person who honorably does his work is extremely important in our work of building socialism. Moreover, we must increase the circle of loyal young citizens who carry out their duties, and [we must] reject the ridicule and disdain with which the petty bourgeois, false left-wing people who look down on everyday building work speak of those who correctly fulfill their responsibilities.⁹¹

Thus the government considered young people who were not politically active but still participated in society by fulfilling their duties in a respectable manner to be acceptable, and even commendable. The government also associated everyday young people with the desire for something new and the desire for change. In one interview with Lajos Méhes, KISZ First Secretary from 1964-1970, Méhes stated, “The personalities of young people are not mature, and therefore the frequency of error is greater. They are impatient, they search for the unusual and the new, and they are unused to long-term battles, and have difficulty understanding them.”⁹² The search for the new and the modern was an oft-cited characteristic of young people, and could be seen particularly in youth culture. For the government, the key was to direct this desire toward more purposeful pursuits. In his article, András Hegedüs argued, “The problem is that we must work on developing paths and methods that give possibilities to meet the demands of young people for progression – and better orient [these demands] in social questions – and that create a more suitable framework for youth social action.”⁹³ In this way, the government argued that the desire for something new could be channeled into building socialism. They distinguished everyday young people, who sought modern activities, from subcultures, whose activities were reactionary or served to maintain the status quo.

Youth Style

⁹¹ MOL 288f. 4/104-105 ö.e. A párt ifjúságpolitikájának néhány kérdése.

⁹² Sándor Hankóczy, “Örömeink Gondjaink” [Our Joys, Our Problems], *Ifjúsági Magazin*, April, 1968, 6.

⁹³ OSA, HU OSA 300-40-1-502, András Hegedüs, “Az ifjú nemzedékről,” *Valóság* no. 6 (1965), 99.

The government's attitude toward everyday youth culture is particularly reflected in its treatment of youth style. As the passage in *Ifjúsági Magazin* suggests, young people were generally allowed to dress as they wanted, provided their clothing was appropriate for the occasion. MSZP adopted a more tolerant attitude towards the way young people dressed, and Kádár himself was known to say, "It isn't a problem if their hair is long as long as they wash it!"⁹⁴ The government and the Hungarian media also urged adult readers not to judge young people by their outward appearance, stating that the appearance of young people was not an indicator of hooliganism. *Népszabadság* told its readers that "clothing is just *one of* the signs of hooliganism... For this reason one cannot generalize by clothing alone."⁹⁵ *Magyar Nemzet* stated, "It is not debatable that the majority of young people dressed according to contemporary style are not young criminals, but honest young men and women capable of development, who know how to keep up in both school and work."⁹⁶ The KISZ Central Committee 1966 report noted, "The communist education of young people, the development of healthy tendencies, and the exposure and cessation of the causes of negative phenomena require a true, bias-free approach. One cannot judge neither the good characteristics nor the insufficiencies of youth from outward appearance or superficial occurrences."⁹⁷ As long hair, blue jeans, flowered shirts, and other 1960s fashions became more prevalent, some authors even went so far as to praise youth who adopted modern style. After overhearing a conversation between longhaired workers, one author writes, "Yes, the hair is long, but respectful and intelligent thoughts are hidden

⁹⁴ Péter Fonyódi, *Beat Korszak a Part államban* [Beat Era in the Party State] (Budapest: XX. Század Intézet, 2003), 106.

⁹⁵ H.A. "Szülőknek Nevelésről: A fiatalok öltözközéséről" [Childrearing for Parents: About Youth Clothing], *Népszabadság*, October 12, 1960.

⁹⁶ Julis Török, "Hosszú haj és kultúra" [Long Hair and Culture], *Magyar Nemzet*, March 29, 1967.

⁹⁷ Vass (1978), 521.

underneath the hairdo many find offensive.”⁹⁸ *Népszabadság* argued that while the older generation was busy judging youth according to their fashions, more and more youth were seeking work over the summer for extra pocket money, “Money with which one can buy a long-desired pocket radio, a cheaper tape recorder, a pair of blue jeans, a brightly colored shirt, or even a solid suit... It is worthwhile to also take note of *this* fashion.”⁹⁹ One article in the Hungarian economic periodical *Figyelő* encouraged Hungarian industry to produce clothing and other items that young people demanded, albeit in a tasteful fashion. “One must ‘influence’ young people not with force but with setting an example and good organization,” the article argued, “The most effective is of course to develop such products that comprehensively meet young people’s demand for modernity and style. At the same time the products would form youth taste and customs in a proper manner.”¹⁰⁰

While adults were being cautioned not to judge young people on personal style, Hungarian youths were similarly warned that while youth fashion often indicated a desire for something new, style alone was not representative of modern life. Noted an article in *Ifjúsági Magazin*, “The prevailing fundamental idea of youth explains the existence and oddities of pop style: ‘We want to be different than you!’ This is a desire to be conspicuous, a rebellion against anything that is customary, that is old.” While the article argued that young people should be able to dress stylishly, it cautioned that stylish dress should not be confused with modern life, stating, “If all of your clothing complements each other in color and style and is appropriate to your age, personality, and not least wallet, of course you can dress stylishly. You cannot,

⁹⁸ H.J., “A Hosszú hajú” [The Longhaired], *Komárom Megyei Dolgozók Lapja*, December 2, 1971.

⁹⁹ József Arkus “Ez is Divat” [This is Also Fashion] *Népszabadság*, August 14, 1968.

¹⁰⁰ a.c., “Fiatalok Vásárlási Gondjai” [Youth Shopping Concerns], *Figyelő*, June 9, 1966.

however, mistake this for modernity, because outward appearance isn't everything."¹⁰¹ Another article in *Ifjúsági Magazin* echoes the sentiment that the outward appearance of young people was a failed attempt at trying to exact real change:

Young people truly want something new, in everything they want what is better than what is. But there is great distance between desire and action. At first the desire for reform expresses itself only in outward appearance. Young men dress in jeans and lumberman's jackets, they grow their hair, call girls "chicks" and seek out the company of their contemporaries. But soon they realize that this doesn't solve anything. Then comes the realization: emerging from the grayness of pressed pants they've arrived at the uniformity of blue jeans. If they want to extricate themselves from [the uniformity] they must bravely look for work (in whatever clothing!).¹⁰²

In Hungary, youth clothing was generally not associated with any political sentiment or with a desire to copy Western fashion. When *The New York Times* commented on the jeans craze in Hungary, they noted, "Hungarians who were questioned about the blue jeans phenomenon said that they saw no political significance, rather a bland way of showing the young generation's yearning for a way of life different from that of their elders."¹⁰³ Young people who wore jeans in an attempt to break from the past were distinguished from subcultures, because the outward appearance of everyday young people was reflective of their desire for change. Although style was not imbued with the same glorified rhetoric as KISZ-sponsored youth culture, the government nonetheless maintained a tolerant stance toward the way Hungarian young people dressed, arguing that it was associated with their desire for new and modern culture and could not be directly connected to the behavior of youth subcultures.

Conflict Between Generations

¹⁰¹ Lenke Elek, "'Egyéniségek' Egyenruhában" [Individuality in Uniform], *Ifjúsági Magazin*, July 1970, 11.

¹⁰² Teréz Józsa, "Ollók Csattogatása" [Snapping of Scissors], *Ifjúsági Magazin*, July 1971, 40.

¹⁰³ Paul Hoffman, "Blue Jeans Mark Trend in Hungary: Youths find Link with West in 'Texas' Trousers" *The New York Times*, August 4, 1968.

Much of the government and the media's discussion of young people contrasted Hungarian youth to older generations. One *Ludas Matyi* cartoon titled "Nostalgia" (Figure 4-6) shows two older men in hats and overcoats looking at two longhaired, bearded younger men who are dressed in modern fashions, with large necklaces, bellbottoms, and platform shoes. One of them is carrying an unplugged electric guitar. While surreptitiously observing the youth, one of the older men says to the other, "Remember during our *jampec* phase when they sneered at *our* fringe?" The cartoon highlights the differences between the two generations, but also reinforces the idea that most young people would eventually become productive members of society no matter how outrageous their clothing. Depicted as hard-working everyday Hungarians, the older gentlemen nonetheless acknowledged that in their youth they too had dressed differently from the previous generation. Indeed, as the government adopted a more lenient attitude toward youth culture, it was often the parents and members of the older generation who were considered to be too restrictive. A number of young people wrote *Ifjúsági Magazin* to complain about their parents and neighbors who judged them based on outdated morality. In one debate, Ilona, a Hungarian youth, complained, "I constantly observe that the majority of adults think we should just do what they command and live according to their customs. Of course there are decent people among them, but they are as rare as a white raven."¹⁰⁴ Another youth, Judit, took a more moderate stance: "Indeed many young people believe that adults represent the outdated and the bad. Of course it's not like this. Among them there are also many modern people we can learn from if we pay attention at all, and don't categorize them as old fogeys."¹⁰⁵ Members of the KISZ leadership encouraged young people to be respectful of their elders, but acknowledged that

¹⁰⁴ "A Dühös Romantikus 2" [The Angry Romantic 2] *Ifjúsági Magazin*, November, 1968, 11.

¹⁰⁵ "A Dühös Romantikus 3" [The Angry Romantic 3] *Ifjúsági Magazin*, December, 1968, 12.



Figure 4-6. Remember during our *jampec* phase when they sneered at *our* fringe? *Ludas Matyi*, January 16, 1969.

many adults were too quick to judge young people based on outward appearance or new customs (for example being friends with members of the opposite sex). Béla Radnai, a docent in Budapest's Eötvös Loránd University's Psychology department, remarked, "It is lucky that young people are more understanding with us adults than we are with them," and argued that adults were oftentimes too quick to judge young people, especially on outward appearance.¹⁰⁶

Conflict between generations was not unique to Hungary in the 1960s, the decade that coined the phrase "Generation Gap." As cultural theorists Stuart Hall and Paddy Whannel argued in 1964, "Parents are always one generation behind their children: today they seem to be two generations behind."¹⁰⁷ While acknowledging that many adults were overly critical of Hungarian

¹⁰⁶ István Ivanics, "Bölcsőtől a Beatlesig" [From the Cradle to the Beatles], *Ifjúsági Magazin*, March, 1968, 6.

¹⁰⁷ Hall and Whannel, 274.

young people, the government and the media often tried to portray the conflict between generations not as a disagreement between the old and the young, but between the old and the new. During the KISZ Sixth Party Congress, it adopted the principle that “the problems of our society are not generational, but social... the battle is not between old and young, but rather between the long-standing and the new!”¹⁰⁸ An article in *Ifjúsági Magazin* noted, “Just as a young person cannot be bad because he is young, in our eyes a parent cannot be conservative just because he is a parent.” It went further, “One cannot disavow principles of socialist morality, and we must cast aside out of date, crude judgments, but know that young people cannot manage without adults’ useful advice and critical inspection of life experiences.”¹⁰⁹ Hungarian youth periodicals like *Magyar Ifjúság* and *Ifjúsági Magazine* interviewed a number of Hungarian leaders and portrayed them to be tolerant of youth culture. When speaking with Béla Radnai, the reporter remarked, “From your responses it is clear that you side with young people on virtually every issue.” Radnai responded, “Absolutely!”¹¹⁰ Placing themselves within the group of tolerant, forward-thinking adults was an attempt to distance government leaders from those adults who viewed the rise of youth culture with no little concern. The media suggested that while there was a segment of the adult population that was consistently upset with the behavior of Hungarian youth, the government adopted a more tolerant attitude, even encouraging youth culture that represented a break from past generations.

Conclusion

In a radio address, Árpád Pullai, KISZ First Secretary from 1961-1963, argued:

¹⁰⁸ Vass (1978), 520.

¹⁰⁹ “Kire Hallgassunk? Vitazáró” [To Whom Should We Listen? Concluding Article], *Ifjúsági Magazine*, January, 1967, 55.

¹¹⁰ Ivanics, “Bölcsőtől a Beatlesig,” 6.

Young people seek the connection between modern life and communist idealism. Many discover the correct path; others, however, go astray, and become empty, superficial modernists. Many young people think to find the meaning of modernity in outward appearance. Some too freely interpret and practice modernity. They are arrogant, cynical, excessive in their entertainments, and offensively individual. They run after empty adventure, because to them this is modern life, the modern rhythm. Many, of course, judge those who walk around in more daring clothing and shoes but otherwise dress tastefully. Those people must understand that one cannot judge one generation while viewing previous generations with rose-colored glasses. This will cause self-deception and disappointment.¹¹¹

Pullai's words reflect the Hungarian government's portrayal of Hungarian youth culture. In general, the government argued that most youth culture was acceptable as long as it was consumed within the appropriate, socialist framework. Official youth culture through KISZ focused on meeting the demand of young people for entertaining, age-appropriate activities while at the same time emphasizing taste and education, which meant that Hungarian youth could be engaged in the activities they enjoyed and simultaneously fulfill the socialist emphasis on the purposeful use of free time. KISZ leaders argued that taste would improve the more young people became educated about the activities they enjoyed. Young people were encouraged to dance, for example, as long as they learned the proper steps and did so in a tasteful manner. Youth clubs were the cornerstone of the focus on taste and education, where Hungarian youth could learn about their favorite pastimes and eventually make better more tasteful choices. KISZ even created its own versions of youth culture, which were popular with Hungarian youth.

The Hungarian policy toward youth was reflective of the more permissive attitudes of the 1960s, which existed throughout the Soviet Bloc. By the end of the 1960s, most state socialist countries had instituted at least some form of youth culture in order to compete with the West

¹¹¹ Gábor Zsigmond Papp and Miklós Tamási, "A pesti vasárnap" [The Budapest Sunday], *Budapest Retró 2* (Budapest: Budapest Film, 2003) DVD.

and provide young people with entertainment they would enjoy.¹¹² However, unlike in Hungary, many Soviet Bloc governments had a more ambiguous stance to the products of youth culture, especially dress. In the Soviet Union, vague criticisms about wearing “too much” makeup or lacking “harmony” in dress allowed for negotiation and dialogue about what was excessive and what was the appropriate balance.¹¹³ The Soviet media depicted improper behavior in such an extreme matter that the majority of Soviet youth could not relate to images of spoiled, selfish youth who demanded Western-style jeans and terrorized their traditional, hard-working parents. This allowed for the introduction of a measured type of youth culture that was not officially forbidden, but that didn’t have its place within Soviet socialism.¹¹⁴ Alexei Yurchak terms this process “deterritorialization,” whereby youth culture was neither Western nor Soviet, but placed a separate location that Yurchak dubs “The Imaginary West.”¹¹⁵ In Hungary, the government made a greater attempt to incorporate all aspects of youth culture, including clothing, into its idea of socialism, arguing that Hungarian youth culture could be socialist as long as it was consumed in an appropriate fashion. This type of incorporation was rare among the Soviet Bloc countries.

Despite their tolerance of youth culture, the Hungarian media argued that subcultures were inappropriately participating in youth activities, and Hungarian subcultures were often condemned by both the media and the Hungarian police. Hooligans, hippies, and gangs were portrayed as representatives of the old society, and the media depicted their behaviors as alien to Hungarian socialism. The existence of youth subcultures was explained by the fact that Hungarian youth still lived in a transitional society, and were affected by the excesses of past

¹¹² Reid and Crowley (2010), 35.

¹¹³ Tsipursky (2008), 643.

¹¹⁴ Yurchak, 198.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 158-206.

regimes. The media argued that youth subcultures were participating in youth culture to engage in rebellion while still maintaining the status quo. In a country where young people were supposed to be the vanguard of the socialist revolution, Hungarian subcultures were depicted as adopting Western behaviors without thought to their meaning in a socialist context. Hungarian hippies who adopted Western rhetoric were seen as ridiculous parodies of their American counterparts, who themselves only served to reinforce the capitalist status quo. While most subcultures wore similar clothes and participated in similar activities as other Hungarian youth, the media criticized them by arguing that their consumption of youth culture was only to pretend to rebel rather than to bring about any real change.

In contrast to the disparate pictures of youth culture that were represented by KISZ's depiction of youth and the media's depiction of hooliganism, the average Hungarian youth would have felt out of place at both the Hippie Walk and at a Central Committee meeting of KISZ. Few identified with the depiction of hooligans, and most young people actively sought to distance themselves from youth subcultures, despite the fact that they wore similar clothes and enjoyed the same activities. Most Hungarian youth often wore modern clothing and participated in non-KISZ activities, but still considered themselves to be productive members of Hungarian socialist society. For these young people, the government argued that it was enough that they adopted youth culture as a symbol of their desire for change, for something different from what their parents enjoyed. Once young people realized that clothing alone did not offer the change they were looking for, KISZ leaders argued, most Hungarian youth would eventually find the correct path to finding work and their place in society, thus effectively becoming a "builder of socialism." Although young people in Hungary were not as politically oriented as their Western counterparts, the government's incorporation of youth culture into their socialist ideology

enabled most Hungarian youth to implicitly support the government by participating in KISZ-organized youth activities and by conscientiously doing their jobs. Many joined a youth club, attended a concert at Youth Park or went dancing at a Hungarian culture house, and read *Iffúsagi Magazin*, even if they were not members of KISZ. Thus the government's attitude toward youth culture was reflective of its attitude toward society in general: young people were considered to be participating in building socialism as long as they were not engaging in overtly oppositional behavior.

Chapter 5

Beat

From its inception as a particular field of study, youth culture has been closely associated with popular music. In Stuart Hall and Paddy Whannel's 1964 discussion of youth culture, the authors noted:

Because of its high emotional content, teenage culture is essentially non-verbal. It is more naturally expressed in music, in dress, in certain habits of walking and standing, in certain facial expressions and 'looks' or in idiomatic slang. Though there is much to be learned from the lyrics of pop songs, there is more in the *beat* (loud, simple, insistent), the *presentation* (larger-than-life, mechanically etherealized), the *inflections* of voice (sometimes the self-pitying, plaintive cry, and later the yeah-saying, affirmative shouting), or the *intonations* (at one stage mid-Atlantic in speech and pronunciation, but more recently rebelliously northern and provincial).¹

Such an analysis is echoed by subsequent generations of scholars of youth culture who continue to highlight the central role of music in the lives of youth. In their book, Andrew Ross and Tricia Rose argued, "As a daily companion, social bible, commercial guide and spiritual source, youth music is still *the* place of faith, hope and refuge. In the forty-odd years since 'youth culture' was created as a consumer category, music remains the medium for the most creative and powerful stories about those things that often seem to count the most in our daily lives."² Many similarly point to the non-verbal qualities of music in their ability to appeal to and shape young people. When analyzing popular music in the 1960s, Peter Wicke noted, "Ultimately, music [was] ideally suited to absorb the developing system of young people's values and their interests because music's symbolic function was neither reliant on the unambiguous meaning of the words

¹ Hall and Whannel, 282.

² Andrew Ross and Tricia Rose, eds., *Microphone Fiends: Youth Music and Youth Culture* (Oxford: Routledge, 1994), 3.

nor on ideologies, but rather based on emotional impulses.”³ To its young proponents, music from this era, dubbed “beat” for its intense rhythmic quality and extreme sounds,⁴ was symbolic of the search for a shared generational experience among youth who felt increasingly alienated from traditional adult culture. As Wicke stated, “The line between ‘us’ and ‘them’ was henceforth drawn on the basis of music.” This differentiation was not only generational, it also incorporated political and social factors that were becoming increasingly distinct among adolescents during this period.⁵

At the same time, despite its professed desire to maintain independence from mainstream culture, youth music was often dependent on the very structures it seemingly sought to define itself against. As Hall and Whannel argued, “Teenage culture is a contradictory mixture of the authentic and the manufactured: it is an area of self-expression for the young and a lush grazing pasture for the commercial providers.”⁶ Since the 1960s, young people were largely responsible for creating music that would appeal to their peer groups; however, this music was produced, circulated, and promoted by the mainstream music industry. “From the very beginning youth culture was located precisely in between mainstream and subculture,” stated Wicke, “just as much characterized by subcultural patterns of segregation as it was characterized by mechanisms of integration of the markets for music, media, and fashion.”⁷ Indeed, a number of cultural

³ Peter Wicke, “Music, Dissidence, Revolution, and Commerce: Youth Culture between Mainstream and Subculture,” in Schildt and Siegfried, 116.

⁴ Originating in Britain, beat music is a variant of pop music that combines elements of different musical genres including rock and roll, rhythm and blues, and doo-wop. Beat became popular in the early 1960s and is associated most famously with The Beatles, particularly the band’s early work. Despite their similarity in names, in Hungary the term “beat” and “beat generation” is associated with this type of music and not the type of “beatnik” culture associated with post-World War II American writers.

⁵ Wicke, 117-18.

⁶ Hall and Whannel, 276.

⁷ Wicke, 121.

historians argue that even the American counterculture of the 1960s could not fully escape the mainstream society from which they sought to distance themselves. Some, like John Storey suggested that countercultural music as a brand of popular culture needed to be incorporated into mainstream culture and cultural industries in order to ensure its own survival.⁸ Others, like Thomas Frank, argued that counterculture itself reflected the middle-class consumer values that it styled itself against, selling nonconformity and anticommercialism with the adroit business sense of any mainstream marketing executive.⁹ For musicologist Nadya Zimmerman, 1960s counterculture ultimately dissolved because it falsely believed in its ability to work outside of the system while simultaneously reflecting it. According to Zimmerman, “The countercultural lifestyle and image needed both the semblance of autonomy and access to the system for its unique image to be realized.”¹⁰

In Hungary in the 1960s, especially in the latter half of the decade, beat music had similarly complex political, social, and generational relations with mainstream Hungarian society. Early on in the decade, music that was produced by and for Hungarian youth was originally looked on with no little suspicion by the government and Hungarian parents alike; however as the Kádár government’s policies expanded to include popular types of youth culture, beat music become an important fixture in the government’s youth policy. Never officially sanctioned by the government, cultural policy makers within MSZMP nonetheless recognized the importance of maintaining its complex, often uneasy relationship with Hungarian beat bands

⁸ John Storey, “Rockin’ Hegemony: West Coast Rock and Amerika’s War in Vietnam,” in John Storey, ed., *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: A Reader*, 4th ed. (Harlow, England: Pearson, 2009), 88-97.

⁹ Thomas Frank, *The Conquest of Cool: Business Culture, Counterculture, and the Rise of Hip Consumerism* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1997).

¹⁰ Nadya Zimmerman, *Counterculture Kaleidoscope: Musical and Cultural Perspectives on Late Sixties San Francisco* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2008), 20.

in order to meet the demands of everyday Hungarian youth as well as to counteract Western *fellazítás* (see Chapter 3). Indeed beat music, with its associated social, cultural, and generational attributes, was considered to be so critical to young people that many in the media used the term “beat” to identify the majority of Hungarian youth. “In our eyes, we classify the majority of young people into two poles: at-risk, neglected youth and the extraordinarily valuable ‘elite...’” stated one article, “Somewhere in between these two extremes it is customary to put the impressionable masses, which we have entitled the ‘beat generation.’”¹¹ As with youth style and other aspects of youth culture that were permitted but not officially sanctioned, many members of the Hungarian media portrayed beat music as a value-neutral form of culture, and its positive and negative qualities were dependent upon the manner in which it was consumed. In an article on the Hungarian beat generation, one author argued, “Within young people, the ‘Beat Generation’ exists only as an age-identifying stratum. But this qualifies nothing relative to its essence or moral prestige. Belonging to this generation are valuable, honest, respectable girls and boys, and less ‘decent’ ones as well. Exactly like all young people between the ages of fifteen and twenty-five.”¹²

In this chapter, I describe the complex social, political, and generational aspects of Hungarian youth music of the later half of the 1960s, specifically the discourse that surrounded the introduction of Hungarian beat music.¹³ Often viewed through the lens of post-1989 scholars, the music of the 1960s, and indeed all music during state socialism, often oversimplifies the

¹¹ OSA, HU OSA 300-40-1-503, Katalin Kékesi, “Napjaink ifjúsága: Hosszú hajú gondolatok” [Our Age’s Youth: Long-Haired Thoughts], *Nógrád Megyei Hírlap*, April 8, 1970.

¹² OSA, HU OSA 300-40-1-503, S.B., “Beat koroszály? Válasz egy levelre” [Beat Generation? Response to a Letter], *Veszprém Megyei Napló*, April 11, 1970.

¹³ During this period “beat” was generally used as a term that was synonymous with youth music, although this term was contested by some of the musicians that played it.

distinct position that youth music maintained within society and does not adequately address the unique connection between its various participants. Without denying the political nature of youth music generally and Hungarian beat music specifically, beat music in Hungary existed primarily as a particularly powerful form of youth culture, and as such could not occupy the autonomous ideological or political space that is often attributed to it by modern scholars. Understanding the beat movement requires an understanding of the complex interconnections between the government, the older generations, the beat musicians, and the youth audience. For the Kádár government, the desire to meet the demands of Hungarian youth for popular, youth-specific music led cultural figures in MSZMP to establish Hungarian counterparts to what was considered less tasteful Western music and radio programming. As contact with the West increased, so too did the government's efforts to provide a Hungarian alternative to Radio Free Europe and Radio Luxembourg, and to produce youth music that reflected Hungarian musical traditions. At the same time, beat music never won the official support of the government, and the older generations in Hungary continued to be suspicious of the new genre of music that seemed to captivate Hungarian youth. For Hungarian musicians, beat music provided a method of expression that differentiated their work from the mainstream Hungarian "light" music that was associated with the older generations of Hungarian society. Styling themselves as the voice of Hungarian youth, these musicians, perhaps most notably the Hungarian band Illés, pushed the boundaries of lyrics, sound, and behavior, and distanced themselves from the government, often clashing with cultural leaders within the party. Nonetheless, they participated in government-organized music competitions, featured prominently in Hungarian youth magazines, and often became the primary wage earners within their families despite being classified as "amateurs." For many Hungarian youth, beat music was an important expression of youth identity. This

expression was not necessarily political in form, but more often generational, speaking to the desire of youth to participate in a shared experience that spoke to their own age-specific needs and emotions. As with most youth music in and out of Soviet Bloc countries, the Hungarian beat music of the 1960s was as dependent on and reflective of the government and mainstream society as it strove to stand outside it.

Historiography of Rock Music in the Soviet Bloc

Perhaps more than any other aspect of popular culture, state socialist rock music has been the subject of a broad range of scholarly analysis, especially after the fall of state socialism.¹⁴ Indeed, rock music is broadly associated with the 1989 revolutions in the Soviet Bloc countries. “Every revolution has its music...” Sabrina Ramet argued, “Indeed one may even go so far as to say that without music there cannot be a revolution. The East European revolution of 1989 likewise had its music, and that music was rock.”¹⁵ Scholars of state socialist rock music and its associated genres highlighted not only the political nature of rock music but also its function as a substitution for political plurality within the one-party state.¹⁶ Rock music’s capacity as a tool for political opposition has led scholars like Gábor Klaniczay and Balázs Trencsényi to eschew the expressions “popular culture” and “subculture” to depict various musical genres in Eastern Europe in favor of the term “counterculture,” borrowing from Theodor Roszak’s depiction of counterculture as a viable alternative to mainstream society.¹⁷ In the former state socialist

¹⁴ Indeed, one of the first broad-scale, English analyses of Soviet Bloc rock music was published in 1990, but written before the fall of the Berlin Wall. See for example Timothy W. Ryback, *Rock Around the Bloc: A History of Rock Music in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990).

¹⁵ Sabrina Petra Ramet, ed., *Rocking the State: Rock Music and Politics in Eastern Europe* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994), 1.

¹⁶ See for example Ramet, 5; Gábor Klaniczay, *Ellenkultúra a hetvenes-nyolcvanas években* [Counterculture in the 70s and 80s] (Budapest, Noran, 2003).

¹⁷ Theodore Roszak, *The Making of a Counter Culture: Reflections on the Technocratic Society and Its Youthful Opposition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

countries, Klaniczay and Trencsényi describe the existence of what they call “musical countercultures,” which “constituted a specific field of cultural creativity and also of resistance and rebellion in the ‘Eastern Bloc’ countries.”¹⁸ The ability of music to create a separate, autonomous ideological sphere that is distinct from socialist mainstream culture is often highlighted by Hungarian music scholars, especially when depicting the music of the so-called underground in the 1980s, and is attributed to the weakening and ultimate demise of the state socialist regime.¹⁹ For some of these scholars, the rock music of the 1980s and the subsequent fall of socialism was symbolic of the triumph of freedom in the face of government suppression. When examining the role of the state police in the lives of rock musicians, Tamás Szőnyei wrote, “The police surveillance of popular music proves the weakness of the regime: they were afraid of rock & roll as a way of expression of free speech and spirit. The paradox is, that in a sense, they were right: looking back to those days we can see that this ridiculous fear was justified. Certain works of popular music and their performers actually contributed to the weakening of the system.”²⁰

Scholars of Hungarian rock music who focus on the music of the 1980s often depict the music of the 1960s as lacking the transformative characteristics of the latter eras. In his essay, László Kürti derides the music of the 1960s as overly simplistic, lacking in the more radical sentiments expressed by bands of the 1980s:

¹⁸ Gábor Klaniczay and Balázs Trencsényi, “Introduction: Mapping the Merry Ghetto: Musical Countercultures in East Central Europe, 1960-1989,” *East Central Europe* 38 no. 2-3 (2011): 171, doi: 10.1163/187633011X602462.

¹⁹ See for example László Kürti, “How Can I Be a Human Being? Culture, Youth, and Musical Opposition in Hungary,” in Ramet, 73-102; Anna Szemere, *Up from the Underground, the Culture of Rock Music in Postsocialist Hungary* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania University Press, 2001); Tamás Szőnyei (2011), “Kept on File: The Secret Service’s Activities against Popular Music in Hungary, 1960-1990,” *East Central Europe* 38 no. 2-3 (2011): 199-220, doi: 10.1163/174552411X600095.

²⁰ Szőnyei (2011), 207.

During [the period between the mid-1960s and the late 1970s], Hungarian pop music offered uncontroversial texts and images (boy loves girl, girl leaves boy, much homework and bad grades, party on a Saturday night), which coalesced to form the stereotypes of “socio-pop,” a distinct configuration of Euro-pop. A comparison of the songs produced by the Big Four²¹ and of those by lesser-known counterparts in the 1960s and 1970s yields the same characteristics. The portrayal of love relations between men and women, often set in a “syrupy and mellow-toned milieu” that was questioned by the singer *himself* was perhaps the quintessential feature of early pop music. Although this overt romanticism was a recurring formula, even in the more rebellious and often scandalous heavy metal and folk genres, its resemblance to everyday life in Hungary was negligible. Yet on records and in concert, the music of the Big Four and its cohorts reinforced these stereotypes of the establishment.²²

The idea that Hungarian bands of the 1960s were part of the establishment or that these bands had been somehow “tamed” by the government was echoed by a number of scholars of Hungarian rock music.²³ In 1981, when government officials met with beat musicians of the 1960s to discuss how to address contemporary youth music, Timothy Ryback describes how their “collaboration with government officials” was indicative of “the extent to which Hungary’s veteran rock stars had alienated themselves from a large segment of Hungarian youth. While the established pop and rock musicians wrote state-approved hits and built their ‘villas’ in Rózsadomb,²⁴ thousands of csöves²⁵ loitered on the streets of Budapest.”²⁶ The discussion of 1960s musicians, especially with their relation to the music and audience of the 1980s does not adequately take into account the generational aspects of youth music, particularly the fact that since the 1960s, music that spoke to a particular youth culture or subculture originated in large

²¹ Here, Kürti is referring to four main bands of the 1960s and early 1970s: Illés, Metró, Omega, and Locomotiv GT. The first three of these bands are discussed later on in this chapter.

²² Kürti, 75-6.

²³ See for example János Sebök (2002), *Rock a vasfüggöny mögött: Hatalom és ifjúsági zene a Kádár korszakban* [Rock Behind the Iron Curtain: Power and Youth Music in the Kádár Era] (Budapest: GM & Társai Kiadó, 2002), 115-118.

²⁴ The Rózsadomb is a wealthy area of Budapest’s second district, and is located in the Buda Hills.

²⁵ From the Hungarian word for pipe, the csöves movement was akin to the punk movement of the 1980s.

²⁶ Ryback, 172.

part by musicians who belonged to the same peer group as their intended audience.²⁷ Popular musicians of the 1960s, then in their mid-30s, could not easily relate to the youth generation that emerged during this period. Furthermore, in the 1980s throughout Europe, youth culture had become more fractured and the concept of youth had been transformed into what Wicke described as a “conglomerate of minorities.”²⁸ Indeed, the underground music that is most often heralded by Hungarian scholars is the music that was created by a self-styled intelligentsia who appealed to the urban intellectual youth of Hungary, including many of the scholars themselves.²⁹ In his article, Tamás Szőnyei describes his experience at an underground concert in the early 1980s, “All of us, who were there, felt that it was very important that the band choose the risky freedom of self-expression, and we thought highly of these musicians, roughly of our age, in their mid-twenties... The song belonged to us, whatever the circumstances were like.”³⁰

At the same time some scholars criticize beat musicians for becoming part of the establishment, others, often those who grew up during this era, imbue 1960s beat culture in Hungary with a similar sense of freedom against oppression that is prevalent in studies of 1980s rock. “Beat was the gate that for us could open a crack to the West,” wrote Péter Fonyódi, a musician from the 1970s, “Through which for many fresh air flowed into stale officialdom.”³¹ That such disparate impressions of Hungarian beat music existed further highlights the fact that beat music existed primarily as a form of Hungarian youth culture, and as such occupied a particular space within society, both dependent on the institutions of mainstream culture while at

²⁷ Wicke, 117.

²⁸ Ibid., 123.

²⁹ Szemere, 29.

³⁰ Szőnyei (2011), 202.

³¹ Fonyódi, 6.

the same time often in opposition to them. One cannot deny the power of youth music and youth culture to create real political change; however, by arguing that this type of music could exist in a sphere that was ideologically or politically autonomous from state socialist society oversimplifies the complex relationship that the musicians and the youth audience had with official culture, both politically and generationally. It also glosses over the fact that young people's desire for independence and a shared generational experience could not be expressed only in the political arena. By examining beat music of the 1960s from a broader perspective, one that focuses on its qualities as a genre of youth culture, we see a much more nuanced picture of Hungarian society, one that incorporates the political characteristics of Hungarian socialism with the universal political and social demands of youth that were emerging during this era.

Zoltán Kodály and Music Education in Hungary

It is impossible to discuss the role of music in Hungarian society during the 1960s without briefly discussing the important contributions of Zoltán Kodály to Hungarian music education. Born in 1882, Kodály spent the early part of the twentieth century touring the Hungarian countryside and recording Hungarian folk music, often accompanied by Hungarian composer Béla Bartók. By the 1930s and 1940s, Kodály had become a passionate advocate for music education, and for the rest of his life he worked tirelessly to reform music education in Hungary. "It is the duty of every music educator to teach music in such a way that good music becomes a necessity of life for every child," Kodály stated, noting that the best time to start teaching music to a child was "nine months before the child is born."³² In the 1940s, Kodály developed the Kodály Method, which was introduced into Hungarian schools in the middle of the decade, and became more prevalent with the increased centralization of the public school

³² Mary Helen Richards, "The Kodaly System in the Elementary Schools," *Bulletin of the Council for Research in Music Education*, No. 8 (Fall 1966): 44-5, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40316916>.

curriculum under the socialist government.³³ Critical of the music that had been previously used to teach children, Kodály used Hungarian folk songs as the basis for his teaching method, which he dubbed “Hungarian classical music par excellence” and saw as a symbol of universal Hungarian culture.³⁴ By the mid-1960s, the government had seen the academic benefits of increased music education, and nearly half of all primary schools in Hungary taught music daily, a percentage that was limited only by the availability of music teachers.³⁵ The relationship between Kodály and the socialist government was by no means straightforward: Kádár and Kodály seemed to have shared a sort of mutual respect, and Kodály was willing to attend certain public events as an important Hungarian cultural figure, but he never officially supported the Kádár government.³⁶ Nonetheless, by his death in 1967, Kodály’s role in improving music education and increasing the role of music in Hungarian life was dramatic. One article noted that in a socialist country where education was free, parents were willing to sign up for aptitude tests and pay tuition fees in order for their children to attend schools where music was taught regularly. “Moreover,” the article stated, “one finds the unique situation wherein the youth’s national hero is neither a footballer nor a pop singer, but a musician and educator, Zoltán Kodály.”³⁷ Hungarian youth growing up in the 1960s were among the first beneficiaries of Kodály’s efforts to create a Hungarian public that would appreciate quality music, and thus from an early age were taught to appreciate the role of music in everyday life.

³³ Lois Choksy, “Kodály In and Out of Context,” *Music Educators Journal* 55 No. 8 (1969): 58, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3392529>.

³⁴ L. Dobszay, “The Kodály Method and Its Musical Basis,” *Studia Musicologica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 14 no. 1 (1972), 22, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/901863>.

³⁵ Geoffrey Russell-Smith, “Introducing Kodály Principles into Elementary Teaching,” *Music Educators Journal*, 54 no. 3 (1967): 44, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3391185>.

³⁶ Gough, 129.

³⁷ Russell-Smith, 44.

The Kádár Government, Dance Music, and Beat

In the early 1960s in Hungary, the government was largely suspicious of the new type of youth music that was emerging in the Hungarian youth community. The first youth bands had begun to form at the beginning of the decade. By 1964, 250 “amateur youth bands” (*ifjúsági amatőr együttes*) existed in Hungary. Perhaps more striking was the rise in guitar sales, which went from 1100 in 1962 to 2970 in 1963.³⁸ Many of the early youth bands in Hungary began playing songs that they had heard on Radio Luxembourg and sang almost exclusively in English. The type of music they played was generically called “dance music” (*tánczene*), a category that encompassed a wide variety of “light” music styles, and was not considered to be geared toward a particular generation of Hungarian society. In May of 1963, KISZ organized an amateur festival at the Sportcsarnok in Budapest that featured a number of guitar and jazz bands, including early forms of the popular beat bands Metró, Illés, and Omega.³⁹ The reaction of the audience, whose screams, whistles, and stamping was described as a “Liverpool atmosphere,” caught the festival’s organizers by surprise. Both Illés and Metró won first prize, but the media viewed the behavior of some members of the youth audience with no little disquiet, especially their support of certain bands. One article described the event, stating, “An insignificant, loud group of the youth audience made a show of throwing apple cores and beer glasses in support of Illés against the other bands.”⁴⁰ As a result of the Sportcsarnok festival, Illés was banned from playing KISZ-organized events for one year, and the event was long used as an example for

³⁸ Iván Vitányi, ed., *Beat* (Budapest: Zeneműkiadó, 1969), 9-10.

³⁹ Of these bands, only Metró was comprised of those members that would define its “classic” phase.

⁴⁰ Sebők (2002), 39.

those who were suspicious of youth music. In the face of any type of disturbance, the opposition would recite the maxim, “Organizing the Sportcsarnok festival was also damaging.”⁴¹

KISZ’s 1964 report on free time reflected the disquiet towards Hungarian youth’s interest in dance music. “The expansion of *modern dance music* is understandable and natural,” the article stated, “but is not unequivocally a pleasant phenomenon.” The KISZ report argued that young people’s widespread acceptance of dance music was dangerous in terms of improving public taste, stating, “It is characteristic of general public taste that the best-selling classical music album is Schubert’s Ave Maria, which only reached *fifteenth place*, and even this is most probably thanks to the similarly-titled dance song by [Swiss singer] Vico Torriani.” The report also pointed to the lack of development in Hungarian dance music. “Modern dance music discredits the musical taste of youth,” the report argued, “at the same time the development of Hungarian dance music does not keep up with youth’s ever-increasing demands and the requirements of musical taste education.” Indeed, the KISZ report saw little in Hungarian dance music to recommend it, arguing that it was also a form of nostalgia for Western forms of music. When describing the Hungarian singers of dance music, the report stated bluntly, “Amateur singers of dance songs do not popularize the oftentimes idiotic and insignificant Hungarian dance music lyrics, but cause even more damage imitating Western stars, singing foreign texts pointlessly and incorrectly.” The solution the KISZ report offered was aimed in large part at encouraging talented Hungarian dance music bands to become more engaged in playing jazz music, which KISZ leaders considered to be more beneficial in terms of shaping youth taste. As the report stated, “In the past few years, the experiences of the youth jazz clubs show that the demand and cultivation of jazz, which is much more exacting than dance music, calls for a

⁴¹ Vitányi (1969), 13.

higher musical culture and virtuoso knowledge of instruments; therefore it creates more favorable ground for the reception of classical music.”⁴²

Despite the near universal suspicion with which the government viewed this new type of music in Hungary, it had become clear by the mid-1960s that such music was only increasing in popularity among Hungarian youth. Further, youth music was considered a particularly powerful weapon of Western governments in terms of *fellazítás*. In his article entitled “*Fellazítás* in the Ether,” András Tardos described the way in which Western radio stations used dance music to influence Hungarian youth and promote capitalism:

Western radio stations broadcast a large number of programs aimed at young people that glorify capitalism in indirect ways. Dance music has a distinguished position in all Western radio programs, and not only because political messages can be placed in between the dance music programs. Today, dance music programs have an independent function in the development of youth’s range of emotions and consciousness. Good dance music programs – because we can’t contest that the programs are good – can indicate the first incentives for youth to turn toward the West. According to the plans of psychological warfare, the youth of socialist countries under the influence of good dance music programs will think thusly: “Where the dance music is this good, society cannot be as bad as they say.”⁴³

In 1964, when the Kádár government stopped jamming Western radio broadcasts (see Chapter 1), the ability of Western governments to influence Hungarian youth through popular music was of particular concern for cultural policy makers. In December of 1964, Hungarian Radio and Television produced a report on the work of Radio Free Europe, noting with concern the “popularity of several types of programming among our youth.”⁴⁴ Particular attention was paid to the program *Teenager Party*, a music program aimed specifically at Hungarian youth. Introduced

⁴² MOL 288f. 35/1964/8ö.e. A szabad idő felhasználásának tapasztalatai a művelődés, pihenés, szórakozás néhány fontos területén [Observation of the Use of Free Time in Several Important Areas of Culture, Rest, and Entertainment]

⁴³ Tardos, 77.

⁴⁴ XXVI-A-8-a box 45, A Szabad Európa Rádió munkájáról [On the Work of Radio Free Europe].

in 1958, *Teenager Party* was the brainchild of Radio Free Europe worker Géza Ekecs who, under the name László Cseke, was the voice of the program until the mid-1980s. Unlike many of the other stations that played popular youth music, *Teenager Party* was in Hungarian, and was therefore more popular with the Hungarian youth audience. Ekecs strove to translate English titles into Hungarian, interpret often difficult English slang and lyrics, and even took requests from Hungarian youth, who would send letters to the RFE station requesting specific songs for “Uncle Laci” to play.⁴⁵ In its study on the work of RFE, the MRT report paid particular attention to *Teenager Party*, asking, “*What is the reason for the unambiguous popularity of this dance music program among our young people? Why do so many listen to this program, whose influence also grows when certain songs are immortalized and multiplied tenfold with the help of a tape recorder? What is this program’s ‘secret?’*” While the report noted that there was “nothing special” about the program’s format, it referred to the conversational tone of its presenters, stating, “At a low standard, they nonetheless create *atmosphere* and *closeness* – at the very least they have found the path to an undeniable group of adolescents. *Our presenters are more rigid even with generally good scripts!*”⁴⁶

For the writers of the study, the lesson from the popularity of *Teenager Party* was clear: “There is no reason for us not to present our young people with a dance music program that young people will listen to with pleasure, with the kind of presentation and information that they demand, and at such a time that they are able to listen.”⁴⁷ At the December 10, 1964 meeting of MRT’s management, András Tardos noted, “We debate endlessly the problems and development of Hungarian dance music. At the same time the competition – RFE – presents the world’s best

⁴⁵ Puddington, 137-41.

⁴⁶ XXVI-A-8-a box 45, A Szabad Európa Rádió munkájáról.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

dance music recordings. We too must do this but at much better times and much livelier than we are doing now.”⁴⁸ During a meeting of MSZMP’s Politburo, KISZ First Party Secretary Lajos Mehés argued that meeting youth demand was a key factor in successfully steering young people away from RFE:

With regard to young people, it is possible to observe that they are not generally directed or drawn to capitalist exploitation – moreover they consider it immoral and untruthful – but at the same time they are very influenced by various Western lifestyles and manifestations of taste. Young people listen en masse to this Teenager Party, and the sole explanation for this is that it plays modern dance music that is most suitable for youth taste... Young people don’t request or demand a complete explanation of Marxism; rather [they want] the assurance of appropriate propaganda work while their demands are being met.⁴⁹

In its report on how to combat RFE programs, MRT listed as one of its primary tasks its endeavor to “satisfy much better than before young people’s specific demands for entertainment music, and later, prose.” The report went further, “We must more resolutely create programs that are comprised of the most popular songs and the delicacies of dance music, and whenever possible broadcast them at the most convenient times for young people.”⁵⁰ On April 8, 1965, Hungarian Radio broadcasted the program *For Young People Only! (Csak fiataloknak!)*, whose host György Komjáthy mimicked the *Teenager Party* format, fielding listener requests with the newest youth songs that were available in Hungary. *For Young People Only!* also followed Ekecs’s practice of explaining the meaning of specific songs and translating song titles into Hungarian, sometimes less than faithfully. When he tried to translate the Beatles song “Penny Lane” as “Penny Lane: Streets of the Poor,” Komjáthy was forced to apologize after being

⁴⁸ XXVI-A-8-a box 86, “Rövidített jegyzőkönyv az Elnökség 1964 december 10.-i üléséről” [Abridged Minutes from the Management’s December 10, 1964 Session].

⁴⁹ MOL 288.f. 5/380.ő.e. “Az imperialisták fellazító propagandája néhány problémája” [Several Problems of Imperialist Fellazítás Propaganda].

⁵⁰ XXVI-A-8-A box 86, “Javaslat a SZER adásainak ellensúlyozására” [Proposal to Neutralize RFE Programming].

inundated with angry letters from Hungarian youth who knew from *Teenager Party* that Penny Lane was a street in Liverpool's financial district.⁵¹ Nonetheless, *For Young People Only!* enjoyed a great deal of popularity among young people living in Hungary. In its report on measures taken to combat *fellazítás*, the Secretariat of MSZMP's Central Committee noted, "Radio has launched dance music and youth programs that have succeeded in drawing away listeners from Radio Free Europe."⁵² An article in the British newspaper *The Guardian* corroborated this confidence:

[*For Young People Only!*] was started up because of the success of Radio Free Europe's pop programme, beamed in from West Germany. This had news items and propaganda larded in between the records. Some years ago the Hungarian Government would have jammed it. Now more intelligently they produce their own programme, with no news and thus more time for music. Most teenagers love it and have switched over.⁵³

For Young People Only! was also an example of the government's attempts to create music programs that were aimed at specific groups of society, including youth. In the 1965-66 Plan of Hungarian Radio's Music Department, the authors noted, "In assessing earlier periods we believe that we can report significant progress in the quality of our music entertainments. This is primarily expressed in our success in developing program types in the different genres that speak directly to certain circles."⁵⁴ In an article about *For Young People Only!*, Komjáthy noted, "It is the objective of Radio's entertainment music sector to provide interest and diversity for *every circle*, so that the public opinion on entertainment music programs will be the best possible."⁵⁵

⁵¹ Puddington, 140.

⁵² Cseh et al., 552.

⁵³ Jonathan Steele, "Pop's False Forum," *The Guardian*, October 20, 1969.

⁵⁴ XXVI-A-8-a box 11, "A Zenei Főosztály 1965-66. évi terve" [The Music Department's 1965-66 Plan]. In addition to *For Young People Only!*, the plan mentioned several music programs, including *Sunday Cocktail*, *Motorists Pay Attention!*, and *Light Music for Pensioners*.

⁵⁵ György Komjáthy, "Csak Fiataloknak?..." [For Young People Only?], in Béla Lévai, ed., *Rádió és Televízió Évkönyv 1967* [Radio and Television Yearbook 1967] (Budapest: Magvető Kiadó, 1967), 342.

Hungarian officials also worked to expand the production of modern dance music in Hungary. At the end of 1964, Hungarian Radio issued a report on the development of Hungarian dance music, urging more focused efforts to improve and promote the quality of this type of music in Hungary. “An atmosphere must be created,” the report noted, “in which Hungarian dance musicians do not feel like parasites in the life of music, but receive the respect that is due to them based on their talent and the proportion of audience interest.” The report also encouraged building up musical personalities, stating, “Without stars and audience favorites there can be no hit songs.” In terms of radio programming, the report further highlighted the importance of reaching young people, arguing, “Our most important programs... must in the first place meet the demands of youth.” The report further advocated for the increase in dance music that would be sung in Hungarian, asserting, “The proportion of songs with lyrics in Hungarian must reach 50% of all songs with lyrics.”⁵⁶ In the discussion of the report during the Radio Leadership’s meeting, Rezső Faludi, the head of Hungarian Radio’s Music Department, stated further, “A lot of foreign dance music comes into Hungary, but we do not need to draw back from this. From time to time the proportions shift, and this we want to change. A Hungarian hit song in every musical branch would be useful.” Some in the Radio Leadership expressed doubt that Hungarian songs would be popular with Hungarian youth. One stated, “The task to improve the proportion of Hungarian dance music is a very difficult problem... Young people like Western dance music and criticize Hungarian dance music.” In response, another argued, “We must pay attention to the demands of the audience, but we must also cut back on the exaggerations. The viewpoint is that we must always be ahead in the development of work and in the opinion of dance music as well.” Another argued for the introduction of an amateur music

⁵⁶ MOL XXVI-A-8-a box 48, “Feljegyzés a rádió tánczenei munkájáról” [Memo on Radio’s Work on Dance Music].

festival that would feature Hungarian bands and stated, “it would be good if now and then a good amateur band would gain access to the recording studio.”⁵⁷

Thus, from the mid-1960s, there was a change in the government’s attitude toward popular music, which was aimed at creating high-quality Hungarian versions of popular music genres. This change in attitude was evidenced in Hungarian Television’s broadcast of the first annual *Dance Music Festival (Táncdalfesztivál)* in 1966 and the subsequent reaction of the Hungarian media. The *Dance Music Festival* was a yearly, multi-day music competition for Hungarian musicians, both singers and bands, that played dance music. Following the popularity of the first festival, the *Dance Music Festival* became a yearly fixture on Hungarian Television from 1966 to 1972. In its discussion of the festival, Hungarian Television’s Art and Film Department noted, “On the basis of audience reaction and the opinion of the governing bodies, we must underscore the significance of the *Dance Music Festival* that we have announced and arranged. It is the opinion of the authorized department and leadership of the Ministry of Cultural Affairs that there hasn’t been such widespread and significant action in this genre since 1945.”⁵⁸ Shortly after the festival aired, a number of articles emerged in the Hungarian press that praised the quality of the festival and its performers. The Hungarian youth newspaper *Magyar Ifjúság*, which several years earlier had published an article criticizing dance music and urged “fast, thorough solutions” for the “quality of Hungarian dance music, the inanity of lyrics, and the youth ‘captive with the madness of dance music,’”⁵⁹ published a new article in 1966 praising the

⁵⁷ MOL XXVI-A-8-a box 48, “Rádió Vezetői értekezlet: 1965. január 6.” [Radio Leadership Meeting: January 6, 1965.].

⁵⁸ XXVI-A-8-a box 13, “Művészeti- és Filmfőosztály jelentés a Vezetői testületnek az 1966. évi munkáról és az 1967. évi munka irányelveiről [Art and Film Department Report to the Leadership Body on its 1966 Work and the Guiding Principles for its 1967 Work].

⁵⁹ “Művelődés, Pihenés, Szórakozás: A KISZ KB értékelése és határozata a szabad idő felhasználásának tapasztalatairól és a KISZ-szervezetek feladatairól” [Culture, Relaxation, Entertainment: KISZ Central Committee’s

festival's music. "Since the airing of the first semifinal, the destiny of Hungarian dance music has become a public matter," the newspaper stated, adding further, "The consequence of the first Hungarian dance music festival was not the birth of one or two good songs, but the simultaneous growth of the esteem and general quality of a genre."⁶⁰ The Hungarian composer Emil Petrovics wrote an article for the Hungarian newspaper *Magyar Nemzet* entitled "The Triumph of Talent and Good Taste," in which he stated, "In this dance music festival – which conjured up no little agitation in Hungarian light music, and which stirred public opinion with surprising strength – talent, professional knowledge, and good taste, indisputably triumphed." Petrovics tempered his praise of Hungarian dance music in stating, "I only know one thing worse than undervaluing the artistic value and social role of dance music: overvaluing it."⁶¹ Nonetheless, following the festival's popularity, the media's widespread acceptance of Hungarian dance music was notable. The 1966 *Dance Music Festival* also featured a number of popular Hungarian youth musicians, including the Hungarian beat bands Illés and Metró, who had begun to sing songs in Hungarian at the end of 1965. Illés even won second place with its song "Every Kiss Still Hurts" (Még fáj minden csók). These bands, whose popularity had been heretofore located mostly in Budapest clubs, had now achieved national recognition among Hungarian youth.

Following the first *Dance Music Festival*, Hungarian beat music became increasingly distinguished from the dance music that was enjoyed by older generations. In its article on the festival, *Magyar Ifjúság* discussed this distinction:

Assessment and Resolution About the Observation of the Use of Free Time and the Duties of KISZ organizations], *Magyar Ifjúság*, April 25, 1964.

⁶⁰ Lajos Fodor, "Az első magyar táncdalfesztivál" [The First Hungarian Dance Music Festival] *Magyar Ifjúság*, August 27, 1966.

⁶¹ Emil Petrovics, "A tehetség és a jó ízlés győzelme: A televízió táncdalfesztiváljáról" [The Triumph of Talent and Good Taste: On Television's Dance Music Festival], *Magyar Nemzet*, August 26, 1966.

The letters that have arrived to television and newspapers are proof of how many people are against beat music, because it is unfamiliar and they don't understand it. On the other hand, most young people are crazy for it and become irate if another type of music plays on the radio or – in our case – wins a prize at the festival. Impatient youth must realize that it is appropriate to be respectful of other's tastes as well, and consider: what would you think of a restaurant that served only the favorite foods of a specific taste? At the same time, the most ferocious critics of beat music must realize the rejuvenating influence of this style – the new tonality of the guitar bands, the strong and healthy (!) pulsating, exciting rhythms – on the traditional styles of dance music as well!⁶²

In 1967, when the *Dance Music Festival* failed to feature any beat songs in the finals, an article appeared in *Magyar Ifjúság* criticizing the festival's notable exclusion. When describing the fifteen songs that had reached the finals, the author stated, "These dance songs serve a variety of tastes, but they disregard only one – and to us this is baffling – the beat music enthusiasts... The entirety of this year's festival could have been produced thirty years ago." He went further:

Beat music is not "reactionary." To those who believe this I would quote a Kossuth Prize-winning composer: all that is old-fashioned is not progressive! To those who hear only noise in beat, once again I would say there is no accounting for taste. It is very important that *every* manifestation of public taste is important enough that we always seriously take it into consideration. Every age of light, entertaining music was the fresh, timely sound of the widest public feeling. Playing decades-old music will not improve it for young people, even if they have fewer votes. Because tomorrow they will be in the majority. It would be a shame to artificially slow the natural tempo of a movement. Even in dance festivals.⁶³

That same year, a movie came out in Hungary featuring the most popular beat musicians – primarily the band Illés – and beat music. The title of the movie, *These Kids (Ezek a Fialatok)*, was a common phrase in the 1960s. As the *Ifjúsági Magazin* described, "This expression is familiar. Its tone is often reproachful. We hear this from the adults when they experience something from today's young generation that they don't approve of or don't understand."⁶⁴

⁶² Fodor [1966].

⁶³ Lajos Fodor, "Ízlések és pofonok..." [Different Strokes], *Magyar Ifjúság*, August 26, 1967.

⁶⁴ Miklós Végh, "Ezek a Fialatok," *Ifjúsági Magazin*, July

Directed by Tamás Banovich, the film was intended to capture the everyday life of Hungarian youth, of which beat music played a large part. According to Banovich:

We must take everything seriously. Even this music. This music is not ballad-like, its melody is not easily whistled – although there is a definite melodic line – and its lyrics are not sticky and sentimental, but rather dry and rough. There has never been such active music making and such an active audience. This is in part a consequence of developed musical education as well. It is possible to debate its beauty, but we must recognize its influence and presence. It now belongs to young people.

The soundtrack of *These Kids* was the first full beat album that was produced by the Hungarian record company, Hungaroton. Thus by the end of 1967, beat music had been distinguished as a form of dance music that spoke specifically to Hungarian youth.

According to a comprehensive study on beat music, 1968 was beat music's "breakthrough year." For the authors of this study, by 1968, some of the more prominent Hungarian beat bands "after incorporating certain elements of the Western beat sound began to develop an independent musical style and with their success were able to prove that beat is not at all foreign in Hungary." At this point, argued the study, "This type of music was already able to shoulder the cultural policy objective of 'caring for national cultural traditions,' and moreover extend this intention to a mass level."⁶⁵ The most symbolic moment of beat music's success was during the 1968 *Dance Music Festival* when, of the eleven prizes that were awarded, beat musicians received five, among them the top prize for Illés's song, "When I Was Still a Little Boy" (*Amikor én még kissrác voltam*). In an article entitled "The Rejuvenated *Dance Music Festival*," *Ifjúsági Magazin* stated, "We learned at the festival that a Hungarian beat god is enjoying himself. It's true that until now we had no idea of his existence, but a good priest lives and learns. So: there is a god of beat."⁶⁶ In his review of the Hungarian media's reaction to the

⁶⁵ Vitányi (1969), 29.

⁶⁶ V.M., "Megfiatalodott Táncdalfesztivál," [Rejuvenated Dance Music Festival], *Ifjúsági Magazin*, September 1968.

festival, an employee at Hungarian Television noted, “Illés succeeded in finding a unique Hungarian beat style built on folk music. ‘When I Was Still a Little Boy’ is an excellent example of this. The jury did well when they deemed this song worthy of appreciation.”⁶⁷ Perhaps even more strikingly, when MRT’s Mass Communications Research Center did a public opinion survey of the voting audience’s musical taste, they asked the voters which other genres of music they enjoyed. The results indicated that “A portion of the voting audience – appropriately to their level of taste – gave their votes primarily to the sweet, catchy, easily learned dance music, for example ‘Little Girl at the Piano’ (Kislány a zongoránál). Only those who enjoyed the more demanding music, the opera and concert enthusiasts, preferred the more difficultly-toned beat style.”⁶⁸ That listening to beat music indicated a more demanding level of audience taste than other forms of dance music helped to elevate beat’s position as an important aspect of youth culture. The fact that Hungarian beat music had reached a higher taste level and was of a higher quality than its Western counterparts was critical. As one article in *Iffjú Kommunista* stated, “The bands that have the most success are those who *endeavor to produce music that is specifically Hungarian music instead of following foreign examples.*” The article noted that the songs of those bands that created Hungarian beat music “are of a higher quality, if even only a little, than the earlier chart toppers.”⁶⁹

In justifying the role of beat music in terms of socialist youth culture, the government argued that beat music was appropriate when it indicated a desire in young people for something new. Similar to the way the government discussed youth clothing (see Chapter 4), beat music

⁶⁷ XXVI-A-8-a box 87, “Táncdalfesztivál – 1968.” [Dance Music Festival 1968].

⁶⁸ XXVI-A-8-a box 88, “A táncdalfesztiválok szvazóközönségének zenei ízlése” [The Musical Taste of the Dance Music Festival’s Voting Audience].”

⁶⁹ Iván Vitányi, “Ízlés, Igény, Műveltség” [Taste, Demand, Culture], *Iffjú Kommunista*, July 1972, 59.

was considered an important symbol of Hungarian youth's search for a society that was different from that of their parents. Using beat music in the place of actually working to change society and build socialism, however, was considered dangerous. In a documentary film about beat music, sociologist Iván Vitányi described the possibilities that beat music offered in the lives of Hungarian youth:

The consequences of biological conditions – by which I mean that young people are still young – indicate that this culture will be full of insolence, immoderation, loud noises, shouting, and the propensity for rebellion. The question of course is what is the character of this rebellious tendency and this insolence? I would add that by rebellion I don't mean unfailingly political rebellion, but rebellion of behavior and demeanor: the rejection of what came before and the search for something new. Beat fits into this system, and I would say it offers two possibilities. On one hand it offers the possibility, taking in a wider sense the entire youth movement, of choosing new values in the place of the earlier, old-fashioned ones. However, as Adorno... described with regard to jazz, but which can be adapted to beat, it also offers the possibility of a kind of mediocre rebellion. So it gives the person an illusion of rebellion. It allows for the possibility that "I don't like what I find in this society, I'm going to go out and blow off steam and afterwards everything will stay the same."⁷⁰

As an article in the journal *Új Írás* stated, "It is not a problem that beat has become a movement, but that it has become a 'private' movement in a portion of young people, which makes it not an organic part of life (and movement), but a substitution for universal life and activity."⁷¹ An article in the Hungarian newspaper *Népszava* echoed this statement, arguing, "If an undeniable, significant number of young people living for and by themselves spend their youth *only* in guitar music, then there is indeed a problem. *In their thirties forties and fifties they cannot healthfully achieve a healthy society.*"⁷² Thus beat music was in keeping with socialist society only insofar

⁷⁰ András Kovács, "Extazis 7-től 10-ig" [Ecstasy from 7 to 11], YouTube video, 29:49, from a television documentary televised by Hungarian Television in May 1969, posted by "kenguru99," May 27, 2011, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hYJeWl2PuYM>.

⁷¹ Ágnes Heller, "Egy film a tizenévesekről – negyvenéveseknek" [A Film About Teenagers – for Forty Year Olds], *Új Írás* 9 no. 7 (1969): 103.

⁷² András Rajk, "Gitárzenet: 'A közepeserűség lázadását'" [Guitar Music: 'Rebellion of Mediocrity'], *Népszava*, May 28, 1969.

as it signified the youth's desire for something new; however, this desire had to translate into contributing to the building of socialism, and beat music was considered dangerous because it offered the possibility for young people to rebel without enacting real change in Hungarian society.

Beat music was never completely supported by the cultural policy makers within the Kádár government. Like much of youth culture that was not officially sanctioned by KISZ, beat was positioned in the middle category of the Three Ts (see Chapter 1), often on the edge of what was forbidden and what was merely tolerated by cultural policy makers. Nonetheless, in an effort to displace the importance of Western youth music in the lives of Hungarian youth, the government actively sought to create a socialist, Hungarian way for young people to listen to the music they enjoyed. "Beat was created not solely with Western influence," stated one study, "but is more and more a product of Hungary, and thus one of its important social functions is to direct youth's attention from foreign productions (and radio programs) towards Hungarian versions."⁷³ In terms of the music itself, many figures in the government framed their own reception of beat music as a matter of taste and quality. When asked if he liked beat music, Lajos Méhes stated, "I am neither in the oppositional camp nor among those who listen to beat night and day. In my life, poetry, books, the theater, and many other things play a larger role. In the beat genre there are excellent musicians. Those I like and listen to with pleasure. As a consequence of the excessive volume, there are a lot of inferior products, and those I do not like."⁷⁴ Such statements seemed to reflect the sentiments of the leftist cultural theorists Hall and Whannel, who, writing in the first

⁷³ Vitányi (1969), 174.

⁷⁴ Sándor Hankóczy, "Örömeink, gondjaink: Interjú az I. titkárral" [Our Pleasures, Our Anxieties: Interview With the First Secretary], *Ifjúsági Magazin*, April 1968, 5.

years of the Beatles' popularity, noted, "The worst thing which we would say about pop music is not that it is vulgar, or morally wicked, but, more simply, that much of it is not very good."⁷⁵

The Beat Musicians

By 1969, a study on beat music estimated that four thousand guitar bands existed in Hungary, meaning that roughly twenty thousand Hungarian young people were members of this type of musical group.⁷⁶ Indeed, the main character of *These Kids* was an aspiring musician who started his own guitar band with several of his schoolmates. Of these groups, however, only a few gained recognition throughout Hungary. By the end of the 1960s, the beat bands Illés, Metró, and Omega had emerged as three of the most popular bands among the broadest segment of Hungarian youth. These bands had become popular in Budapest, where each had their own club in which they would play regularly. Clubs were an important factor in the Hungarian music scene. As the beat study suggested, "It is the primary endeavor of the bands to develop enduring, enthusiastic audiences around themselves. To do this, they above all try to secure a permanent place, a club, because this is the only way to establish a larger, regular audience outside of friends and personal acquaintances."⁷⁷ For those musicians who had started bands in the early 1960s, the change in the government's attitude toward beat music that occurred in the middle of the decade was palpable. Metró's lead singer Zorán Stevanovity, known more popularly as simply Zorán, stated that in the second half of the 1960s, "there was an increase in the degree of freedom that we truly achieved through our music. So we played what we really wanted to play, we traveled more easily, and our lives were simpler, because we didn't have a party secretary boss, there were no company heads in front of our faces, but at that time existence had a free, or

⁷⁵ Hall and Whannel, 812.

⁷⁶ Vitányi (1969), 79.

⁷⁷ Vitányi (1969), 100.

freer texture to it.”⁷⁸ The most popular Hungarian beat bands gained countrywide popularity through their participation in the *Dance Music Festival*, and also by their increased ability to produce songs through the Hungarian state-owned record company. By the end of the 1960s, every Hungarian youth had their favorite beat band, often eschewing the other popular bands in favor of their own personal preference. The difference in styles between Illés and Omega, and the rivalry that ensued was often compared to that of the Beatles and the Rolling Stones.

The mid-1960s was also the beginning of when these bands began to incorporate songs that they had written in Hungarian into their English sets. At first many bands were wary of singing songs in Hungarian. As János Bródy, a member of Illés, described, “At first Lajos⁷⁹ didn’t like it very much. And at the time he was actually right when he said that we must play what the audience likes, and the audience hates Hungarian songs. It was perilous to experiment with this.”⁸⁰ Nonetheless, in the fall of 1965, Illés sang one of their Hungarian songs, “Oh Tell” (Ó mondd), sandwiched in between two English songs. When afterward they asked the audience what they thought, many hadn’t even noticed that the band sang a song in Hungarian.⁸¹ The incorporation of Hungarian folk songs and Hungarian musical expressions into their music seemed a national progression to those musicians who had grown up learning the Kodály method in Hungarian schools. As Bródy stated, “We were the generation that was raised with Kodály-Bartók folk songs... they are deeply within us in a way that they aren’t in people even one

⁷⁸ “Rocklexikon, 2008. február 23. – Zorán” [Rock Lexicon, February 28 2008 – Zorán], MTV videótár movie, 16:58, from a broadcast televised by MTV on February 28, 2008, http://videotar.mtv.hu/Videok/2008/02/23/20/Rocklexikon_2008_februar_23_Zoran.aspx

⁷⁹ Lajos Illés was another member of Illés, for whom the band was named.

⁸⁰ Fonyódi, 193.

⁸¹ Vitányi (1969), 20.

generation older.”⁸² In relation to the importance of Hungarian musical traditions in the lives of beat musicians, one article stated, “It appears that in more than one Hungarian beat band the desire to develop the Kodály and Bartók traditions are very deep.”⁸³ Another argued, “Beat, into which a distinct Hungarian sound is healthily becoming amalgamated, exists thanks to the young generation who have taken some Hungarian musical material into their lives. This, however, is thanks to Bartók, Kodály, and the gradual achievements of the activities of socialist culture, and is thus very good.”⁸⁴ Many of the beat musicians took their music seriously, and considered their music to be speaking to a demanding musical audience. When *Magyar Ifjúság* asked where beat music was headed, Levente Szörenyi and János Bródy, Illés’s Lennon and McCartney, stated, “The type of music that we play is headed in such a direction that it will become the light music of classical music enthusiasts.” To the same question, Zorán responded, “We can begin to notice that beat is getting more serious... The general rise in standards will insure a level that is irrefutable. It will prove false the belief that beat is a seasonal commodity or passing fad.”⁸⁵

Although beat musicians were generally given wider latitude after the mid-1960s, they nonetheless often dealt with a number of distinct political issues when producing their music. György Aczél notoriously did not care for Hungarian beat music, and according to legend, when he received the first Illés album, “he broke it, and angrily jumped on it, upset that such a thing could happen in this country without his knowledge or permission.”⁸⁶ One of the primary locations for political struggle was at Hungaroton, the Hungarian record company, in which two

⁸² Kovács, 53:23.

⁸³ Heller, 100.

⁸⁴ Rajk.

⁸⁵ “Merre tart a beat?” [Where is Beat Going?], *Magyar Ifjúság* December 25, 1969.

⁸⁶ Sebők (2002),6.

formidable party members, Jenő Bors and Péter Erdős, had the final say in what records could be produced. Following the increased profit orientation of culture that was introduced following the preparation and introduction of NEM, beat music became an important source of profit for Hungaroton, and was thus produced in greater numbers.⁸⁷ Nonetheless, it was not a rare occurrence that beat musicians had to contend with censorship and changes to their lyrics. Another salient political problem for Hungarian beat bands was the fact that even the most popular musicians were categorized as “amateur,” and thus were technically in violation of Hungarian state socialist law, which required citizens to have an occupation. As János Bródy stated, “Theoretically every policeman can take us in for vagrancy. If they know our faces [they say] ‘okay, you are musicians,’ and they don’t arrest us, but they could, because for two years [according to] our labor books and our identity cards, we are public menaces, slackers.”⁸⁸ Musicians were often careful to keep their distance from the official state socialist cultural leaders, worried that official acceptance of their music would decrease their popularity among youth eager to distance themselves from mainstream culture. In the 1980s, Lajos Illés noted, “To this day I am grateful to comrade Aczél that for a long time he prohibited and censored us. We received an advertisement from him that it is impossible to repay. When in 1968 we won the [*Dance Music Festival*], I was afraid, ‘Good lord if they start to officially support us because of this, we are finished!’”⁸⁹

Looming censorship forced beat musicians to create lyrics that required the listener to read between the lines of what was being sung in order to discover the true political meaning. When asked if his band was oppositional, Illés member Levente Szörényi stated, “Of course, we

⁸⁷ Ibid., 66.

⁸⁸ Kovács, 45:10.

⁸⁹ Fonyódi, 79.

represented in our work this opposition, and tried to develop it, separately as well: Bródy in his lyrics and me in my selection of musical themes.”⁹⁰ Illés’s song, “Why Did We Allow This to Happen?” (Miért hagytuk, hogy így legyen?), for example, was a criticism of the Hungarian government’s participation in the Soviet Union’s military intervention during the Prague Spring in 1968.⁹¹ The lyrics, although speaking of flowers and love, nonetheless convey the sense of disappointment and disillusionment that was felt by many Hungarians:

Do you believe that the yellow rose still blooms?
Do you believe that we listen to lying words?
Do you believe that we always forgive everything?
Do you believe that we renounce all of our dreams?

To be with you among the flowers,
I know it would be beautiful, my love.
There are no flowers, nor you,
Why did we allow this to happen?⁹²

The practice of reading in between the lines, which was common among the majority of the Hungarian beat bands, not only allowed the musicians to couch political messages into songs that would be accepted by Bors and Erdős, it also created an audience of Hungarian listeners that would search for political meaning in even the most mundane of lyrics.⁹³ This only served to increase the impression that these bands were outlets for those young people who felt alienated from the state socialist government. Political opposition was not solely confined to the bands’ music, but was reflected in their behavior as well. During this period, this opposition was

⁹⁰ “Rocklexikon. 2008. március 1. – Szörényi Levente,” [Rock Lexicon, March 1, 2008 – Levente Szörényi], MTV videótár movie, 16:30, from a broadcast televised by MTV on March 1, 2008, http://videotar.mtv.hu/Videok/2008/03/01/19/Rocklexikon_2008_marcus_1_Szorenyi_Levente.aspx

⁹¹ Szemere, 36.

⁹² Illés, “Miért hagytuk, hogy így legyen?” [Why Did We Allow This to Happen?], by Levente Szörényi and János Bródy, recorded in 1968, on *Nehéz az út* [*The Road is Hard*], Hungaroton-Vivát HCD 37445-446, 2005, compact disc.

⁹³ Szemere, 37.

perhaps best reflected when in February and March of 1970, Illés traveled to London to do a tour of the British pop circuit. Upon their return, the *Magyar Ifjúság* posted an article stating, “Illés’s British success is demonstrated by a three-column article with picture in the Arts section of the Financial Times. The distinguished British newspaper set a very high value on Illés’s accomplishment: the export of Hungarian folk lore that is particularly modern, experimental, and young.”⁹⁴ Several months later, however, when a BBC interview was aired on the radio station’s Hungarian channel, the newspaper was not so enthusiastic. While there is some debate about what was actually said, *Magyar Ifjúság* quotes the band as saying “In Hungary one cannot speak of a popular music scene: young people – with a few exceptions – have no clubs, no places where young people can get together. In this situation, bands are only very rarely able to excel.” The newspaper’s response criticized the musicians, stating, “Altogether: the beat problem is not a central cultural or youth question nor a central question of youth itself. It is no more than a product, a popular music direction, which has been camped up in Hungary for various reasons... The task of beat bands is to play music – well.”⁹⁵ Because of the BBC interview, Illés was banned for one year from the Budapest music scene, and their songs were no longer featured on the radio or on Hungarian television. During that year, the band received a permit to travel to the countryside, where they earned the moniker “The Best Band of the Provinces.”⁹⁶ Upon their return to Budapest in 1971, they produced a beat oratorio entitled *Human Rights*, which was dedicated to the American political activist Angela Davis. In their next album, *Give Me Your Hand (Add a kezed)*, the band produced a song entitled “Sign Language” (Jelbeszéd) which

⁹⁴ Gy. Ferenc Simon, “Illés turné,” [Illés Tour], *Magyar Ifjúság*, March 20, 1970.

⁹⁵ Sebők (2002), 127.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 128.

seemed indicative of its political viewpoint. “Our life is sign language,” the refrain went, “But too many people think of nothing but slogans.”⁹⁷

In addition to their political actions, beat musicians considered themselves to have an important social function as well. In April 1968, *Ifjúsági Magazin* published an article that was based on a round table of beat musicians, including some members of Illés, Metró, and Omega. “Those around the table are stars,” writes the magazine, “The favorites, second favorites, and so on of tens of thousands of Hungarian teenagers. They are known from TV, from film, and from the pages of newspapers. At the same time they are curious. The kind which we are familiar with but don’t know. This is how they feel.” Indeed, the musicians had much to say about what they felt, and how they viewed themselves and their role in Hungarian society. “For years we have lived in the crossfire of debate. We lived in such a way that others would purse their lips and say ‘you don’t know how to make music!’ ... We were those who they accused of ‘Worshiping the West,’ and we were those whose clothing was suspicious. In this way we lived and worked.” Nonetheless, the musicians argued, they succeeded: “Ultimately, we reached our goal, we created and nationalized a new musical style. And we are proud of this. We tried to express everything that a young person of the same age would think. Since it is our nature we write only what arises from within us. This sincerity is understood primarily by young people.”⁹⁸ The idea of sincerity was important to the beat musicians. When discussing his song lyrics, Metró member Dusán Sztevanovity stated, “We only write lyrics that are about us.”⁹⁹ Beat musicians argued that the songs that they wrote appealed to Hungarian youth because the musicians belonged to the same

⁹⁷ Illés, “Jelbeszéd” [Sign Language], by Levente Szörenyi and János Bródy, recorded in 1972, on *Add a Kezed* [Give me Your Hand], Hungaroton HCD 37705 CD5, 1993, compact disc.

⁹⁸ “Tartozunk-e valahova?” [Do We Belong Anywhere?], *Ifjúsági Magazin*, April 1968, 18.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 21.

peer group as their audience. According to Bródy, “Of course we play what the others like, because it is almost exactly the same as what we like, since we are not so very different from the other young people. So we cannot really imagine that the music that we enjoy will not be enjoyed by the audience.”¹⁰⁰ The musicians also noted their role in turning youth from Western music to Hungarian variants. “Without us there would not have been successful festivals,” they wrote, “Our works could create the only programs that young people will search for on Hungarian radio, and not turn their dials to foreign broadcasts.” Thus the beat musicians argued that they were representatives of Hungarian young people, and that their music expressed Hungarian society. As their article stated, “Our program: to reflect today’s world in music, together with its contradictions and its joys.”¹⁰¹

The beat musicians also differentiated their work from the other types of dance music that were popular with the older generations. “We know that a large portion of young people have accepted and become attached to our music. For years they had lost faith in Hungarian music. We asked for a place for ourselves within public taste that for more than half a decade had been saturated with operetta traditions. And that we succeeded in attaining that place, we have the understanding young people to thank.”¹⁰² According to János Bródy, “When nowadays they say that something serves public taste, it goes deeply under public taste.”¹⁰³ The implication that in stating something served public taste, you were stating that its quality was less than ideal is evidenced in these musicians’ desire to differentiate their songs from the other types of dance music. In an article in *The Financial Times* about Illés, the author notes, “The Illés... have

¹⁰⁰ Kovács, 46:10.

¹⁰¹ “Tartozunk-e valahova?,” 18.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Kovács, 46:06.

determinedly striven to create a national style, derived from Hungarian folk traditions. The musical taste behind this is severe and critical.”¹⁰⁴ In their article, the beat musicians stated, “We never identified with the cautious principle ‘write about love and there will be no problem!’ How much simpler it would have been, how much easier to work in the public taste of the operetta!”¹⁰⁵ The musician’s criticism of dance music, with its emphasis on low quality and poor taste, seemingly reflected the government’s statements about the low level of taste to which traditional dance music spoke (see Chapter 3). However, the criticism of other forms of dance music and public taste went deeper than the concept that this type of music was of a lower musical quality. As one article stated, “The traditional ballad does not only mirror the sentiments of the ‘kitsch listeners,’ but rather the *private genre* par excellence.” In contrast, the article argued, “The best beat bands do not simply serve public taste, but rather act as ‘apostles’ of collective music against kitsch as a private genre.”¹⁰⁶ In contrast to the adults who listened to “kitschy” dance music in private, the article argued that for young people beat music lent itself to a shared, collective experience. Thus in general, the beat musicians felt as though they represented a better form of popular music, one that represented an improvement over previous genres and signified an important revival of Hungarian dance music as a whole. As they stated in their article, “We helped in reviving Hungarian dance music, and we represent the independent, fresh offshoot as well, the zealous beat at the concert podium. This is how we feel! And we know that tens of thousands of youth are one with us.”¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ David Robinson, “Beat from the East,” *Financial Times*, February 24, 1970.

¹⁰⁵ “Tartozunk-e valahova?,” 18.

¹⁰⁶ Heller, 102.

¹⁰⁷ “Tartozunk-e valahova?,” 19.

A number of people were less than convinced that Hungarian beat represented any real change. In 1971, a debate emerged in the Hungarian newspaper *Élet és Irodalom* that challenged the social importance of beat music. In his article, “The Present and Future of Beat,” Tamás Révbíró argued that beat musicians were wrong to imbue themselves with political importance. As with in the West, Révbíró argued, “In Hungary too, beat music has secondarily developed into a morbid swelling of philosophy, which has caused an impediment to musical development.” Révbíró went further, “The newer, Western tendency has once again begun to view beat music as: music. Not as a prophecy, not as a moral lesson or political-sociological seminar, but only as music that contains vocal elements.” Révbíró did not consider beat musicians to be revolutionaries, and suggested that in Hungary they should concentrate solely on their music, stating, “It would help if the young musicians would free themselves from every hand-tying element of the deep-rooted classification of beat music in the general consciousness, so that their hands will be freer for their instruments.”¹⁰⁸ The response to Révbíró was co-written by two musicians, János Bródy of Illés and Tamás Mihály of Omega, who signed the article in the name of their respective bands. The article argued, “One cannot forget that beat music came to existence not through unscrupulous managers and not with manipulative goals. Rather on the contrary: it became a mass movement when (and because) at the beginning of the 1960s British youth turned against manipulated mass entertainment.” The article further argued that Révbíró “did not measure those changes which pop music brought,” and stated, “it is unfitting to talk down the activities of pop musicians, who, with their own tools, are trying to make the world better.” It ended with a quote from the sociologist Robert K. Merton, who argued that the value and political characteristic of pop music meant that it was the first type of music in modern

¹⁰⁸ Tamás Révbíró, “A beat jelene és jövője” [The Present and Future of Beat] *Élet és Irodalom*, September 4, 1971.

history that attempted to bridge the gap between the products of the artists and the reception of the genre.¹⁰⁹

In the closing article of the debate, Júlia Lévai offered a more tempered position. Of the debate, Lévai stated, “Two dangerously one-sided opinions stand against one another. According to one, beat did not bring anything new; according to the other, it caused a revolution... The answer lies not in between those two viewpoints, but rather elsewhere, in a different dimension.” Arguing that every type of music had its own philosophy, Lévai stated, “It is not the question of whether or not they philosophize, but what the content of their philosophy is and how they declare it. Therefore, we cannot condemn beat because they want to express a different philosophy from the older ballads – we must analyze them based on whether what they express is really different, and if so, is it better?” On the basis of the analysis of the most popular songs from the previous thirty-five years in Hungary, Lévai argued, “it is possible to factually verify that beat is a true change, moreover its main line brought positive change to popular music, both in musical content and in lyrics. This is what we can establish without exaggeration.” With regards to the young people who attended beat concerts, Lévai stated that in Budapest, nearly one hundred thousand young people would listen to beat concerts on any given Saturday evening, adding “On the strength of the research, it is not just the music that brings them there, but they are searching for some form of communal experience... here are the young people who come together from week to week, methodically. They listen to music and they are crazy for it too, but they are susceptible to so much else.”¹¹⁰ In a summary of the debate for the Cultural Ministry, Iván Vitányi argued that to examine the influences of beat, one needed to examine it

¹⁰⁹ László Hegedős et al., “A beatről és a popról” [On Beat and Pop], *Élet és Irodalom*, September 18, 1969.

¹¹⁰ Júlia Lévai, “A beat a tét?” [Beat is at stake?], *Élet és Irodalom*, October 2, 1969.

from the viewpoint of the music and from a view point of Hungarian youth. “If we look at it from a music perspective,” Vitányi argued, “it would be wrong to inflate it with words like ‘revolution’ but at the same time, it would be wrong to deny the positive directions.” With regard to Hungarian youth, “The task is not in the quality of the youth’s demands, but rather to help discover what they want to express, what they want differently, and once we discover this, to discover what we can do in the interest of this desire.”¹¹¹

In discussing the Hungarian band Illés, the author of *The Financial Times* noted, “Parental attitudes are apparently much the same as in the capitalist West... generally speaking [Illés’s] families share the reluctance of officialdom to recognise the group as a potentially distinguished export.”¹¹² Indeed the generational aspect of beat music seemed to be an international phenomenon, whereby adults heard only noise in music that young people so enjoyed. According to Gábor Presser, a member of the Hungarian band Omega:

It’s crazy that people endlessly explain this genre, and everyone falsely interprets something. That’s the worst. It is what it is, and it’s what we do, and whoever understands it is able to differentiate it from everything else, and those who don’t understand it, it is impossible to explain. So only with understanding is it possible to truly feel it. Of course this is how everything is in life.¹¹³

The Hungarian beat bands occupied a unique position in Hungarian society. Popular among Hungarian youth, the government considered their music to be of a higher quality than previous dance music genres. Beat musicians participated in festivals, produced records through the Hungarian state-owned record agency, and were featured prominently on Hungarian radio and television; however, as amateur musicians they were considered in violation of the law. Many musicians imbued political messages into their lyrics, allowing the audience to read between the

¹¹¹ Fonyódi, 94-5.

¹¹² Robinson.

¹¹³ Kovács, 1:10:01.

lines of what was actually being sung, which gave their music a political quality among Hungarian youth. At the same time, the musicians argued that their music had important social functions as well. Considering their music to be of a higher taste level its predecessors, the musicians believed that their music helped to revitalize Hungarian dance music, arguing that they created a communal music that was not solely for private consumption, but that had implications for bringing Hungarian youth together. Almost the same age as the majority of their fans, these musicians styled themselves as the voice of young people, whose sincerity was appreciated by a nation of youth searching for a common experience.

The Youth Audience

In 1969, two works were issued in Hungary that sought to examine beat music and its influence on a larger scale. The first was a documentary film by András Kovács, entitled *Ecstasy from 7 to 10 (Extázis 7-től 10-ig)*, which sought to present an overall picture of beat music and its reception, especially among Hungarian youth. In an interview with *Magyar Ifjúság*, Kovács noted, “Even in the process of filming, I was asked incessantly whether I was making a film for beat or against it, and few understood when I responded, not for or against, but about beat.”¹¹⁴ In summarizing his opinion, Kovács stated:

I saw that young people expect beat to meet some sort of need, which perhaps they couldn't find elsewhere. They demand to stand for or against something: They choose the appropriate band or company according to their taste, and independently decide what is good or bad. They also desire an organization, and when one or another club is difficult to get into, they see that as a success in and of itself. All of this brings up deep-seeded social and psychological questions. And the goal of the film is to meditate on these questions.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁴ Gy. Ferenc Simon, “Extázis 22,10-től 23,40-ig” [Ecstasy from 22:10 to 23:40], *Magyar Ifjúság*, May 23, 1969.

¹¹⁵ Vitányi (1969), 37.

The second work on beat music was a book edited by Iván Vitányi, perhaps the foremost authority on beat music in Hungary, that was entitled simply *Beat*. While the book discussed the music and the beat bands themselves, it paid special attention to the beat audience, focusing on the role of beat music and its influence on the lives of everyday Hungarian youth. For the Hungarian government, beat music's influence on the youth audience was an important aspect of the general discourse surrounding the music's rising popularity. In addition to being a way to distinguish themselves from the older generations, beat music provided young people in Hungary a sense of having a collective generational experience, not only in being a member of the audience, but having the sense that they are not very different from their favorite bands. Beat, of course, also provided young people with a form of entertainment, one that seemed to represent a more modern character than other free time activities. For the government, the idea that beat music could meet a need in young people that traditional society could not was a problem that needed to be corrected.

When discussing popular youth music, one must of course note that much of the older generation simply didn't care for the new type of beat music that had emerged in the 1960s. As one young person writes about his father, "He is a completely ordinary person, nearing fifty, with neither distinction nor valor. He supports a family of four and his only entertainment is when he goes fishing on the Danube. He is not interested in our music or our fashion. When I listen to the *Cocktail*¹¹⁶ he makes a face and goes out into the garden."¹¹⁷ The beginning of *Ecstasy from 7 to 10* featured several opinions from adults who viewed the new music as "just noise." As one woman stated, "It's only semitone, with drums – it is not necessary to play the drums. Long ago,

¹¹⁶ *The Sunday Cocktail* [Vasárnap koktél] was another György Komjáthy radio program that played popular youth music.

¹¹⁷ Ferenc T., "A Dühös Romantikus" [The Angry Romantic], *Iffjúsági Magazin*, October 1968.

the soldiers used to play the drums. When the army left they drummed and played the trumpet in a more refined way [than today's musicians]. For entertainment purposes, it shouldn't be so loud."¹¹⁸ The distinction between youth and adult tastes was perhaps most notably defined by the difference between beat music and the song "Little Girl at the Piano," a song that also won first prize at the 1968 *Dance Music Festival* and was more popular with the older generations. That year, a letter was published in the Hungarian newspaper *Esti Hirlap* (*Evening News*), criticizing beat music, stating, "The Hungarian nation does not need soul-destroying, savage music, but we indeed enjoy beautiful music, such songs like 'Little Girl at the Piano.'"¹¹⁹ The debate that emerged as a result of this letter served to distinguish the older generations, who preferred the more melodious music of previous genres of Hungarian popular music, from the younger generations, who were among the most ardent fans of beat. When the older generation began to push for the government to ban the beat musicians, the band Omega responded with a song that began "You cannot forbid me."¹²⁰ As one young person stated, "We are seriously sickened by older people. Because we must understand their viewpoint, that [beat] is loud and boring, but they don't understand us. They are uneducated, and they vilify beat only because they don't understand it or they don't know it, or they don't want to understand it."¹²¹ According to Hungarian scholars, the generational gap extended beyond that of personal taste. As one article wrote, "The position of the teenagers is simple: this kind of music expresses *them*, and for this reason the 'adults' don't understand it... The gap between the tastes of the parents reflects a gap in worldview. In this sense, the worldview gap... is not primarily political, but rather a gap in

¹¹⁸ Kovács, 3:05.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 22:49.

¹²⁰ Heller, 100.

¹²¹ Vitányi (1969), 122-3.

*feeling.*¹²² According to the authors of *Beat*, the lyrics of the beat musicians “popularize those values that young people consider to be genuine, putting aside the accepted value hierarchy of the ‘average person’ in adult society.”¹²³ One article in *Népszabadság* noted, “Young people come in contact with social connections and production, and thus it is understandable that they try to create their own symbolic system.”¹²⁴

Indeed, for young people in Hungary, beat music also answered their desires for a shared generational experience, one that expressed their own feelings and emotions. As *Beat* stated:

We have already mentioned that beat as a conversational topic is a connecting point for the most diverse layers of youth. We must add to this that in everyday relations, the differences in education and cultural backgrounds have almost disappeared: a young female skilled laborer and a medical student can excellently find a common language and alphabet, if they start speaking about an Omega song.¹²⁵

For many Hungarian youth, listening to beat music helped them feel as though they were in a place they understood and where they too could gain understanding. As one youth stated, “A person is very liberated when he hears [beat music] and he feels happier, because he feels like ‘Now maybe somebody understands!’ because the lyrics speak to us.”¹²⁶ *Beat* echoed this idea, stating, “Truly, music is a form of communication with which – mostly after speaking – one can express oneself, and above all is able to connect with the others.”¹²⁷ Beat music also established a relationship between the audience and the musicians. As an article in *Új Írás* described, “*In the case of beat music, a rigid ‘boundary’ does not divide the stage and the audience.* An expression

¹²² Heller, 101.

¹²³ Vitányi (1969), 29.

¹²⁴ László Sziklai, “Beat és Közösség” [Beat and Community], *Népszabadság*, July 12, 1969.

¹²⁵ Vitányi (1969), 119.

¹²⁶ Kovács, 38:30.

¹²⁷ Vitányi (1969), 130.

of this is the audience's collective action, their direct participation in the production (singing, shouting). But it is not just about this, but primarily [the audience] sees in the music (and the lyrics) their own emotions and ideas." The article further argued that the audience felt a connection with the band because they too could become a member of a band: "Every young person could buy a guitar and try to do 'the same,' finding pleasure in playing, and with playing, causing pleasure in others."¹²⁸ It is important to note that the desire of Hungarian youth for a shared experience was coupled with young people's desire to enjoy themselves. As the authors of *Beat* contended, "For the overwhelming majority of young people, beat music is not a substitute in the lack of an ideal social forum, but rather a tool for entertainment, release, and relaxation."¹²⁹ The study further argued that beat met the demands of young people for modernity, stating, "Beat as entertainment suits modern demands, since it provides all at once company, togetherness, good music, and easily accessible forms of release and movement."¹³⁰

Of particular concern to the Hungarian media with regard to the beat audience was the idea that beat music provided a certain ecstasy to Hungarian youth that could not be found anywhere else in society. In *Ecstasy from 7 to 10*, one fan of the band Metró stated that when she heard the band, "Inside of me there is a, I don't know how to say it, when I hear the music there is inside of me some kind of ecstasy... I feel as though I am alone and there's nothing around me but the music."¹³¹ In Hungarian newspapers, numerous articles were published discussing the propensity of young people to shout during a beat performance. For many in the Hungarian media, the idea that young people shouted during beat concerts was indicative of their inability to

¹²⁸ Heller, 100.

¹²⁹ Vitányi (1969), 129.

¹³⁰ Vitányi (1969), 131.

¹³¹ Kovács, 14:09.

find a real connection amongst their peers. Noting that the shouting and ecstasy that occurred in beat concerts was representative of the desire to be freer and more active than in everyday life, a *Népszabadság* article noted, “This freedom is however only an illusionary, negative freedom, and their activities have no significant meaning. They have replaced coexisting with the audience and real experiences with a collectively lonely ecstasy.”¹³² From his experience in the Omega club, András Szapudi similarly noted that the club members chose ecstasy over real connection. Stated Szapudi, “They are members of one of the country’s biggest youth clubs, yet from this they are still alone... They have membership cards in their pockets, but they don’t know what a real club is, what they can rightly expect from it, and thus it doesn’t strike them that it could be different, that a Sunday afternoon could be more human.”¹³³ György Konrád called this type of connection “association without effort.” As Konrád stated, “They come together in large crowds, a pack of boys and girls, having lengthy shouting conversations, but without a single word being exchanged.”¹³⁴ Some suggested that young people shouting was more a fad than a real expression of ecstasy. When the writer of one article consulted a psychologist, he received the response, “It is possible... that some of the weaker-nerved, hysteria-prone youngsters truly reach the borders of ecstasy under the influence of beat music, and spontaneously scream. Some form of crowd influence is also possible. But I believe that the majority of young people scream because it is fashionable.”¹³⁵ Another article echoed this statement, arguing, “There are those who shout because they truly enjoy the performance; others do so out of conformity.”¹³⁶

¹³² Sziklai.

¹³³ András Szapudi, “Zártköri üvöltés,” [Private Screaming], *Ifjúági Magazin*, May, 1970.

¹³⁴ Vitányi (1969), 160.

¹³⁵ Attila Kristóf, “Extázis” [Ecstasy], *Ifjúági Magazin*, October, 1966, 13.

¹³⁶ Vitányi (1969), 101.

The concern over ecstasy and shouting reflected the concern that something was missing in Hungarian society that forced young people to turn to beat music. In the movie *Ecstasy from 7 to 10*, this viewpoint was represented by a debate among university students, wherein one student states, “It is about the fact that there is a huge base who needs this music – whether it is only this music or other things as well, but definitely this music is in the foreground – and what demands this base has. Can other methods satisfy these demands or only beat?”¹³⁷ “The problem,” stated one article, “Is not that [beat music] meets [youth demand for collectivity] (I consider this to have positive and negative characteristics), but that... it meets this demand *alone*. But this is again not beat music’s ‘fault.’ Since we must once again ask the question: Why is there nothing else that meets this demand?”¹³⁸ The article further stated that the problem was not with the beat movement but that “*Politics and societal activities* have ceased to be a ‘personal’ movement for these young people, thus there is no political-social movement that they themselves connect to like they do with beat music, which would express their activities, feelings, and thoughts the way that beat does.”¹³⁹ When describing the need for ecstasy, the authors of *Beat* noted, “On one hand it signifies a demand: young people have a demand to liberate energy and ensure for themselves the appropriate bliss. On the other hand it symbolizes a breakdown, or a breakdown in opportunity.”¹⁴⁰ In *Ecstasy from 7 to 10*, psychology student György Csepeli notes,

The ideal of course would be that at the same time, in the same moment we are working, we would be working in ecstasy. But where do you see this? As long as work is boring, as long as everyday life is burdensome and exhausting, as long as it is unable to ensure

¹³⁷ Kovács, 1:11:50.

¹³⁸ Heller, 102.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 103.

¹⁴⁰ Vitányi, (1969), 164

that in one moment ecstasy and sensibleness have materialized, unfortunately we must work with these methods of distribution.¹⁴¹

For the media, it was important to create a true movement that would express the changing desires of young people. As an article in *Népszava* stated, “Whose job it is to supply [young people] with, in addition to a guitar, something different, interesting, exciting, and substantial? To create for them those sincere forums where they can become manifest, where they can be pleased with the success of their activities and thoughts? *Of course it is our job!*”¹⁴² An article in *Magyar Ifjúság* noted, “In KISZ activities, while there are undeniable and significant successes, there are also insufficiencies, which are necessary to develop and perfect continuously to accommodate changing relations and modernity.”¹⁴³ In his report to the cultural ministry in 1971, Iván Vitányi noted, “The beat cult is ideal in the judgment of the entire youth situation and consciousness, which demonstrates the unformed demand that our young people want to see something different around them, but they don’t know exactly what and how.” Arguing for the need to discover and address those issues, Vitányi stated, “In order to complete this task, however, we can make use of, and because we are able to, we *must* make use of, the interest toward beat.”¹⁴⁴ Júlia Lévai echoed the idea of using beat music to educate Hungarian youth, stating, “There was an example where one beat club unexpectedly turned into a nuclear physics seminar when the youth noticed that György Marx¹⁴⁵ was also with them. They themselves demanded the conversation. If this can happen unexpectedly why can’t it happen organically? It is simply baffling why the education apparatus does not seize this opportunity.”

¹⁴¹ Kovács, 1:22:08.

¹⁴² Rajk.

¹⁴³ F. Gy. S., “Az Exázistól a Valóságig” [From Ecstasy to Reality], *Magyar Ifjúság*, June 6, 1969.

¹⁴⁴ Fonyódi, 95.

¹⁴⁵ A Hungarian physicist.

At the end of the movie *Ecstasy from 7 to 10*, György Csepeli stated, “I see it as a positive thing that finally there is a music, finally there is as normal tool of life with which they can feel better. They fall into ecstasy in this way, and do not search for release in aggressiveness, hatred, or disdain for one another.” When asked what he would respond if someone said that beat music was demoralizing people Csepeli responded:

Then I must say that I don’t know what demoralized the youth before this, because if one looks around, one certainly doesn’t see such ideal relationships among adults that would cause one to say “Behold! They grew up without beat and look how well they live, how beautifully!” No, I must say that it can only be better than this... The adult society was able to understand when the beat singer Adolf Hitler sang his own national lyrics, and the adult generation not so very long ago accepted this with a great deal of ecstasy, and its ending was much uglier than with the beat movement.¹⁴⁶

Csepeli’s statements reflect the various reactions to Hungarian beat music, and the reasons young people chose to participate in the beat movement. Hungarian youth enjoyed beat music for a variety of reasons. Beat music differentiated them from the older generations, and was symbolic of their desire to distinguish themselves from what came before and to choose their own forms of culture that would express their own thoughts and desires. Perhaps most saliently, young people found that listening to beat music was entertaining, and beat clubs provided a place for relaxation and community. As one young university student stated, “If we young people view beat music as separate from society’s problems, then we can enjoy ourselves. A little later when we are older there will be time to judge it as a social phenomenon.”¹⁴⁷ For the government, the youth obsession with beat was indicative of something that was missing in society, something that the government needed to create. Much attention was paid to the way young people shouted and the idea that beat music created a certain sense of ecstasy in young people that was difficult to find

¹⁴⁶ Kovács, 1:20:27.

¹⁴⁷ Kovács, 1:22:46.

elsewhere. In order to step into society, the government argued, young people had to participate in a movement that both expressed their desires for something new and provided a forum for real change.

Conclusion

When describing *Ecstasy from 7 to 10*, one author stated, “We do not only discover a wide variety of opinions; rather – more significantly – we discover a wide variety of motivations as well.”¹⁴⁸ That the government recognized youth music’s powerful political implications is well evidenced by the fact that many popular musicians were the subjects of numerous secret police files.¹⁴⁹ However, the beat movement in the 1960s in Hungary cannot be seen as a failed political movement because it wasn’t a political movement at all, but rather a powerful youth movement that occupied the same complex space that youth cultures do: both oppositional to much of what traditional society had to offer, but at the same time dependent upon it. The discourse that surrounded the beat movement in Hungary in the 1960s demonstrated the complex relationship between the Hungarian government, the beat musicians, and the youth audience, a relationship that was reflective of the Kádár government’s pragmatic desire to meet the demands of young people for their own type of culture while at the same time adhering to the principles of socialism. For the government, the development of Hungarian beat music, as well as radio and television programs that would broadcast popular music, was primarily a way to limit young people’s exposure to Western music and radio programs, which the government considered to be a particularly virulent form of *fellazítás*. Beat music that was created in Hungary and that reflected Hungarian traditions was considered to be at a higher taste level than its Western

¹⁴⁸ Heller, 99.

¹⁴⁹ See Tamás Szőnyi, *Nyilvántartottak: Titkos szolgák a Magyar rock körül, 1960-1990* [Kept on File: Secret Service around Hungarian Rock, 1960-1990], ed. Katalin Sebes (Budapest: Magyar Narancs, 2005).

counterpart, and while beat music often teetered precariously on the boundary of the tolerated category of Aczél's Three Ts, the government nonetheless recognized its utility, and even argued that it reflected young people's desire for something new, which indicated their potential for building socialism.

Music played a greater role in the lives of both the Hungarian beat musicians and the youth audience. In one of his writings in 1937, Zoltán Kodály noted, "We brought up a musical elite, but we forgot to bring up a public for it."¹⁵⁰ Young people had grown up as beneficiaries of Kodály's tireless efforts to create both musicians and audiences as the socialist government increasingly introduced music education into Hungarian schools. For the beat musicians, opposition to the government was expressed both in music and behavior, and many musicians sought to produce lyrics that required the listener to read between the lines of what was being sung, thus creating an audience that was ever aware of a possible political message. This political opposition was coupled with the desire to be the voice of a generation, one that felt they had few outlets that truly expressed their emotions and desires. These musicians argued that their music broke from the traditions of dance music that was enjoyed by older generations, and sought to reflect the world in a way that young people would understand. For young people, music was a way to distinguish themselves from older generations, and in listening to beat music they often felt like their emotions were being expressed, and that the beat musicians understood where they were coming from. Beat was also a way to form a shared generational experience, one that was based on the specific characteristics of Hungarian youth. Many, however, used beat simply as a way to enjoy themselves, to get together with friends and participate in a communal activity. For Hungarian scholars, however, the fact that young people searched for ecstasy in beat music and

¹⁵⁰ Dobszay, 29.

found something in the beat movement they could not find elsewhere was indicative of the fact that the government needed to create a movement that better reflected Hungarian youth's desire for change. It is impossible, therefore, to examine the Hungarian beat movement solely in terms of its political expediency. The intricacies of a variety of social, generational, and political factors meant that the beat movement exemplified the complex relationship between the Kádár government and Hungarian youth culture.

Epilogue

In mid-February 1972, Brezhnev invited Kádár to the Soviet Union for a weekend of hunting. Billed as a friendly unofficial visit, the trip nonetheless served to caution Kádár about the Hungarian government's policies. As Kádár later recalled to MSZMP's Politburo, "By itself, the conversation was such that Brezhnev spoke in the first person, in his own name; however, considering its entirety, one still cannot deem it a private conversation." During the course of the trip, Brezhnev expressed concern at the direction that the MSZMP was taking on both economic and cultural levels. "They are afraid that in Hungary the political mood is also deteriorating," stated Kádár, "and Comrade Brezhnev said verbatim: these days it is especially important that the ideological front be unwavering." With regard to the cultural situation, Kádár noted:

It came up more than once in discussions with Soviet politicians that our cultural relations are working, but also reflect that on the part of Hungary, some peculiar selections are occurring, and that we only want to work together on certain elements: those that are not considered the most steadfast in the Soviet Union. They meet with indecency and looseness. They also mentioned, it came up, that they don't buy films from us – I didn't know that the Soviet Union had this complaint. Fiercely stated: they would like to, but among today's Hungarian films there are none that the Soviet Union could use. There is indecency and looseness in them.

Kádár recalled that during a visit from Brezhnev in September 1971, "two things kept coming up in the conversation: the first was that we ran off with investments; the second was that there were a lot of longhaired, bearded young people, etc." Summing up, Kádár noted, "I must say it was not the most relaxing of weekends." The response from members of the Politburo reflected the increased tensions between the reform-oriented members of the party and those who maintained a more dogmatic viewpoint. Prime Minister Jenő Fock, a member of the former category noted, "I am happy that the discussion was successful, and that Comrade Brezhnev stated his opinion. At the same time it fills me with bitterness: what has changed in half a year that concerns them about Hungary?" Representatives of the latter group, like Zoltán Komócsin and Sándor Gáspár,

suggested that there was much truth to Brezhnev's criticisms.¹ Kádár's visit to the Soviet Union marked a distinct shift in MSMP policy: once the driving force of reform, the Kádár government began to halt and even reverse many of the policies that had served to define the 1960s.

Indeed, if the 1960s were symbolic of a more permissive, more tolerant state socialist government in Hungary, the 1970s served as a stark example of the limits of that tolerance. Brezhnev, now at the height of his power, had begun to target the Hungarian reforms, which he considered to be out of keeping with the conservative trend that was occurring throughout the Soviet Bloc. Emboldened by what they perceived as Soviet support, the more conservative members of MSZMP became increasingly vocal during Politburo meetings, and debates were so virulent that Politburo member István Horváth noted, "If a policeman had heard such arguments in public, he'd have intervened to break them up."² The political situation had become so contentious, the disapproval of the Soviet party so strident, that in May of 1972 on the eve of his sixtieth birthday, Kádár offered up his resignation as First Party Secretary. Kádár did not expect his resignation to be accepted; however the alarm his resignation caused within the party had the desired effect of reasserting his importance as a political figure.³ Nonetheless, the Soviets maintained their pressure on the Hungarian government to take steps to counteract the reform measures taken in the 1960s, and in November 1972, Kádár complied in the form of a Central Committee Resolution that adopted a more disapproving tone toward some of the reforms that had been implemented during the 1960s, particularly NEM. "The system of economic directives that came into operation on January 1, 1968 is an appropriate and effective tool in serving the

¹ MOL 288.f.5/575.ő.e. "Jegyzőkönyv a Politikai Bizottság 1972. február 22-i megtartott üléséről" [Minutes from the Politburo's February 22, 1972 Session]

² Quoted in Gough, 180.

³ *Ibid.*, 181-2.

socialist planned economy and the goals of building socialism,” the resolution noted.

Nonetheless it tempered this praise by stating, “Conditions are growing that are contrary to the direction.”⁴ The resolution was ambiguous enough that it was unclear whether steps were being taken against the reform, or whether corrections were being made to save the reform. Indeed, the classic “battle on two fronts” was once again recalled to represent the struggle against strident reformers and conservative dogmatists alike.⁵

However, if the post-1956 Kádár government leaned more on the side of the reformers, the MSZMP that emerged in 1972 was more reflective of the conservative left members, who had been wary of NEM and its decentralization of the command economy. The November Central Committee resolution called for the centralized authority to “individually examine and observe the activities of forty to fifty of the country’s largest companies, which account for over half of production, and, where it is necessary, take separate measures to ensure the necessary conditions for appropriate work.”⁶ While the government consistently adhered to the rhetoric of the reform policy, it was clear that the brakes that had been put into the system were being applied, and aspects of the centralized economy were being reintegrated into the system, both with surprising speed. With the conservative elements of the party in ascendency, those members who had been associated with the reform were increasingly marginalized. In 1973, an investigation of the Agricultural Machinery company MEGÉV became a full blown political scandal that pitted conservative leftist Béla Biszku against two of the main proponents of reform: Lajos Fehér, one of the main figures of the agricultural reforms, and Rezső Nyers, the chief

⁴ MOL 288.f.4/119-120.ő.e. “A Központi Bizottság állásfoglalása a X. kongresszus határozatainak végrehajtásáról és a tennivalókról” [The Central Committee Position on the Fulfillment of the Tenth Congress Resolutions and Future Tasks].

⁵ Berend, 208-9.

⁶ MOL 288.f.4/119-120.ő.e. “A Központi Bizottság állásfoglalása a X. kongresszus határozatainak...”

architect of NEM. Fehér and Nyers were implicated in trying to inhibit the investigation into MEGÉV, and as a result were removed from their posts in January of 1974.⁷ In 1974, the conservative movement within MSZMP was at the height of their power; however the MEGÉV affair highlighted one of its main weaknesses. Because the rhetoric of the reform had been maintained, conservatives could not attack reform politicians on their policies, which were theoretically still in place, and instead had to resort to other tactics to achieve their aims of ousting reform-minded party members. The representation of continuity also hindered conservatives from restoring any sort of ideological doctrine, to the point that even economic textbooks remained largely reflective of reform policy.⁸ At the same time, the movement had a powerful ally in Brezhnev, who, along with other Soviet politicians, was openly disdainful of the Hungarian reformers, particularly Fehér, Nyers, and Aczél.⁹

Indeed, the return to conservatism in Hungary and the halt or reversal of many of the reforms that had been put in place during the 1960s was not so much a symbol of conservative success, but of the reform's limitations. In Hungary, because of its size and location, the most successful politicians are generally not staunch ideologues but pragmatists who are able to balance domestic legitimacy with international politics, especially when the two conflict with each other. Kádár's dedication to the ideals of communism cannot be denied; however, politically Kádár was a quintessential Hungarian politician, and pragmatism, not reform, was the driving force of his political policies. Among Kádár's strongest political beliefs was the idea that Hungary's fate was closely tied to the will of Soviet leaders, and that acceptance of Soviet

⁷ Nyers was a Central Committee Secretary and Fehér was Deputy Prime Minister.

⁸ György Péteri, "From Purge to Scandal: The MEGÉV-Affair and the Changing Political Style in Communist Hungary," in Rainer and Péteri, 106.

⁹ Gough, 189.

dictates was non-negotiable. This belief was seemingly confirmed during the Prague Spring of 1968. Certainly, the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia served as a stark reminder to the Hungarian leadership that Brezhnev would brook no deviation from what was considered acceptable. However, Hungary's participation in the August invasion was also symbolic of the Kádár government's firm tenet of maintaining a close allegiance with Soviet leaders, even in the face of potential backlash on the domestic front. Kádár's personal opposition to the invasion was well known, thus his participation in it was emblematic of his deeply held political convictions.¹⁰ For this reason, many historians argued that the moment that ended the 1960s was not Brezhnev's hunting trip with Kádár in 1972, but the events of the Prague Spring in 1968.¹¹ These events provided the definitive evidence that Hungarian domestic policy was strongly dependent on the good will of the Soviet Union and its leaders. The fact that high-ranking MSZMP officials refused to stray too far from Soviet dictates meant that any reform that was introduced could succeed only as long as it had Soviet support. When that support was taken away, as in 1972, Hungarian leaders felt they had no choice but to severely curtail its reform-oriented policies.

The realignment of MSZMP policies to more closely reflect the Soviet model is also evidenced in culture during this period. As the November resolution stated, "We must consistently enforce the principle that we do not give public space to tendencies and works that are hostile to socialism or dangerous to the interests of our nation."¹² This dictate was rigorously implemented during the so-called "Philosophers Trial" of 1973. The proceedings targeted the

¹⁰ For Kádár's role in the events of 1968, see Gough, 162-173; Tibor Huszár, *1968 Prága, Budapest, Moszkva: Kádár János és a csehszlovákiai intervenció* [1968 Prague, Budapest, Moscow: János Kádár and the Czechoslovak Intervention] (Budapest: Szabad Tér Kiadó, 1998). On the domestic front, Hungary's role in 1968 became an important rallying cry for many politicians and intellectuals who were critical of the government's decision to stand with the Soviet Union and invade Czechoslovakia. See for example Ervin Csizmadia, *A magyar demokratikus ellenzék 1968-1988* [The Hungarian Democratic Opposition, 1968-1988] (Budapest: T-Twins Kiadó, 1995).

¹¹ Rainer (2005), 17.

¹² MOL 288.f.4/119-120.ő.e. "A Központi Bizottság állásfoglalása a X. kongresszus határozatainak..."

members of the Budapest School of philosophers, Marxist scholars like Ágnes Heller, András Hegedűs, and György Márkus, many of whom had been students of the Hungarian philosopher György Lukács. In the fall of 1972, three members of the Budapest School submitted a manuscript that argued the case for building socialism through market-oriented reforms coupled with increased freedoms and political pluralism.¹³ The party's reaction against this work and similar publications was swift and punitive. On February 5, 1973, the Central Committee launched an investigation into "anti-Marxist views and the representatives thereof in the sphere of social sciences" which focused on members of the Budapest School.¹⁴ In March, the Central Committee backed a report that was extremely critical of these scholars, stating, "The essence of their platform is in the name of shallow 'Marxism' to present petty bourgeois humanist phrases against Marxism and the workers' movement, and to provide a 'socialist alternative' that is counter to already existing socialism as well as every form of socialism that has been attained in practice."¹⁵ The report further argued, "This tendency toward ideological pluralism, which is against the party's policy, the international workers' movement and its ideology, and the foundation of Marxist-Leninism, requires judgment that is not merely scholarly, but political as well."¹⁶ As a result of the proceedings, members of the Budapest School were called before a special committee of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. They were dismissed from their

¹³ György Bence, János Kis, and György Márkus, *Hogyan lehetséges kritikai gazdaságtan?* [How are Critical Economics Possible?] (Budapest: T-Twins Kiadó-Lukács Archívum, 1992).

¹⁴ "Molnár Ferenc levele Borbándi Jánosnak a társadalomtudományok terén jelentkező antimarxista nézetek egyes képviselőivel szemben alkalmazott intézkedésekről" [Ferenc Molnár's letter to János Borbándi Regarding the Measures Taken Against Several Representatives of Anti-Marxist Views in the Social Sciences] in Cseh et al., 226.

¹⁵ "Az MSZMP KB mellet működő Kultúrpolitikai Munkaközösség állásfoglalása néhány társadalomtató antimarxista nézeteiről" [Report of the Cultural Political Panel, Working in Conjunction with the Central Committee, on its Attitude on the Anti-Marxist Views of Several Sociologists] in Péter Agárdi, ed., *Művelődéstörténeti szöveggyűjtemény II/1 (1945-1990)* [Cultural History Document Collection Volume II Number 1 (1945-1990)] (Pécs: Pécsi Tudományegyetem Felnőttképzési és Emberi Erőforrás Fejlesztési Kar, 2008), 361.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 357.

positions, and those who were still members of MSZMP had their membership revoked. The Philosophers Trial and subsequent clashes with Hungarian intellectuals served to alienate scholars who were associated with the reformist left. While they had previously worked within the limits of the Kádár government's cultural policy, the actions taken in the early 1970s pushed these scholars towards a more oppositional stance.¹⁷

A similar turn toward a more rigid stance in culture in the early 1970s can be found in the writings of György Aczél. One of the main targets of Soviet ire, Aczél did not escape the demotions that were doled out to MSZMP members who represented the more permissive atmosphere of the 1960s.¹⁸ While Aczél was allowed to keep his position in the Politburo, he was removed from his post as Central Committee Secretary and given the government position of Deputy Prime Minister. In practical terms, Aczél was still in charge of cultural policy: as he noted in 1989, "In 1974, they dismissed Rezső Nyers, Lajos Fehér, and me, and I was to ostensibly act as Deputy Prime Minister. At that time it became known that even if Aczél was a doorman, he would still direct cultural policy." While this certainly became true, and indeed was Kádár's intention, Aczél's first years in his government post were marked by less cultural activity than he had previously conducted.¹⁹ Furthermore, Aczél's policies, even the Three Ts, began to reflect the government's increasingly inflexible attitude toward deviation from the traditional model. In 1974, Aczél published a study that argued, "The goal of acceptance is not to make our cultural life into a still picture that we notice passively." He went further:

¹⁷ Gough, 188-9.

¹⁸ Zoltán Komócsin, a member of the conservative left wing of the party, was also demoted at that time, although this measure was adopted as more of a humane action: at the time, he was dying of cancer. Nonetheless, Komócsin's demotion served as a superficial bulwark to counteract the idea that political action was only being taken against a certain segment of MSZMP leadership.

¹⁹ Révész, 223-4.

There are many misunderstandings (or “misunderstandings,” whether from convenience or from a “market” viewpoint) around the “acceptable” category. In fact, we designate with this word those elements that are difficult to categorize, that are only for entertainment, for example crime novels or dance music. However, “acceptance” cannot mean that the proportion of these products should swell at the expense of true artistic assets, or that we don’t monitor their behavior or role in developing taste.²⁰

Aczél’s book argued that the middle category of the Three Ts had been overvalued, and that it actually represented a narrower sphere of culture than previously thought. This idea represented the ideological rigidity that had permeated the cultural sphere during this period, which Brezhnev had expressly called for in his meeting with Kádár.

At the start of the 1970s, popular culture also came under scrutiny by the government. The idea that culture had become too much of a commodity, a viewpoint that gained little traction during the 1960s, became a more mainstream suspicion of the Kádár government. The Central Committee resolution of November 1972 highlighted this suspicion:

The Tenth Party Congress emphatically emphasized culture’s role in socialist consciousness, public thought, and forming and developing public taste. Since then our party has professed, and now declares, that in our socialist society, artworks and cultural service are generally a culturally important social policy and not a question of commerce. The Central Committee considers it necessary to reexamine the economic regulating system in this sphere, with the goal that increased state support will expressly help those works that are important and valuable for a socialist society.²¹

In a speech to the Central Committee, Kádár echoed this position, stating, “We cannot work here with a large axe: where economic requirements cannot be removed from the practice, perhaps directive methods can be created on the basis of other indicators. Likewise, in the cultural sphere it is known that the commercial viewpoint cannot harm our cultural goals, and we must correct

²⁰ György Aczél, *Szocialista kultúra – közösségi ember* [Socialist Culture – Communal Person] (Budapest: Kossuth Könyvkiadó, 1974), 213.

²¹ MOL 288.f.4/119-120.ő.e. “A Központi Bizottság állásfoglalása a X. kongresszus határozatainak...”

the directive.”²² Discussions of popular culture continued to focus on improving taste but often lacked the previous emphasis on meeting audience demand. Further emphasis was placed on popular culture being more expressive of the ideals of state socialism. An article in *Társadalmi Szemle* stressed the important connection of ideology and entertainment culture, stating, “Bad forms of entertainment and obsolete genres not only play a role in destroying taste, they also destroy the positive efforts that we have already achieved in certain areas of public education.”²³ In his book, György Aczél stated, “Several words on *entertainment*: Brecht said that you must employ a trick in order to arouse the interest of millions. He turned the Three Penny Opera into a musical so that it would become popular. Would it be so shameful if we bring more arts into entertainment, if it was with art that we tried to entertain ourselves and awaken excitement and interest?”²⁴ Anecdotal evidence of the decreased focus on demand and the increased focus on ideology can be found throughout popular and youth culture. Traditionally, the yearly calendar that was featured in *Ifjúsági Magazin* featured popular Western and Hungarian musicians. At the end of 1972, the magazine showcased a 1973 calendar populated with notable figures in Hungarian history. In 1972, the month of July displayed a picture that featured the band Illés, its long-haired members dressed in an array of patterned shirts and slack; in 1973, July was represented by the Hungarian physicist Loránd Eötvös. Similarly, the Dance Music Festival, which had aired yearly on Hungarian television since 1966, had its final annual broadcast in the summer of 1972.

²² MOL 288.f.4/119-120.ő.e. “Jegyzőkönyv a Központi Bizottság 1972. november 14-15-én tartott kibővített üléséről” [Minutes from the Expanded Meeting of the November 14-15 Central Committee Meeting].

²³ Almási Miklós, “Szórakoztatás és ideológia” [Entertainment and Ideology], *Társadalmi Szemle*, 28 no. 10 (1973): 91.

²⁴ Aczél, 242.

János Rainer describes the long 1960s as a time when “the relieved intelligentsia and then the wider public in daily discourse began to turn this curious mixture [of concessions] into a socialism that was feasible, bearable, human and specifically Hungarian.”²⁵ Rainer’s description is clearly evidenced in the popular and youth culture that emerged from this period. However, as the long 1960s came to a close, the government became increasingly antagonistic toward the hybrid it had created. In the 1960s, the government argued that building socialism could take place in a variety of forms, including the way in which popular culture was consumed. However, with the rise of conservatism and ideological rigidity within the party, that which was considered to be in keeping with socialism was increasingly narrowed, and many of the figures that had defined the 1960s became marginalized and alienated from the socialist state. Because the rhetoric of reform and many of its institutions had been retained, the government was able to return to many of its reform policies in the latter half of the 1970s once the conservative movement had been neutralized and economic stagnation necessitated more radical reforms. By the 1980s, the reforms that took place in the economy and culture far exceeded any measures that had been implemented in the 1960s. However, while the conservative movement did not last long in Hungary, and did not make any powerful strides in reversing the rhetoric of the reform that the government had so carefully fostered, the government’s actions in the 1970s put an end to the notion that Hungary could create a viable alternative to the traditional model of state socialism, one which was centered on creating a society that was at once modern and in keeping with socialist principles. Much of the popular and youth culture of the 1960s is representative of this attempt. The popular culture of the 1960s represents a period in which “socialist popular culture” was not inherently contradictory, but potentially attainable. However, in the 1970s,

²⁵ Rainer (2005), 18.

while popular culture was still produced, it was no longer considered to be integral to the modern socialist process, and was consumed by a population who no longer believed in that process's existence.

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BFL Budapest Főváros Levéltár [Budapest Archive]

MOL Magyar Országos Levéltár [Hungarian National Archives]

OSA Open Society Archives

Washington, DC

NARA National Archives and Records Administration

Primary Source Periodicals

Chicago Tribune

Csongrád Megyei Hirlap [Csongrád County Post]

Délmagyarország [South Hungary]

Élet és Irodalom [Life and Literature]

Figyelő [Observer]

Financial Times

The Guardian

Heves Megyei Népujság [Heves County Paper]

Ifjú Kommunista [Young Communist]

Ifjúsági Magazin [Youth Magazine]

Kelet-Magyarország

Kereskedelmi Szemle [Trade Review]

Komárom Megyei Dolgozók Lapja [Komárom County's Workers' Paper]

Kortárs [Contemporary]

Magyar Ifjúság [Hungarian Youth]

Magyar Hirlap [Hungarian Post]

Magyar Nemzet [Hungarian Nation]

Népszabadság [People's Freedom]

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