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ARGUMENTS OF THE PHD THESIS

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Political Lawsuits Concerning Teachers And Students
Conducted Between 1956-58 in Bács-Kiskun County

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I. The Project Summary

The intentional focus of this research project was to understand political retaliation lawsuits concerning teachers and students conducted between 1956-59 in Bács-Kiskun county. The overall aim was to present the teachers' and students' participation in the events taken place in the autumn 1956, and put it into the framework of the events at national and local level analysing the political and institutional establishment of the judicial system at the time of the above mentioned interval.

The changes in Hungarian education until 1956 and the nationalization of the educational system are handled as a central issue. Several waves of political purge are outlined and I devoted attention to professional, political, ideological demands on teachers and ideological priorities focusing on the fight against religious education, which were drawn up in the curriculum.

Mainly due to space limitations, the essay provides a cross-sectional view on the events of 1956 and processes of political history.

On the basis of the resources I followed the teachers' role in revolutionary councils as well as in militia. I looked at students' involvement in the revolutionary councils, as well as in the demonstrations held in 1956. Flysheet distribution committed by students and their participation in armed struggle, as well as in preparation of armed uprising in the period of consolidation are considered to be an important part of this research.

I reviewed the intimidating judicial and non-judicial proceedings affecting teachers. Data were collected referring to the disciplinary procedures conducted by the educational departments of local councils in the summer 1957 and the lawsuits affecting both teachers and students regarding the type and the measure of punishment they received and I also examined how the amnesty was extended to teachers and students.

An important purpose of the thesis is to study the organizational background of the judiciary system and to analyze judiciary principles based on political intentions related to criminal suits.

II. Adopted methods, sources

The research is based on a wide range of data collected in several archives. I could study the material of the lawsuits handed down by Supreme Court, and the party papers (MDP KV, PB, MSZMP) in the National Archives of Hungary, the investigations of the former State Security Organizations handled by Historical Archives of the Hungarian State Security and the documents made by the communist party and the local councils in Bacs-Kicskun county

preserved by Bács-Kiskun County Archives. I also reviewed the lawsuits in the archive of Bács-Kiskun County Law Court and in the archive of the Supreme Court as well as newsreels in the archive of the Hungarian Radio. Besides secondary literature I relied on press materials

As I am not a jurist I examined lawsuits from historical aspect. I revealed the social and political context of the events and the trials as at that time law served political purposes.

Since majority of the documents were issued by party organs or authorities controlled by the communist party – including local councils, investigating authorities and law courts - in the period of party state, the risk of distortion and biased presentation is rather high. Therefore it is essential to evaluate these sources from the point of view of their reliability. I had to take into consideration when the source was written, by whom it was produced, what the evidential value of its contents was. I had to also devote attention to preceding circumstances and consequences of the documents issued, I had to define the author's attitude to the events or proceedings, the purpose of issuing the document, how much time passed between the date when the document was produced and the event about which the document was written.

Since I did my research in several archives, considering these factors, I compared different types of sources reported on the same event and determined the similarities and differences and, if it was possible, I drew conclusions on similarities and differences.

However, basic research in some key areas is still awaited. Without such basic research I could rely on mosaics from the sources. It is not only an obstacle to work, but without it, I consider my findings limitedly valid.

III. Conclusions and areas for further research

1. The Hungarian revolution of 1956 couldn't have united the nation since the events took place besides conflicting intentions and purposes. Therefore it is necessary to define exactly what political factors meant under revolution and democracy during the revolution.

Until the December 5th the Hungarian Workers' Party and the local authorities considered the events to be a revolution in records and documents issued by the party management and local councils. In my opinion on the part of the Hungarian Workers' Party it was an attempt to get a way out of the impasse of stalinism by gaining the support of the nation and getting rid of its stalinist opposition and the Soviet "strangling" control with declaring socialism on a kind of a national basis. The process of internal democratization of the party system could be regarded as the symptom of crisis, which was articulated by young

professionals and intellectuals, most of them members of the communist party within Hungarian Writers' Association and then in so called Petőfi circles.

After Rákosi had been deprived from the post of Prime minister with Soviet assistance, the speech delivered by Déry Tibor on June 27th 1956 defined the direction which was published as a proclamation of the Hungarian Writers' Association in the newspaper called Népszava. Compared with a list of sixteen points containing key, national political demands compiled by Hungarian Federation of University and College Students' Associations show no essential difference. Both documents contain the idea of free, general election by secret ballot, however it was restricted to the demand that new Government must be constituted under the direction of the communist Imre Nagy and according to the Hungarian writers' proclamation the multi-party system must be implemented in the framework of Patriotic People's Front controlled by the communist party. In the economic field it was announced no change of ownership, but steps were called for to broaden democracy, the ban of distribution of agricultural products, the revision of the norms operating in industry with an overview of the need for sustainability. The Writers' proclamation proposed the right to free will of the peasantry, but the conditions of individual farming were envisioned in a system providing 'free socialist production and exchange of goods.'

As a counterpoint to the above mentioned intentions revolution could be considered as a self-defense response of those who were deprived of their rights, and whose aim was to overthrow a corrupt government and to establish a new society in which freedom and decent life for the oppressed and exploited classes are granted. However, the communist government led by Imre Nagy does not fit into this image and it has no significance, - as we can see in the students' demands - whether the Central Committee of the communist party will be renewed or not. In addition free elections could not be limited to the parties represented in the Patriotic People's Front.

Personally I think that people living in Bács-Kiskun county thought of a revolution as a return to the preceding era of November 1945. The winner of the National Assembly elections held on November 04th 1945 was the Independent Smallholders' Party, which gained over the half of the votes. Considering the fact that the majority of the county's population worked in agriculture and is known to stick to land and landed property, a lot of people demand the dissolution of farmers' co-operatives, the ban of distribution of agricultural products and annulment concerning the distribution of agricultural products, the destruction of the collection of documents and opportunities for individual peasant production without any communist controlled restrictions.

Regarding the political preferences of the population in the county, the elections held in Kiskunhalas gave an example if really free elections had been held, the Communist Party could not have formed a government. Longs here is that the representatives of the communist party management were dismissed from revolutionary councils or at mass gatherings they were not allowed to deliver a speech.

Freedom of religion is thought to be a very important principle for people. Therefore reintroduction of religious studies, restitution of nationalized school to church, and dismissal of communist headmasters opposing and making efforts to put back teaching of religious studies were claimed widely.

2. Based on the above mentioned, it is necessary to give an explanation to the statement made by the Supreme Court. It says "Organisations of "National councils", "militia", and other revolutionary councils should be reviewed in the light of their activities. The nature of these are defined by the members' activities and the purposes expressed by them. Each activity must be seen independently of each other and must be examined whether these organisations aimed to overthrow the people's democratic state or not. Some of the revolutionary councils were considered to be 'counter-revolutionary' while others were assessed as the ones whose activity is not directed to overthrow the people's democratic state even though these were clearly 'counter-revolutionary' organizations according to the laws. As a logical consequence some of the council members were not accused.

So far no special emphasis has been put on researching this key issue during trials though it was examined. Further answers should be sought in order to learn more about relationship and occult interlock between revolutionary organizations, the communist party management and local council members, furthermore the body of the established organizations, in particular the communist party members' activities in the revolutionary councils and militia until their dissolution.

It also needs to be clarified to what extent the selection system for both revolutionary council and Hungarian workers' council members contributed to the great proportion of communist party members elected in the revolutionary organisations I suppose a type of a civil movement would not have set up its revolutionary organization structure based on a Soviet-style election system, in the first round of the solidification of communist functionaries with the vital assistance of labour union and local councils and I am not sure that they would have incorporated with communist party members, either.

More details ought to be brought to light on the formation of the militia and the role of the army in it. In several settlements of the county protestants were killed as a consequence of violating the prohibition of assembly which had been put into effect by local revolutionary councils.

3. It would be worth reviewing circumstances of the establishment of the revolutionary organizations. In my opinion the adoptable elements of the electoral system applied by revolutionary councils were built in subsequent council elections by Kádári regime providing the majority of communist party members in council bodies in order to maintain the domination of the communist party management.

Patriotic People's Front was entrusted to assist in the selection of candidates under the control of the communist party. The executive committee of the Council had to cooperate with Patriotic People's Front. It was the task of Patriotic People's Front to organize the assemblies for promoting candidates. Though the opinion of the social organizations could have been taken into consideration, the party management approved of the candidates. The local party committee was responsible for the organization and conduct of the elections.

4. In my thesis, within the limits of the available sources, I tried to outline teachers' working conditions though these sources are rather meagre. The facts revealed to me, suggest that teachers worked within a highly regulated system in which there had been neither conscience nor professional freedom and existential insecurity surrounded them.

Bács-Kiskun is a county with a few towns and a lot of villages. A high level of hostility appeared against communist school headmasters due to the fact that they implemented the regulations on religious education without consideration though teachers represented significant proportion of the local intellectuals were widely respected. Therefore I am not surprised that the proportion of teachers involved in the revolutionary councils and militia as a member or a leader seems to be relatively high, while the rate of headmasters' participation is very low, almost negligible. When revolutionary councils and militia were dissolved most of the the teachers' activity ended. However there were some who resigned from their post before November 4th at the time when the great majority of Communist functionaries were removed from the revolutionary councils..

Many of the students were not a member of revolutionary organizations. The highlight of their activity is made for the period after November 4th. By then most of revolutionary

organizations had been dissolved. Most of them took part in armed resistance against the Soviet troops, armed movement or flysheet distribution

The teachers' social and professional background explored by legal proceedings constitutes a ground for reversing or modifying a sentence. In favourable cases it supported alleviation of the punishment or in some cases exacerbation of the punishment. The students' professional and social advancement in the light of the judgements was not so relevant, as in the case of teachers because on one hand they had no professional advancement due to their age, on the other hand specific provisions relating to underages were applied. The family background is considered to be a determining factor in trials of offenders with class-alien ancestors especially in case the aim of the court was to set an example.

5. "Counter-revolution and revolution" must be defined from the point of view how the communist party interpreted it. The communist party looked on everything as a „counter-revolution” which endangered or was directed against the power of the party. The events were mentioned as a revolution in the documents released by local councils and party management. until the decision made on December 5th 1956 by the Central Committee of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party. At the time of the revolution, Imre Nagy also made statements on ”counter-revolution” but on the basis of these statements people opposing the „democratic state” and refusing the government led by Imre Nagy were considered to be "counter-revolutionists". According to declaration made by Imre Nagy ”revolutionists” were those who came up for renewal of socialism within the framework of the ”national democratic movement” under the control of communist party.

However, in the declaration issued on December 5th by the Central Committee of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party the events were evaluated as a „counter-revolution” regardless the participants' intention.

Based on the above, the classification of ”errant workers” seems to be clear. It referred to those whose purpose was to renew the existing social system. Teachers were treated as 'errant' intellectuals by the judicial proceedings. The plain outbreak of the ”counter-revolution” was dated on October 30th 1956 by the Central Committee of Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party. This date actually coincides with the date when communist party failed to maintain its influence in revolutionary organizations and party functionaries were excluded from the revolutionary councils.

The classification of ”intentionally conceived counter-revolutionaries” was applied for those who promoted the exclusion of party functionaries from the revolutionary organisations,

weakened the influence of the party in revolutionary councils or rebel against the consolidation of the Kadar regime. Unlike teachers most students were regarded as "intentionally conceived counter-revolutionaries"

The number of teachers and students brought in the lawsuits was continually rising due to the above mentioned political intentions. It can be observed as a general trend that procedural acts concerning 'intentionally conceived counterrevolutionaries' had been held since February and March 1957 while the legal proceedings concerning 'errant workers' began only in the summer of 1957. However, the Bacs-Kiskun county court statistics also suggest that punishments imposed growing in number show a steadily decreasing rate.

In my opinion the above outlined classification was not applied accidentally. The lawsuits should be analyzed referring to the following criteria:

- the time of trials concerning 'intentionally conceived counterrevolutionaries' and 'errant workers'
- participants' family and professional background
- correlation between the qualification of the crime and assigning punishment as the time went on from 1957 till 1959?

Might differences arise, however, dominant trends could be concluded from statistical data.

6. The issue of amnesty seems to be an unexplored mystery. The fact that there may have been a kind of regulation, is indirectly proved by the head of the Supreme Court who invested a lot of energy to undermine its existence at the judicial conference in March 1957. Some believe that amnesty is introduced for political purposes when the accused offenders are innocent and this fact is known for legislators. This approach does not seem to be so absurd considering the fact that several political statements including the declaration issued on December 5th by the Central Committee of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party and the statement made by Ferenc Münnich at the judicial conference in February 1957 which recognized the demonstraton on October 23rd against the Rakosi regime, as legitimate.

Details on the amnesty decree come from several different sources, and they inform us about the different stages from preparation to putting it into effect. In November 1956 the Department of Justice ordered the courts to postpone the trials related to the events taken place in October 1956 because the amnesty decree was under preparation. A Yugoslav newspaper referring to the newsreel of the Hungarian Radio reported that the amnesty decree had been submitted to the Presidential Council. According to the news from the Hungarian

Radio broadcast the amnesty decree was enacted on November 28th. At the beginning of January a judicial source ordered the courts to conduct political trials related to the events taken place in October 1956 as the issue of the amnesty decree was struck from the agenda.

Later a partial amnesty was decreed in 1959, which was offered for a group of people imprisoned over two years but less than 4 years..

Personally, I believe that the amnesty might have entered into force in November 1956, the existence of which was denied after December 05 1956. I think it would be worth digging deeper into files in the archives of Justice Department and the National Archives of Hungary.

At first glance the research theme of this dissertation may seem peripheral importance. However, the role of this social group also highlights essential questions which have not been cleared up so far. Further research of both political trials and central issues are inevitable. Due to the fact that since the events short time has elapsed in historical perspective, if research is still awaits, there is a high risk that the historical events will be defined and used for political purposes, which are labelled as national but beneath the surface they seem to be rather selfish goals.

IV. Publications

- A B. 10/1957 PER - adalékok az 1956-os megtorlás történetéhez (Esettanulmány)
in: A mában élő tegnapok- Tanulmányok a XX. század történetéhez, szerkesztette: M. Kiss Sándor, Ifj. Bertényi Iván, Pázmány Péter Katolikus Egyetem Bölcsészettudományi Kar, Piliscsaba, 2011, 257-277. old
- Albertné Zombori Katalin: „Forradalom” és „ellenforradalom” problematikája a megtorlás időszakában Bács-Kiskun megyében lefolytatott tanár–diák-perek tükrében in: A diktatúra évtizedei – tanulmányok, esszék, előadások szerk.: Horváth Miklós Pázmány Péter Katolikus Egyetem Bölcsész- és Társadalomtudományi Kar Történelemtudományi Doktori Iskola, Piliscsaba, 2013, 231-260. old.
- Mítoszteremtés a Kádár-rendszerben in: Aetas 28. évf. 2013. 2. szám 216-217. old.