

Society, Resistance and Revolution: the Budapest Middle Class and the Hungarian Communist State 1948-1956*

Accounts of resistance to Communist states have dominated the historiographies of central-eastern European countries since 1989. The anti-Stalinist protests in Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia, peasant opposition to collectivization and the dissident 'civil society' movements of the 1980s have become the most popular research topics. In addition, left-wing dissidents, the catholic church and conservative nationalists have used resistance stories to establish themselves as anti-Communist fighters in the popular consciousness.¹ The idealization of resistance has meant that even inter-war and wartime rightist leaders of the 1930s and 1940s have been openly celebrated as national heroes for attempting to prevent the occupation of their countries by the Red Army, despite their involvement in the Holocaust.² This celebration of dissent was in part a reaction to the silences of the Communist historiographies which preceded it.³ Yet as different groups have sought political respectability by placing themselves at the forefront of anti-Communist opposition, so the post-Communist estimation of resistance has developed beyond its actual historical scale.⁴

Despite widespread dislike of Communist regimes by the early 1950s, there was in fact very little concerted political resistance. Well-known outbreaks, such as the 1956 uprising in Hungary or the Solidarity movement in Poland, were remarkable exceptions. Historians and political scientists have usually resorted to 'top down' explanations to explain the absence; this is especially true of the 1950s in central-eastern Europe, where

brutal Stalinist states made effective opposition difficult. According to these accounts, only when the state weakened – owing to political infighting between hardliners and moderates in the period of de-Stalinization, or after the signing of human rights protocols with the West in the mid-1970s – did greater possibilities for resistance develop. Yet these analyses too often assume that a society in opposition will always combat the state given sufficient opportunities.⁵ Much less attention has been paid to the range of strategies that social groups used in order to survive under illegitimate power and the varied (and often ambivalent) attitudes they held towards the expression of resistance.⁶

This article will explore the variety of attitudes towards, and expressions of, opposition by the Budapest middle classes, in their encounter with the Communist state between its inception in 1948 and its initial breakdown in the 1956 uprising.⁷ Most members of the middle classes experienced discrimination and persecution on account of their class background.⁸ Even those who had been initially sympathetic to the Communist project were questioning their allegiance and turning against the state by the early 1950s. Yet the middle class did not express their opposition to the regime in uniform ways; some engaged in active opposition whilst others deliberately withdrew from direct political confrontation.

The choice to resist was not dependent on the degree to which different groups felt opposed to Communism, but rather on the extent to which they thought it appropriate to engage politically with illegitimate power. The codes which defined acceptable levels of engagement were shaped by different political traditions within the middle class.

Conservatives, who abhorred the Communist state more than any other group, saw engagement, even in the form of resistance, as collaboration with an illegitimate regime. Liberals, by contrast, saw political involvement, albeit at the margins of Communist society, as crucial to their identities. Socialists had the most complex attitudes to engagement: they withdrew from political opposition when their dislike of the Stalinist state was at its most intense, but engaged in open political struggle when the re-establishment of the integrity of the Communist movement became a realistic possibility after 1953.

The evidence is primarily drawn from an oral history project in which I interviewed seventy-six individuals from the Budapest middle class, born between 1907 and 1938, about their experiences of the Second World War, the liberation era and the early Communist state. These interviews addressed not only resistance, but also topics such as private life, educational and professional attainment, and the evolution of political attitudes. They were conducted between 1998 and 2000 and averaged around three hours in length. There were thirty-one female and forty-five male respondents. All interviewees were promised anonymity; hence all names used are pseudonyms.

This article focuses on how individuals responded to Communist power and how they interpreted their behaviour. Hence it is not useful to impose any strict criteria on what resistance entails; rather, it is more informative to explore the conflicting definitions offered by the respondents themselves. For this reason, any act, from listening to jazz in private or discussing the behaviour of Red Army soldiers amongst groups of friends, to

establishing an anti-Communist organization or engaging in sabotage, will be considered resistance so long as it was consciously pursued as such. At the same time, it is also important to analyse those acts which undermined the norms of Communist behaviour, even when not defined as resistance by respondents. It is revealing to examine why certain forms of opposition were not considered to be resistance; certainly, they should not be ignored because they were not consciously defined as such.

The importance of political tradition in shaping behaviour under the Communist state was the result of deep ideological divisions within Hungarian society. After the First World War, middle-class Hungarians' life chances were increasingly shaped by their political beliefs: the short-lived Communist regime of 1919 inflicted terror on the right; the subsequent right-wing authoritarian Horthy regime then excluded the left-wing and Jewish middle class from public service employment and political power throughout the inter-war period; the wartime German occupation and subsequent Hungarian fascist regime further terrorized the politically active left and Jews; the post-war anti-fascist popular front subsequently denied large sections of the conservative middle class the right either to vote or to return to public employment. By the end of the Second World War, these political divides were reinforced by social and religious divisions within the middle class; the public sector was dominated by those from conservative Christian gentry backgrounds who had been promoted by Horthy, whereas a more heterogeneous entrepreneurial and professional middle class (which included many from Jewish backgrounds⁹) was mainly liberal-left in political outlook. Thus in the decades which

preceded the Communist take-over, middle-class Hungarians' lives had been moulded as much by their political allegiances as by their social background.

The conservative middle class was more deeply opposed to the Communist state than any other of these groups. Hungarian conservatism itself had grown out of a fear of radical left-wing upheaval; many had been drawn to the right-wing authoritarianism of the Horthy era out of a fear of Soviet Bolshevism and the return of the Hungarian Communist regime.¹⁰ Their experience of the Second World War reinforced this view; most conservatives had supported their country's alliance with Nazi Germany and fight against the Soviet Union, and came to understand the war as the struggle of Christian, conservative Europe against a barbarous eastern Bolshevism. In the late 1940s, conservatives ignored the progressive policies that attracted some of their countrymen to radical left-wing ideology; rather, Communism was understood as an alien political force which had destroyed the Hungarian nation and victimized its people.

Despite their opposition, conservatives were the group least likely to engage in acts of resistance against the Communist regime. Explanations for an absence of dissent have often centred on the political impossibility of active opposition given the effectiveness of the state security apparatus, especially during the Stalinist period between 1948 and 1953.¹¹ Conservative interviewees themselves held this view; Franciska suggested that even the smallest public expression of opposition might incur dire penalties. Her father, who had been a high-ranking officer in Horthy's army, clashed with a prominent Communist politician when he failed to cancel an event which coincided with a party

rally. Fearing the consequences of this act, he employed extreme measures to avoid being caught by the police, and became paranoid when friends offered him assistance:

Franciska: I think it was 1948 when he [her father] got into trouble with one of the secretaries of state, who made a visit to our town. There was a big horse breeding fête, and the Communists wanted to hold a rally at the same time... and my father said that he couldn't do anything about it. And then he knew that politically he was in such an awful situation because he could be arrested any time, for any reason, or just simply he could have been suspended and put in prison because he was opposing the regime. So he was in hiding most of the time. During the day he came home, in the evening he disappeared. He wouldn't come home until about three o'clock in the morning, because he was so afraid of the secret police. That was the time when they arrested people in the early hours of the night. Every evening he went to the same pub and they would signal to him when they saw the police coming in, and he would go out the back...it was always on his mind, that you could be arrested for no reason...just because your family had a pub, or your family had land or whatever, or for simply no reason at all...he didn't talk about it, but I

knew that it was always on his mind...one evening, my school friend said [to him], 'you can't go home on your motorbike; we will take you home!' But he didn't really know them, so he said, 'Na! You have got me now! Na! You will get me now!' It was always on his mind. 'You are going to arrest me'...

Certainly these respondents had suffered from greater discrimination than any other middle-class group. Those from conservative backgrounds were much more likely to be sidelined in post-war public life. Procedures were set up between 1945 and 1947 to exclude those who actively collaborated with the fascist state from returning to public employment or voting, but these were soon used to marginalize a wide swathe of conservative opinion.¹² After 1948, the newly-established Communist state barred individuals from secondary or higher education, expropriated property or deported families¹³ on account of their affiliation with the Horthy regime and their 'reactionary' political views. This marginalization convinced many conservatives of their political impotence. They increasingly saw themselves as helpless victims of power.

However, fear of further persecution was not the only reason conservatives chose not to fight; in addition, they understood resistance to be a form of collaboration that dishonoured the individual involved. The idea of dissent as shameful was most clearly illustrated by those few conservatives who accidentally found themselves confronting the state. One man, who described himself as a 'reactionary', had become involved in street

fighting with Communist vigilantes in the early 1950s. He did not use the story to present himself as a heroic resister. Rather, he described how the conflict had been unwanted and unintended (he was drunk), had left him feeling ashamed and had confirmed his decision to withdraw from a political life:

Dezső: ...Now that involves hooliganism...we were fairly drunk on May 1st, which is a day of vigilance for Communists. Imre [his friend] started to throw bricks at lamps, and we did this because we knew the Communist vigilantes were there. Three of them from different sides of the street started to rush towards us, and the three of us 'went in four different directions'...So it wasn't bravado, it wasn't a sort of conscious heroic opposition to the regime. In a sense one was ashamed of it, it didn't really matter somehow...I certainly didn't feel that I was fighting the Communists, I didn't feel that at all. And had you asked me at any point, I would have said, no, no, no, I'm an observer.

James: So why do you think you saw yourself as an observer at the time?

Dezső: Well, the feeling that it has nothing to do with me, it was, you know, imposed on me and the whole of Hungarian society from without. Essentially you can't do anything about it.

Resistance was shameful because of its political nature. Conservatives presented themselves as alienated from politics from 1945 onwards.¹⁴ According to Magda, 'right from then, beginning in April 1945, from the beginning of the system, we had a feeling of being opposed (ellenséges érzés).' The most appropriate response was then to become apolitical; according to Ildikó, 'I didn't have any political opinions. I mean, I was a very strong-minded proud Hungarian woman.' To become political was to collaborate with the 'anti-fascist' liberal-left consensus of the popular front which took power following the war. Márta stated that after 1945 her family '...didn't join any party, they hated politicians, they didn't have any opinions, they didn't like politics, politicians were not 'termelő' [productive] people, at our house somebody who was termelő was a good person'.

They therefore avoided any activity that might bring them into political conflict with the Communist state after 1948. They would only engage in minor private acts of dissent which the state would not notice and which had no political meaning:

Iré: I think we only had silent weapons [my emphasis] – not to do this or that or not to participate at certain events.

For instance, when we saw these red stars made out of flowers we decided not to cross that park any more. Just such small things, but in our family we did not really go against the system or resist or anything, no...

Rather than resort to direct confrontation, they saw the quiet, private maintenance of pre-Communist bourgeois and religious values as the most appropriate response to Communist power. Church-going was particularly popular, as it allowed conservatives to articulate their values 'discreetly'.¹⁵ However, it was crucial to them that this behaviour should not be perceived as political resistance. In this example, Ildikó emphasized that despite her regular church attendance, she had decided to avoid going behind the sacristy or taking confession; thus, she would not seem to be 'demonstrating' against the regime:

Ildikó: ...I went to the church every Sunday but I didn't dare to go behind the sacristy...to talk personally [with the priest]...I didn't practise my religion but I went to church every Sunday. It is not practising if I go to church. Anybody can go to church. I just went there when there was a mass. I didn't go to a confession. I didn't want to demonstrate...I just went there.

Most accounts of resistance to the early Communist state focus on the period after 1953, when a new post-Stalinist leadership in Moscow removed the hard-line Stalinist Rákosi

and installed the reformist Imre Nagy as prime minister. Explanations for increasing dissent are usually ‘top down’. Nagy’s attempt to curtail the arbitrary use of state power and to achieve a limited amount of popular legitimacy, and the political infighting between Rákosi and Nagy which ensued, have been presented as the crucial factors that weakened the Communist state and gave its critics increasing room to engage in effective resistance. Yet despite greater opportunity, conservatives still viewed resistance as a form of collaboration and refused to become involved. Dezső, for example, had socialist friends who had joined the central forum for dissenting voices, the Petőfi Circle. Although he wanted the system changed he nevertheless dismissed political resistance. He refused to take part because it would have made him a politically complicit ‘servant of the regime’:

Dezső: They [my friends] were perhaps nearer the regime and were willing to do things in a conscious way, and I remember quoting Illyés¹⁶ day-in-day-out. He was asked why he wasn’t at the forefront of this movement. Illyés’ answer was, ‘This is the revolt of the servants, and I was never a servant.’ Now I remember my saying this to [my friends], that, well, you know, I wasn’t a ‘cseléd’ [servant], you know, Litván¹⁷, yes, he was a ‘cseléd’, it was a great thing that he did, but, you know, it wasn’t really my business.

Whereas conservative respondents presented resistance as inappropriate and shameful, other respondents celebrated even minor acts of defiance:

Lóránt: There were other things which were a demonstration of some form of independence. There was certain music, for example, which was completely prohibited – Wagner was one – and there were some underground places where records were played, and one went to these gatherings, and one felt that there were infiltrators there. One knew that the fact that one went to these places was reported somewhere. I saw this really as fumigating myself. It is in these little things one could assert a degree of heroism. It's a rather petty one, if you see what I mean. And it didn't do any good to anybody else. It didn't help anybody; it didn't set a single person free. But we indulged in this thing proudly.

Interviewees who idealized resistance were mainly from liberal backgrounds, and were largely confined to those who came from entrepreneurial or professional middle-class milieux, including many from Jewish families. Although liberalism was a spent political force by 1945,¹⁸ it still remained an important badge of personal identity for many after the war, associated with the realization of progressive goals, such as land and wealth redistribution, within the context of a stable democratic system.¹⁹ Whereas conservatives

related how depoliticized their communities had become, liberals charted how the ‘anti-fascist’ consensus of the post-war democratic system had reinvigorated their engagement with politics. Their active resistance after 1948 was a result of this reawakening; it was this progressive democratic system they sought to restore following its destruction by the Communists.²⁰

James: So what were the politics of your family before the war?

Pál: I think my family was not very political before the war but we were more political after it...Hungary had been a very conservative country and I think that the liberal Jewish middle class didn't have a major impact on it, but certainly between forty-five and forty-eight it looked like you could have more say...during the early stages of the [Communist] regime we were trying to guard what democracy had been achieved during those couple of post-war years basically.

James: Were you political at that time [under the Communist regime]?

Pál: Very.

James: Were you involved in any way?

Pál: I was involved in some strange ways, on the margins. I remember giving a speech in 1951 when I graduated, just before 15 March²¹...I've got the original text on the original piece of paper, which I can show to you, and it was exceptionally courageous...I don't understand how I dared to say that! And why was I not immediately suspended?

James: What was the atmosphere like?

Pál: Everyone was astounded...the dean of the school, he put his arm around me and said, 'It was wonderful, but you have to be very careful because you are not only endangering yourself and your family, but you are endangering the school as well.'

Pál used this story to present resistance as a viable response to the Stalinist state, even before 1953. He contrasted himself with the rest of society, represented by the hierarchy of the school, which had become atomized and fearful of expressing opinions. He saw himself as part of a liberal tradition which took inspiration from the democratic movements of both 1848 and 1945-8 and which dared to speak to Communist power.

Liberals also engaged in greater resistance than other groups because they did not see themselves as likely victims of an all-powerful state. Unlike conservatives, who avoided expressing even the smallest forms of dissent for fear of being victimized, they did not envisage that they would be severely punished for their active opposition. Rózsa, for example, was involved in an organization that aimed to overthrow the state, should the opportunity arise:

Rózsa: ...[we] did a little bit of propaganda, against the regime,
and a little bit of sabotage...and I would draft
pamphlets...and they would distribute them in the
village, and perhaps I would distribute a couple in Újpest
and just stick them up somewhere. They were little home-
made things; that was the sort of organization. It didn't
have a name or anything.

Despite this, she was surprised when two of her colleagues were executed and she herself received a prison sentence. Even when involved in a terrorist anti-state organization, she believed that she 'hardly did anything' and expected that the Communist state would judge her opposition more fairly:

Rózsa: ...I mean I wasn't really doing anything, come to think of
it (laughs)...although it was nothing, in objective terms,

they hadn't done anything at all, in the end two of them were executed...my husband got a life sentence and I got fourteen years for that. We hardly did anything.

Whilst liberals engaged in dissenting activities throughout the early Communist period, the extent to which they resisted at any given time was determined by the opportunities provided by the system. Before 1953, most felt that open, direct opposition was impossible. Rather, they engaged in what James C. Scott termed 'infrapolitical' resistance;²² finding subtle, indirect ways to undermine power that would be difficult to detect or punish. Liberal respondents reported that they used graffiti, rumour-mongering and joke-telling:

Dávid: Well for example, there were some serious cases at the school – the walls always had to be decorated, the pictures of our leaders were always there...I think on one occasion we had a special May 1 decoration and the slogan 'Éljen Rákosi' was put up and someone in pencil put an F in front of Éljen, which became Féljen, and instead of 'Long Live Rákosi', it said 'Rákosi should be afraid', and they were searching the whole school and questioning students and they never found out who did it. Of course we knew who did it.

Liberals presented the death of Stalin in 1953 as a turning point. Under a weakened state, they began to form networks of opposition. Army service was often mentioned by men as an environment in which they discovered that those from other social backgrounds were equally alienated from the regime. No longer believing that they were isolated in their anti-Communism, they were spurred on to further oppositional activity:

Ödön: The only place where you could eventually find out about people's real thinking was the army...masks fell away from a certain number of people and I still remember how shocked I was when one of these peasant boys, who owed everything to the Communist Party, told me once, when we were resting between two bouts of exercise, 'they only have to teach me how to get behind enemy lines and they will never see me again' (laughs)...So, very paradoxically, in the army, where you suffer from restrictions...we had more freedom there because people talked to each other, especially when there was a person-to-person situation. You were sent out, two people to stand guard in front of the ammunition...and, you know, between two and four in the morning you walk up and down there, and you struggle against sleep and you are much more honest with each other.

Unlike conservatives, liberals' idealization of resistance meant that after 1953 they were prepared to use the greater opportunities available to them under a weakened state to express new forms of dissent in public places. However, their earlier experience of 'infrapolitical' resistance meant that they still disguised their activities to avoid punishment. Pál hid his new public opposition behind a demonstration which appeared to be focussing on a non-political sporting issue:

Pál: The first time I protested in the street followed the Hungarian football team's defeat by the West Germans [in the World Cup Final] in 1954. We decided that we must pray that the Hungarians be defeated. I should say that we weren't interested in football. I was anxiously sitting in front of the radio and delighted at every goal that they let in, because I knew that it might lead to demonstrations in Budapest...because the Communist Party so much associated itself with sporting glories, that when there wasn't any glory they had to suffer from it...and for about half an hour I was walking with the demonstration demanding the dismissal of the Minister of Sport, and I do think this was a run-up to the [1956] uprising.

Both liberals and conservatives were opposed to the Communist state after 1948. Yet whereas conservatives withdrew from political activity, liberals idealized the political fight against Communism, and found greater room to engage in public resistance after 1953. By contrast, left-wing respondents had a more ambivalent attitude towards the new regime than either of these groups. Support for leftist ideologies had been growing within the intellectual and professional middle class since the turn of the century:²³ some had supported the short-lived Communist regime of 1919;²⁴ many more were pushed further to the left by the political success of right-wing authoritarianism in the inter-war period.²⁵ The experience of wartime German occupation and the Holocaust further radicalized many younger and Jewish members of the middle class, propelling them towards the Communist party as the best protection against Fascism's return after 1945.²⁶

James: So can you tell me the story of how you joined the party...who invited you or...

Ádám: I came over from Buda to Pest. Buda was freed a bit later from the German occupation than Pest. My big task was how to join a movement that would guarantee to me that the Germans, those fascists, would not be able to occupy Hungary again, or at least they would not be backed by society if something awful was to happen again. So I was openly looking for left-wing anti-fascist movements...

Despite an initial enthusiasm for the Communist party,²⁷ many left-wingers from the middle class reassessed their support following their experience of show trials, anti-bourgeois discrimination and the rigidly imposed Soviet Stalinist economic model. Most had questioned their faith in the Communist state by the early 1950s.²⁸ Before the death of Stalin, however, they did not view resistance as an appropriate way to express their opposition.

Prior to 1953, socialists did not oppose Stalinism actively because they were neither willing nor able to engage with the political sphere. Their alienation from the Communist movement left most disenchanted with politics and ashamed at having supported an oppressive system. Sándor was radicalized during his army service where he saw peasants committing suicide as a result of collectivization. Disillusioned and embarrassed, he withdrew from politics and ‘tended his gardens’:

Sándor: During my army service it became clear what was going on in the country...I think we succeeded once or twice to keep the old men from hanging themselves. But then I thought that that's not really what we really want to do, and kind of decided to ‘tend my gardens’. I don't think I decided to fight or oppose or whatever...not, no, I was in no way political or in any way active until the spring of 1956...I don't say that I was in deep mourning when Joseph Vissarionovich died, but I was shocked, I still

thought that Joseph Stalin was the commander of the
liberating armies...but then that's typical metropolitan
intellectual 'big mouthiness'...

Their withdrawal from politics was also due to the erosion of their belief that they were qualified to critique the system effectively. They had internalized the Communist idea that they were, at best, reformed members of the 'former exploiting classes', and were not able to judge the best interests of 'the masses'. Their final disaffection with the movement was seldom presented as the product of their own experiences; rather, their stories of departure nearly always focussed on the discovery of the suffering of other social groups – such as poor peasants (see the above quotation) or the urban working class – to which the Communist state was expected to provide advantages.

Lastly, socialists refused to express opposition because they were unable to find social spaces in which to resist the regime in meaningful ways. Liberals were able to find opportunities for dissent despite the Stalinist state's effective control of the public sphere because they valued 'infrapolitical resistance' at the margins. For socialists, the only significant form of resistance was direct, open criticism of abuses of power and such opportunities were not available to them in the early 1950s.

Socialists began to criticize the regime publicly only after the Stalinist system started to be dismantled in 1953. Many used stylized anecdotes of an everyday experience which followed Stalin's death in order to illustrate the way in which Hungarian society suddenly

had become willing to challenge Communist power. Mihály, a left-leaning respondent who had turned his back on the party, had been sent to report for radio on a Russian version of Hamlet. Despite the presence of Révai, the former Minister of Education, at the theatre, the audience was now prepared to murmur ideologically unacceptable comments at the Russian actors. The spectators repeated the brutish phrases they remembered from the Soviet occupation in 1945, thus tarnishing the Communist-sponsored image of the Red Army as the liberators of Hungary from Fascism.²⁹

Mihály: The big Russian theatres came to Hungary and were performing Hamlet in Russian and a lot of people were there. Everybody knew that nobody would understand anything, but it was packed, and I was there from the radio. We were behind Révai's box and there was a scene where the ghost is talking to Hamlet and the actor was just repeating 'Gamlet Gamlet!'³⁰, and there was an incredible murmur of 'Gamlet, Gamlet, Idi syuda, davai chasy!' [Hamlet, Hamlet, Come Here, Give Me Your Watch]...everybody in the audience thought they alone were murmuring that stupid thing, and then the actor also said, 'Gamlet, Gamlet, Idi syuda, davai chasy!' That was the Russians in forty-five: 'idi syuda, davai chasy!' I'll never forget Révai's face; it lengthened and paled. Then

the entire audience was whispering, 'Gamlet, Gamlet, idi syuda, davai chasy'.

Their expression of resistance after 1953 was primarily the result of a re-engagement with politics. After Stalin's death, a new leadership in Moscow insisted that the Stalinist regime under Rákosi be replaced by a less hard-line government. In July 1953, a reformist leadership under Imre Nagy began their 'New Course', a programme which advocated a more flexible approach to the agricultural and industrial sectors, an end to the arbitrariness of political persecution and an attempt to gain a limited popular legitimacy.³¹ This revitalized socialists' faith in the possibilities of Communism and induced them to re-enter the political sphere. Mátyás, for example, had found his support for Communism severely shaken following the deportations of relatives and friends whom he knew to be sincere 'anti-fascists', but after 1953 had his faith in the possibilities of Communism restored:

Mátyás: There was the deportation of my relatives, which we were unbelievably shaken by, but still we disregarded it and continued to be Communists. But I felt very ashamed then and to tell you the truth I still do. I was really ashamed because of that. We didn't support them [the party]...and it was not very nice, but I'm sure that this heightened sense of shame contributed to the fact that,

when Imre Nagy came in 1953, we changed very quickly,
if you like, we were on a new road...

Reinvigorated by the possibility of fighting for a more democratic form of Communism, these respondents were now prepared to resist the attempted re-imposition of hard-line Stalinism when Rákosi mounted a political comeback in spring 1955. Jenő decided to confront Rákosi himself at a district meeting of the Communist Party:

Jenő: From 1954 onwards, I was consciously in opposition within the party. This was especially so when in March 1955 Imre Nagy was relieved of the post of prime minister...I felt it was necessary to take on the anti-Stalinist fight against Rákosi, as did my friends...I was indignant I was going to fight against [Nagy's] marginalization and sacking. Then in the spring of 1956 directly after the Twentieth Party Congress in the Soviet Union, an unexpected opportunity arose for me to do something in the interests of this struggle. In the district where I taught, they informed us about Khrushchev's secret speech and about Stalin's crimes being revealed...They invited me to this [meeting] and unexpectedly Mátyás Rákosi himself came. He sat there and listened for an hour and a half to a roll call of Stalin's crimes and nodded his head like this. After this I put my

hand up and rose to speak and I said that now there was a big opportunity internationally to renew the Communist movement, not on a Stalinist basis but putting the movement on an entirely new footing. I argued that it could be done here in Hungary, but the party leadership is preventing it, because they are holding to past political errors, and then I spoke out, saying that neither the people nor the party membership have any more faith in the present person of the party leader, Comrade Rákosi, who is sitting beside me...it had a great effect, not just there, but all over. It wasn't in the newspapers, but it spread by word of mouth throughout Budapest in two days. I presumed that he would not dare to arrest me, and if he arrested me he was once again turning against the people...which would result in a strong movement for his removal...

In addition, socialists now had public fora in which they were able to criticize power directly. We should not always assume that greater opportunity is sufficient reason to explain an outburst of dissent. Socialists withdrew from dissent before 1953 not because resistance per se was unthinkable, but because the type of resistance they wanted to express – open, direct and public – was impossible. Such resistance became feasible only during the increasingly open intellectual environment of Nagy's Hungary. At dissident

intellectual meetings such as those held by the Petőfi Circle, or at public demonstrations such as the one which followed the reburial of Rajk,³² socialists discovered the social spaces in which they thought it appropriate to express opposition. Alajos' testimony illustrated this change; he had initially turned away from the Communist movement in the early 1950s, disheartened by the lack of intellectual freedom and restrictions on his travel. However, without any public outlet for his opposition, he decided to 'play along':

*James: So what did you mean by 'playing along' in the early
 fifties?*

Alajos: Oh, it meant that...I was learning Russian properly at
 school, and went to meetings of the Young Communist
 League...so I mean I didn't oppose the regime in any
 active sense before 1953, this is clear, before the death of
 Stalin...that is, if I had thoughts I noted them down. I
 kept a diary. Things which I disagreed with, I wrote them
 down in my diary.

Alajos emphasised that for him 'real resistance' began only in 1956. Unlike liberals, he had not valued the secret opposition he had engaged in prior to this. Only after the Twentieth Party Congress in February 1956, where Khrushchev's denunciation of 'Stalinist excesses' gave reformists license to criticize Stalinism publicly, did his 'fun' begin:

Alajos: Now fun – fun started really in fifty-six after the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party, because then you could actually openly challenge people in seminars, and not only Hungarian literature seminars...but in Marxist-Leninist seminars too, you could say more or less what you thought...I was a member of the Petőfi Circle... I went to the famous press debate in the Petőfi Circle which was absolute pandemonium, I mean, after which, had Rákosi arrested the five thousand people who were there, he could have gotten away with it, but he didn't have enough power to do that...on 6 October 1956 you had the Rajk Reburial...when I was coming out after the speeches...I saw a little group with a flag and they were sort of beckoning to me to join in. I joined in, and then I found somebody...a bloke I knew from the Széchenyi library who said, 'Somebody told me there's going to be a demonstration'. 'Where are you going to?' 'Oh, we're going to Hősök Tere [Heroes' Square], and then to the Batthyány Örökmécses.' This is a flame in memory of Lajos Batthyány who was the Prime Minister of Hungary in 1849, and was executed.³³ This is a kind of place

where people go, sort of a 'Martyrs' Corner'. All right, so I joined the group. It wasn't particularly political, but we started producing slogans together...between 1945 and 1948, the Communist party slogan was: 'We're not going to stop half-way. Let reaction perish!' So we adapted this slogan, instead of saying 'reaction' saying 'Stalinism', so 'We are not going to stop half-way. Let Stalinism perish!' And then we shouted over and over, two hundred people, as we marched with this flag, and people looked at us, and they didn't understand what was going on...I read out a poem by Atilla József,³⁴ which is a patriotic poem ending with the words, 'So that we shouldn't be a German colony', but I read, 'So we shouldn't be a foreign colony'.

The extent and type of resistance respondents expressed was determined as much by complex social codes that surrounded political engagement as by the opportunities they had to oppose the state. Despite greater possibilities for opposing the Communist state after 1953, only socialists and liberals did so. Regardless of opportunities, conservatives saw political engagement as a form of collaboration and looked to withdraw into the private sphere. Liberals idealized active opposition as they had been politicized by their experience of post-war democracy and wished to fight for its return after 1948; they initially resisted only at the margins, but increasingly found semi-public arenas in which

to express dissent after 1953. Despite quickly moving against the Communist state they had initially supported, socialists refrained from resistance until 1953; only when politically re-engaged by the hope of reforming the Communist state and given opportunities for direct, public dissent did they view it as an appropriate activity.

These different attitudes towards resistance continued to shape individuals' behaviour even in October 1956, when Budapest became the epicentre of the most powerful popular uprising during the early Communist period in central-eastern Europe. The revolt was initiated by student demonstrations on 23 October, but by the time the uprising was put down on 4 November a wide spectrum of Hungary's urban population had played a role. The question of social involvement has been a central one both for a range of political forces since 1956, who have used the social makeup of the resisters to advocate particular political interpretations of the uprising,³⁵ and for historians, who have attempted to pinpoint the backgrounds and aims of the revolutionaries. The re-constituted Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party under Kádár manipulated the question of involvement; they presented the post-1956 Communist state as the saviour of Hungary from a counter-revolution led by reactionary forces intent on restoring Fascism. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, historians focussed on the role of dissenting intellectuals and young, reformist-minded students in starting revolutionary movements.³⁶ In the 1970s, the left-wing British sociologist Bill Lomax argued that urban workers and their factory councils were the real embodiment of heroism.³⁷ In the 1970s and 1980s, the dissident socialist opposition was increasingly united around the image of 1956 as a fight for a more democratic form of socialism by reform Communist intellectuals. Since 1991, a multi-

party democracy has spawned a range of political forces who claim to bear the mantle of 1956: conservative nationalist politicians, for instance, have increasingly presented the uprising as a 'fight for freedom' by 'ordinary people' who took to street fighting in the name of liberal democracy.³⁸ This resistance-obsessed historiography has produced some excellent studies of the participation of various social groups. However, there has been less interest in producing a comparative framework which examines the varied, and often ambivalent, responses that different groups had to the uprising.

Oral history testimony reflected the debates within Hungary since 1956 about involvement in the uprising as much as it illustrated participation at the time. On one hand, respondents' narratives demonstrated how mobilization was closely linked with traditions of resistance within certain social groups. On the other, testimony was strongly influenced by the widespread idealization of active resistance against the Communist state in the years since 1956. These two pressures often meant that personal narratives about 1956 were contradictory or potentially misleading: respondents celebrated the martyrs of 1956 as heroes whilst condemning their friends who took part, or created imaginary roles for themselves when they were not involved. Rather than see these contradictory stories as problematic and inaccurate, they should be viewed as complex narratives which reveal the ways in which individuals have attempted to reconcile their own involvement with the ways in which their society now expects the story of 1956 to be told.

Many conservatives idealized the uprising, despite abhorring political resistance before 1956. Bálint characterized it as a 'morally clean' revolution in which the nation was unified in struggle. He identified with the aims of the younger generation and workers, who he argued were the driving forces behind the revolution:

Bálint: It was an absolutely morally clean revolution – we were there so our impressions were direct ones. There was no looting...not one single case of looting. It's so unusual...whenever there is an uprising the first thing is that people go looting...those who took part were all young people and it was not the intellectuals. Those who actively took part were not from the political strata but from the most suppressed ones: workers, young people, even some from the army or police...They were workers and simple people...no aristocrats, no noble people who were deprived of all their fortunes and so on. It was a spontaneous rising up in favour of something better.

In this quotation, he challenged those who demonized the revolution by questioning its social makeup, rejecting the Communist-sponsored image of 1956 as a reactionary aristocratic counter-revolution. He also refuted the left-wing interpretation which emphasized the role of dissident Communist Party intellectuals in fermenting the uprising, preferring to identify with the role of the 'suppressed' and 'simple' people who

spontaneously wanted 'something better'. The revolution was stripped of its political nuances in order that he could identify with its heroic protagonists. However, when asked about his own participation, he denied any personal involvement and categorized active insurgents as collaborators (who were prepared to 'adapt to the circumstances'), from whom he had tried to distance himself in the aftermath of the revolution:

James : *So in 1956, were any of your family or friends involved?*

Bálint: No, no, I mean, no close relatives were involved...we did not have any direct contact to those who were actively involved...

James: *So what do you think the reason was?*

Bálint: Well (sighs), we, no one in our family is of a revolutionary type. I mean, we are not fond of extremities ...We were never involved in politics at all...we were patriots and Christians...we were considered to be people who would never give in, we would never fight against them [i.e the Communists] openly, or demonstrate against them, carrying posters and banners in the streets. We simply disliked them and did not believe in them. That's all. So we were not dangerous for them...

James: So what did you think of the people who were actively involved [in the 1956 uprising]?

Bálint: Well, in some cases we tried to understand their situation [of those who participated in the uprising], about their motivations, but this did not mean we agreed with them... They were prepared to adapt themselves to the circumstances, so they were ready to collaborate to some extent... Now, especially in the cases of those who were heavily involved, we tried to minimise contacts with them.

These respondents now have a divided memory of the events of 1956. They have accepted the idea, promoted by conservatives in post-Communist Hungary, that 1956 was a gallant (if tragic) first step in the fight against Communism. In this historically decontextualized interpretation, the uprising has become a symbol of the fight for democratic freedoms and national independence which were achieved after 1989. In conservative collective memory, the reform Communist revolutionary leader Imre Nagy has been stripped of his socialist past and has come to be remembered primarily as a nationalist hero.³⁹ On the other hand, this new interpretation clashed with their earlier abhorrence of resistance and their idealization of inner emigration and political

withdrawal. Conservatives therefore found it difficult to construct a coherent narrative which reconciled these opposing views of the uprising.

Conservatives wished to be seen as reliable witnesses of the courageousness of the struggle. Yet they often stressed their absence from the uprising, for fear of being seen as active revolutionaries. Resolving the tension inherent in being an absent yet trustworthy witness was a central theme of their stories. Mária achieved this by placing herself at the end of a telephone; it was thus possible for her to give a personalized running account of the action whilst deflecting any suspicion that she was a participant:

Mária: In the summer of 1956 we really could feel the situation thawing. I didn't want to believe it, when on the afternoon the 23 October 1956 an acquaintance telephoned from the city centre and said that the revolution had broken out, and told us he was going to tear down the Stalin statue. He worked there at Damjanich street, where the Stalin statue was. I said that it couldn't have happened, it was impossible. Then on the following day we realized that revolution had really broken out, everybody joined together, there was such peace, there was such love, everybody expressed their love for everybody else...

Where they became involved in the uprising, conservatives did not attempt to hide the fact: their post-Communist celebration of 1956 has meant that a minimal involvement is not a source for shame or regret. However, their earlier abhorrence of direct confrontation continued to shape their narratives: they presented their roles as unintentional and denied that their actions constituted political resistance. Erzsébet treated the injured Hungarian fighters and Soviet troops. She portrayed her involvement as neutral (she was accidentally asked), humanitarian (as she helped both sides equally) and apolitical (she had no interest in the meaning of the revolution even whilst it was happening). Even where conservatives found themselves caught up in the uprising, their testimony confirmed the absence of a culture of political resistance:

Erzsébet: And when the problems started in fifty-six, we acted together, replacing all those who couldn't come in for the next shift. The medical students who were on the premises were asked if we could do the normal shift work...my husband became the ambulance man and I was the assistant – so we transported the injured, whatever their origin. We picked up Hungarians, Russians. Anybody who was injured, we treated them equally.

James: Can you tell me some more of your experiences of that?

Erzsébet: At that time you didn't try to analyse anything, you just had a task to perform, and didn't ask why I am doing this, what the future might bring, it didn't enter the thought process...there was a lack of interest in political happenings, and political life, I suppose, at that time, as well.

Unlike conservative respondents, liberals and socialists did not find the presentation of their own involvement in the 1956 uprising problematic. They lived in a political culture which idealized active resistance during 1956, and are now part of a post-Communist culture which also celebrates participation in the uprising. They therefore pushed involvement in the uprising to the forefront of their narratives. One socialist respondent gave himself a crucial role in the uprising, claiming that he had started it by marginalizing the importance of another demonstration:

Alajos: I was one of the organizers of the student demonstration on 23 October 1956...I – actually, four of us – started the organization on the 22 October...I was the one who stood up for the demonstration at the faculty. There were two groups which demonstrated the next day. One of them started from the Petőfi statue, the other group started in Buda from the Műegyetem [Polytechnic], marching to the Bem statue, but without slogans, that was a silent

demonstration. Our demonstration was the real one in a sense, because we shouted slogans and people knew what we wanted, and I was the person who actually said to about ten thousand people, ‘Okay, start!’ (laughs). So my wife sometimes says, ‘My husband started the Hungarian revolution!’

Lóránt, a liberal, presented himself as a revolutionary hero whose resistance activities prior to 1956 had prepared him for a role in the uprising as a member of a revolutionary Workers’ Council and organizer of a potential armed insurgency:

James: So what other things would constitute your own personal heroism?

Lóránt: ...I don’t think I was a great hero until about late fifty-five when there was this general livening up of things, and there was the Petőfi Kör and I was fairly active there. By that time I was working in industry. At the place where I worked I organized a small group and taught them English which was definitely a non-official thing to do. During the actual events of 1956, I was quite active in the middle of Budapest, and also in this factory where I worked and there I was elected a member of the Workers’

Council. We also organized, we made trenches, and we collected weapons, and then we got in touch with some secret groups which used to belong to the Hungarian army...

Some respondents from these backgrounds invented narratives of involvement, despite not having taken part in the uprising. There was no intended deception; their fictional nature was made explicit. Rather, these imaginary stories should be read a manifestation of liberal and socialist identity; stories of active political opposition were considered more important than what one actually did. Viktor's well thought-out narrative about what he might have done was more important to him than what had actually happened:

Viktor: If I had been in Budapest at the time, on 22 or 23 October, I'm sure that I would have joined up with the university students, even if I was working.

James: So how.... why do you think you would have been involved in the demonstration on 23 October?

Viktor: Because I've always been a little bit, sort of, revolutionary. I like to be different, you know...I never considered myself a courageous man who would have been on the barricades on the front line in the Corvin Köz

[Corvin Alley].⁴⁰ But I would have been involved, definitely, I would have been involved, not because I feel I'm a revolutionary, but I'm a bit of a free thinker. You know what I mean. And I don't really like to comply all the time and get put into a melting pot and be the same as the others.

Regardless of whether individual respondents were involved, all liberals and socialists testified to cultures of resistance which had been built up in the years preceding the revolution and led to a very rapid mobilization against the Communist state. By contrast, conservatives, even during the first great challenge to Communist power in central-eastern Europe, still considered direct political confrontation abhorrent. Their celebration of 1956 was the result only of a later nationalist idealization of anti-Communist resistance.

In the immediate post-Fascist and post-Communist periods, stories of resistance to the previous regime have come to dominate history writing and have been shaped by the political needs of new states. For instance, historians in post-war West and East Germany sought to use resistance stories to legitimate their new state and demonize the other across the Iron Curtain. Western historians presented their republic as the inheritor of conservative resistance against Nazism and its population as untainted by support for fascism; in the east, by contrast, the Communist state presented itself as the heirs of Communist anti-Fascist resistance, and West Germany as the refuge for supporters of

Hitler's regime.⁴¹ A similar phenomenon has emerged in post-Communist central-eastern Europe. At the sitting of the first post-Communist Hungarian parliament, the following declaration preceded all business: 'The Uprising of 1956 laid the foundation for the hope that it is possible to achieve a democratic social order, and that no sacrifice for our country's independence is made in vain. Although the ensuing suppression reinstated the old power structure, it could not eradicate the spirit of 1956 from people's minds.' Just as the two post-war Germanies erased those traditions of resistance which did not help to legitimate their new states, so the varied motives for dissent in Hungary were forgotten and the story of resistance shaped into a struggle whose inevitable outcome was the liberal democratic state in 1989.⁴²

The obsession with heroic confrontation serves to reinforce ahistorical, post-Communist celebrations of dissent; we should develop a comparative social history which transcends the narrow demands of post-1989 national historiographies and instead addresses the wide variety of strategies that people used to live in opposition. Although groups from across the Hungarian political spectrum now celebrate active involvement in the 1956 uprising, at the time there existed vastly differing ideas about how to live under illegitimate power; some asserted the need to confront the state directly, whilst others believed that withdrawal into an apolitical private existence was more appropriate.

Yet, in general, new social histories have not yet challenged the established stories of monolithic heroic resistance in central-eastern Europe; in Poland, for example, dominant narratives still stress the ability of unified working-class resistance to reach across

political and class divides and become a mouthpiece for Polish society as a whole.⁴³

Superficially, at least, Polish resistance appeared much less politically fractured than in Hungary. Firstly, the country was not divided by the experience of a collaborationist state during the Second World War. Secondly, researchers have noted that amongst the Polish working class there existed a social memory of shared persecution by outsiders (the Jewish-German middle class of the interwar era, the wartime German occupation and then the post-war Soviet occupation) that shaped a collective sense of class and national interest to be defended.

Yet some studies have started the attempt to dismantle the idea of monolithic societal resistance and investigate the range of strategies used by Poles. Despite widespread opposition, some revisionist scholars have begun to address why certain groups decided to accommodate themselves to the Communist state.⁴⁴ Others have examined how social divides between different dissenters shaped very different approaches to resistance. In particular, some studies have emphasized the role of gender; for example, male protesters in heavy industry and shipbuilding frequently stressed the role of men in defending Poland and Polish workers' rights, and deliberately excluded women from public confrontation with the state. By contrast, some women viewed male, working-class protest as a form of collaboration as it accepted the state's assumptions that only labour issues were a legitimate cause for confrontation whereas domestic and consumer issues were not. These women chose very different (and often more successful) strategies to express their opposition.⁴⁵ Only by removing ourselves from the demands of the post-Communist celebration of dissent, by accepting the overwhelming absence of open

protest against Communist states, and by addressing the variety of valid ways in which people chose to live in opposition, can we hope to create a sophisticated social history of resistance in central-eastern Europe.

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¹ On the way in which different groups in post-Communist Hungary have competed to claim anti-Communist resistance as their own, see H. Nyíessön, The Presence of the Past in Politics: '1956' after 1956 in Hungary (Jyväskylä, 1999), pp.178-81, 245-51.

² For the attempted revival of fascist 'anti-Communist' heroes in post-Communist Hungary, see I. Rév, 'Counterrevolution', in S. Antohi and V. Tismaneanu (eds.), Between Past and Future: The Revolutions of 1989 and Their Aftermath (Budapest, 2000). On the rehabilitation of the rightist Marshal Antonescu as the protector of the Romanian nation from Communism, see M. Temple, 'The Politicisation of History: Marshal Antonescu and Romania', Eastern European Politics and Societies, x (1996), 457-503.

³On the inability of János Kádár, the leader of the reconstituted Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party after 1956, to utter the name of the leader of the 1956 uprising, see I. Rév, 'The Necronym', Representations, lxiv (1998), 78-108.

⁴ For an academic call not to see society as a homogeneous force for resistance, see R.S. Watson (ed.), Memory, History and Opposition Under State Socialism (Santa Fe, 1994) especially the introduction.

⁵ Ekiert states, for instance, 'contemporary research on collective protest convincingly demonstrates that political mobilisation [of 'society'] is shaped by the structure of political opportunities offered by the state...'; G. Ekiert, The State Against Society: Political Crises and their Aftermath in East Central Europe (Princeton, 1996), p.5. See also J. C. Scott, Domination and the Arts of Resistance (New Haven and London, 1990); despite providing one of the most subtle and provoking analyses of resistance, he assumes it to be a natural response to repressive power. For him, people do not resist because they are weak and 'atomised', not because they deliberately chose to withdraw from confrontation.

⁶ An exception is J. Staniszkis, The Ontology of Socialism (Oxford, 1992), pp.127-31. See also J.K. Coetzee and H. Otakar, 'Oppression, Resistance and Imprisonment' in K. L. Rogers, S. Leydesdorff and G. Dawson, Trauma and Life Stories. International Perspectives (London and New York, 1999), pp.80-94. They compare examples of South African and Czechoslovak persecution under apartheid and Communism respectively, analysing why South Africans saw the suffering in their lives as a basis for political action, whereas Czechs did not.

⁷ In this article, the term ‘middle class’ refers to those who came from the inter-war middle class (prior to its formal destruction by the Communists in 1948). It includes those from intellectual/professional backgrounds, the economically independent bourgeoisie, and civil servants. It excludes those from the ‘lower-middle class’ such as clerks and shopkeepers. For this definition, see G. Gyáni and G. Kövér, Magyarország Társadalom Története. A Reformkortól a Második Világháborúig (Budapest, 1998), pp.224-54.

⁸ For an account of the mixture of discrimination and opportunity experienced by the middle classes, see J. Mark, ‘Discrimination, Opportunity and Middle Class Success in early Communist Hungary’, Historical Journal, forthcoming June 2005.

⁹ In the 1930s, those of Jewish origin constituted 50% of merchants, 60% of the legal profession, and 44% of doctors, but only 5% of public servants.

¹⁰ For how fear of Bolshevism after 1917 pushed the European middle class to the right, see C. Wrigley, *The Red Menace. The Russian Revolution and Europe*, Modern History Review, v (1994), 20-23. For the idea that the Hungarian middle class ‘sold out’ to right-wing authoritarianism, see F. Erdei, Selected Writings, ed. T. Huszár (Budapest, 1988), pp.45-54; G. Szekfű, Három Nemzedék és Ami Utána Következik (Budapest, 1935); for a critique of this idea, see Gyáni and Kövér, Magyarország Társadalom Története, pp.224-7.

¹¹ The Stalinist system, characterized by the use of extreme state power to effect rapid industrialization, the collectivization of agriculture and the marginalization of political opponents, lasted between 1949 and 1953. The period of ‘destalinization’, during which a new Communist elite attempted to correct the extremes of this initial period, establish a

limited popular legitimacy and put national interests above Soviet ones, lasted between 1953 and 1956.

¹² G. Gyarmati, J. Botos, T. Zinner and M. Korom, Magyar Hétköznapiak Rákosi Mátyás Két Emigrációja Között 1945-1956 (Budapest, 1988), pp.114-20; G. Gyarmati, 'Harc a közigazgatás birtoklásáért. A koalíción belül pártküzdelmek az 1946. évi hatalmi dualizmus időszakában' in Századok, iii (1996), 497-570. Some 100,000 people were 'b-listed' in the workplace and were thus deprived of the right to gain public employment or vote; Gyarmati argues that this included not only fascists but also many members of the centre-right Smallholders' Party. About one in ten adult males suffered some type of punitive exclusion in Hungary in the immediate post-war years. See L. Karsai, 'The People's Courts and Revolutionary Justice in Hungary 1945-46', in I. Deák, J.T. Gross, and T. Judt, The Politics of Retribution in Europe. World War Two and Its Aftermath (Princeton, 2000), p.233.

¹³ Between May and July 1951, 14,000-15,000 members of the old upper and middle classes were deported from their homes in Hungary's major cities and resettled in the area around Hortobágy, where they were forced to become menial workers.

¹⁴ On the inability of the post-war political system to integrate the moderate conservative middle class, see I. Bibó, 'The Crisis of Hungarian Democracy', in id., Democracy, Revolution, Self-Determination (New York, 1991), pp. 107-8. See also M. Szabó, 'Magyar nemzettudat-problémák a huszadik század második felében', in N. Fokasz and A. Örkény (eds.), *Magyarország Társadalomtörténete 1945-89* (Budapest, 1999), vol. 2, p.304. He blamed 'másik Magyarország' (the 'other', conservative, Hungary) for its

failure to integrate itself with a new, 'progressive' Hungary and for their continued idealisation of the Horthy period.

¹⁵ For the importance of Hungarian churches in maintaining conservative outlooks under Communism, see J. Wittenberg, 'Did Communism Matter? Explaining Political Continuity and Discontinuity', Ph.D. diss. (Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1999), pp.160-86.

¹⁶ A populist writer, famous for his account of rural poverty in Hungary in the 1930s ('People of the Puszta'), who became an outspoken critic of Stalinism.

¹⁷ At a Budapest 13th district Communist Party meeting conducted immediately after Khrushchev's Secret Speech denouncing Stalin's errors, György Litván suggested to Rákosi that he should resign. For Litván's own account, see 'A Nagy Imre-csoport kialakulása és tevékenysége 1955. április-1956.július', Társadalmi Szemle, vi (1992), 89-95.

¹⁸ Z. L. Nagy, The Liberal Opposition in Hungary 1919-45 (Budapest, 1983), p.30; I. Bibó, 'Crisis', pp.134-6. In the Budapest municipal elections of 7 October 1945, the liberal Civic Democratic Party (Polgári Demokrata Párt) received only 3.83% of the vote.

¹⁹ Nagy, Liberal Opposition, p.13; she states that 'middle class radicalism as a political trend was ousted from public life, and its remaining adherents withdrew into the sphere of arts, publishing houses and editorial offices of periodicals'.

²⁰ There exists a disagreement between conservatives and the liberal-left in Hungary over whether the period 1945-8 constituted a 'real' democracy that had the potential to thrive before the Communist takeover in 1948, or a 'fake' one that was merely a cover for the increasing power of the Communist Party. For the conservative view, see I. Romsics,

Hungary in the Twentieth Century (Budapest, 1999), pp.219-20. For the opposing interpretation, see C. Gati, 'Eastern Europe before Cominform. The Democratic Interlude in Post-War Hungary' in Survey, xxviii (1984), 99-134. The liberal-left and conservatives of course experienced the period differently, as many of the latter were excluded from participation in post-war political life.

²¹ 15 March was the anniversary of the outbreak of the 1848 Hungarian revolution against the Hapsburgs; it had historical resonance as a symbol of the fight for national independence during the Communist period.

²² Scott, Domination, ch. 7. One analysis has suggested that this 'infra-political' resistance was also practised within industrial working-class communities in this period; M. Pittaway, 'Industrial Workers, Socialist Industrialisation and the State in Hungary, 1948-1958', Ph.D. thesis (University of Liverpool, 1998), pp.327-33.

²³ F. Mucsi, 'A polgári radikalizmus Magyarországon 1900-1914', Történelmi Szemle, xx (1977), 280-314; T. Huszár, Nemzetlét-Nemzettudat-Értelmisség (Budapest, 1984), pp.150-186.

²⁴ For criticism of the middle classes' role in the Communist revolution of 1919, see O. Jászi, Revolution and Counter-revolution in Hungary (Westminster, 1924), pp.115-17.

²⁵ Nagy, Liberal Opposition, p.30; M.M. Kovács, Liberal Professions and Illiberal Politics. Hungary from the Habsburgs to the Holocaust (Oxford, 1994), p.42. On the way in which anti-Semitic discrimination in the inter-war period pushed many Jewish intellectuals towards socialism (rather than Zionism), see M. Lackó, 'A Zsidó Értelmisség a Holocaust Előtt', Magyar Tudomány, xxxix (1994), 651-8.

²⁶ For an exploration of the way in which the fear of fascism fuelled left-wing radicalism in Hungary after 1945, see Bibó, 'Crisis of Hungarian Democracy', p.89.

²⁷ On the appeal of radical left-wing ideology in post-war Hungary, see C. Gati, 'Modernisation and Communist Power in Hungary', East European Quarterly, x (1971), 325-59.

²⁸ On the way in which Communist intellectuals turned against the state, see T. Aczél and T. Méray, Revolt of the Mind (London, 1960). See also personal accounts of this period, such as I.T. Berend, A Történelem- Ahogyan Megéltem (Budapest, 1997); A. Hegedüs, Történelem és a Hatalom Igézetében : Életrajzi Elemzések (Budapest, 1988).

²⁹ On the use of jokes in confronting power, see L. Passerini, Fascism in Popular Memory. The Cultural Experience of the Turin Working Class (London, 1984), pp.68-80.

³⁰ The Russian pronunciation of 'Hamlet'.

³¹ For an outline of Imre Nagy's role as reformer, see J. M. Rainer, Nagy Imre. Politikai Életrajz II. 1953-8 (Budapest, 1999), pp.9-140.

³² In 1949, László Rajk, the former Communist minister of the interior, was arrested, put on trial and then executed. Following Khrushchev's criticisms of Stalin's crimes, he was rehabilitated; his official reburial on 6 October 1956 subsequently became a focal point for dissent.

³³ An 'eternal flame' was constructed by Hungarian nationalists in 1926 to the memory of Lajos Batthyány, who was executed as prime minister of Hungary during the war for independence against Austria in 1848-9; see J.W. Mason, 'Hungary's Battle for Memory', History Today, l/iii (2000), 28-34.

³⁴ A poet and journalist who joined the Communist party in 1930. He was soon expelled, committed suicide in 1937, but his work was later appropriated by the Communist state.

³⁵ For surveys of the multiple meanings of the 1956 uprising, see G. Litván, 'A Forty-Year Perspective on 1956', in T. Cox (ed.), Hungary 1956 – Forty Years On (London, 1997), pp.14-25; Nyeyessön, Presence of the Past; J. M. Rainer, 'Múltunk Kritikus Kérdései – 1956', in Élet és Irodalom, 16 June 2000, 9-10.

³⁶ P. E. Zinner, Revolution in Hungary (New York and London, 1962), ch. 8; P. Kecskemeti, The Unexpected Revolution: Social Forces in the Hungarian Uprising (Stanford, 1961); F. Váli, Rift and Revolt in Hungary. Nationalism versus Communism (Oxford, 1961); Aczél and Méray, Revolt.

³⁷ B. Lomax, Hungary 1956 (London, 1976), pp.17-18; B. Lomax (ed.), Hungarian Workers' Councils in 1956 (New York, 1990), pp.xxi-xxiii.

³⁸ For the role played by lower middle-class and working-class street fighters in Budapest, see Litván, 'A Forty-Year Perspective', p.21; G. Pongrácz, Corvin Köz 1956 (Chicago, 1982); L. Eörsi, Ferencváros 1956: A kerület fegyveres csoportjai (Budapest, 1997).

³⁹ For the changing political meanings associated with Imre Nagy, see K.P. Benziger, 'The Funeral of Imre Nagy. Contested History and the Power of Memory Culture', History and Memory, xii (2000), 142-58 at 155-8; I. Rév, 'Parallel Autopsies', Representations, xlix (1995), 15-39 at 32-3.

⁴⁰ A street running off the main boulevard in Pest where young Hungarian men and boys engaged the Red Army in some of the most brutal street fighting.

⁴¹ See B. Niven, Facing the Nazi Past. United Germany and the Legacy of the Third Reich (London, 2002), pp.62-74.

⁴² This has been a complaint of those from left-wing backgrounds who fought in the uprising for a reformed, more humane version of socialism, rather than for a ‘bourgeois’ liberal democracy: “While in the past most of the friends of the Hungarian revolution emphasized its socialistic and democratic features and its enemies pointed out the bourgeois characteristics, nowadays many politicians and even a few historians want to strip the socialist clothing from 56...[they believe that] the people rejected every form of socialism, and it was only a question of time that the genuine, conservative or bourgeois character of the revolution would prevail.”, György Litván, qu. in Nyyessön, Presence of the Past, p.248.

⁴³ P. Kenney, ‘The Gender of Resistance in Communist Poland’, American Historical Review, civ (1999), 399-425 at 399-400.

⁴⁴ D. Jarosz, ‘How Poles coped with History (1944-1989). Polish History and Problems with National Identity 1944-1989’ in A. Pók, J. Rüsen and J. Scherrern (eds.), European History: Challenge for a Common Future (Hamburg, 2002), pp.45-53, especially the conclusion.

⁴⁵ Kenney, ‘Gender of Resistance’, 421-5.