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LÁSZLÓ NÉMETH:

Rural enemy concepts in Szabad Nép

The churches and the peasantry

in the press propaganda of the communists,

in the period of the takeover of power (1947-1949)

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More than 70 years ago, as the umpteenth change of the system of the twentieth century, communist takeover took place the second time. Intoxicated by the pride of power, governing politics viewed whole social groups as enemies just like 30 years before, at the Bolshevik takeover in 1919, or exactly ten years later, at the elimination of the peasant life-form. For the emerging dictatorship, communities with autonomy, like the church, became enemies. State authority pitted denominations and different social groups against each other as well, therefore in the central communist daily newspaper, a bishop was granted columns simply because he was cooperative, and there were people mentioned on multiple pages for the only reason of being resistant.

Cutting the strength from under the church and the peasantry and their elimination as a broader aim was part of bolshevization. In the years and decades after the Second World War, the Hungarian society was ruled by forces the main purpose of which had been the destruction of values defining their everyday lives. These include the socialisation of denominational schools and the aggressive organisation of producers' cooperatives as well. 1948 is definitely a watershed year regarding these two topics as the School Nationalisation Act was adopted and the organisation of the producers' cooperatives was initiated. These changes affected millions of people and defined the life of society for decades. Furthermore, these aggressive alterations still have an impact today and our society will certainly suffer their consequences long in the future.

The aim and starting points of the research

“In a strange way, the matter of Christianity mingled with the matter of wealthy farmers in the villages” – Szabad Nép quoted an article on Mindszenty in the Swiss paper, Servir. This became clear especially since the autumn of 1948 when the leading politicians and the actors of propaganda as well started to emphasize that the fights against “kulaks” and “clerical reaction” are linked. However, the social division worked in a different dimension as well: they wished to turn the denominations, later the church people, as well as the social strata (for example peasantry) and also, the different groups within those strata against each other.

Regarding the matter of churches, the communists emphasized the separation of the church and the state, in fact, the denominations increasingly depended on political power which forced the

extension of Marxist ideology to all areas of life. In connection with the Mindszenty-case (or other topics), it can also be observed that the Hungarian communist press preferred to quote the foreign communist papers. They wanted to substantiate their own truth that the cardinal's conviction was lawful because even foreign press disapproved of him. Certainly, it raises the – perhaps rhetorical – question, where the foreign press obtained their information from. Regarding the peasantry, the party propaganda was first talking about the confirmation of private property during the seizure of power, later it denied the kolkhozization of agriculture whilst their purpose in fact, was to establish soviet-type producers' cooperatives.

Although later they conducted self-criticism, the assumed role and responsibility of young journalists of Szabad Nép cannot be denied in propaganda. Among others, Péter Kende, Géza Losonczy, Pál Lőcsei and Miklós Vásárhelyi were in the front line of party propaganda. They organized the press discussion in the editorial of Szabad Nép in 1954. I don't share the view and assessment according to which this event would have been a "rebellion", and I don't think too much emphasis should be attributed to it. It is a fact that they expressed criticism of the communist press and, within, their own previous work, and this criticism had its consequences. But also, their earlier work did have consequences, which were really serious. The articles on "kulaks" had been created and published years earlier (and for years continuously), untrue information had been given columns, the notary of Pócspetri had been executed, the propaganda had participated in the ruination of the lives of hundreds of thousands of people, and innocent church people and farmers had been disgraced.

The purpose of this dissertation is to discuss the rural society-related press propaganda of the communist takeover period, the press as an instrument of power and weapon of war. The analyzed medium is Szabad Nép – because this only paper used to determine the policy guidelines and communications practices of the other communist papers. During the discussed period the press was not simply under party control, but it was an integral part of the power structure. Not only did it follow, but also shaped the communist policy.

The dissertation analyzes the more significant articles concerning the churches and peasants from among the rural "enemies" of the communists. It examines the central communist newspaper and the activity of propaganda bodies in major topics like the socialisation of schools, pacts regarding churches, collectivisation, or the persecution of farmers stigmatised as

“kulaks”. Before all this, the dissertation overviews the earlier literature on the topic, propaganda theories and press relations.

Although Szabad Nép had been the paper of a single party, the Hungarian Communist Party (MKP), and later that of the Hungarian Workers' Party (MDP), and naturally it gave place to the spirit and guidelines of the party, it had become the most important press organ of power by 1948. The control of the government and the press was concentrated in the hands of the communists in the previous years, therefore the role of Szabad Nép also changed. It became the most significant paper of the country, the articles published in it informed society at its widest. Of course, it should also be noted here that the paper did not specifically address the masses of rural readers, much rather the ones performing the agitational tasks. “Szabad Nép is the daily bread of people's educators” – as a party education material of the period put it, emphasizing that the people's educator had to “draw on the latest material for their agitation work in the papers”. In the party propaganda, the reading of Szabad Nép was linked to the issue of party membership. It was stated that those who do not read it on a daily basis, cannot be good members of the party.

Therefore, people could both widely read the speeches of Mátyás Rákosi and József Révai, and the writings of party ideologists in the central paper of MKP (later MDP) in the columns of Szabad Nép, which was published daily. There was no need for a special request to publish the speeches and thoughts of the party leaders, since Révai was the editor-in-chief of Szabad Nép. Through them, the Soviet aspects could easily prevail in the paper. Although it is natural for a party paper to serve the interest of its owner, Szabad Nép exceeded simply being a paper of a party. Not only did it influence and determine the life of a party and its supporters, but the whole Hungarian society for decades with its number of copies, (which had reached 350 000 by the end of 1948), with the introduction of the so-called “Szabad Nép half-hours”, and with the “fight against reaction”.

The propaganda in Szabad Nép supported two main goals regarding rural Hungary between the parliamentary elections in 1947 and 1949, in a planned yet sometimes occasional manner, but still according to the will of the Communists. One of them was the nationalisation of schools together with the marginalisation of the church, the other was the organisation of producers' cooperatives, the persecution of “kulaks”. They were trying to convince their readers using the

power of words with the help of agitation propaganda, fighting their assumed enemies on the columns of the paper.

The kind of information the communists who came to total power provided to the readers is well illustrated in the published articles and in their wording in 1948. Since then, the press reports from the press which had been rendered unanimous were not about the really significant news and, in many cases, they failed to reflect reality. The communist press gained more and more publicity and became compulsory reading in a short time despite the fact that its use of language may have been strange to the readers.

Mátyás Rákosi viewed the press as the most important tool of “mass education” and “the education of the nation”. However, this is not what became the real goal: mass education and the education of the nation meant agitation and propaganda, and instead of democracy, a dictatorship was built. Rákosi, as a leading party politician, called the press to order several times and made it clear that he wanted to influence their work. All this, however, was realised in a way that made the press a unanimous, sub-standard propaganda tool. Not only was Szabad Nép an independent press product, but it participated in the control of other party papers. They had to adjust to it, and the editors-in-chief were to consult it in order to make the most important information appear in a uniform way.

“Our fight against clerical reaction is on the agenda for we follow new politics in the village, the politics of preparation for the building of socialism. The fight against clerical reaction is primarily and closely related to the peasant issue. From this respect, it is crucial that we keep our camp preferably absolutely clean of clerical influence” – as stated during the meeting of the Agitation and Propaganda Committee of MDP (Hungarian Workers’ Party) on the 23rd of November, 1948. They, therefore, connected the propaganda regarding the “kulaks” and the “clerical reaction”.

In the autumn of 1948 many politicians expressed their views on the joint solution of the peasant issue and the church-related issues as well. Week by week, statements were published, classifying these two rural social groups considered as “enemies” in one camp, and stating they were cooperating against the power. The dissertation also investigates the way clerical and peasant “reaction” were linked in the propaganda.

A separate chapter in the work plan of the Press Department was devoted to “The Clerical and Kulak Reaction” in December 1948. Together, in one title. This also indicates that the communist party leadership considered the church- and peasantry-related propaganda a priority, and they also connected the two social groups in this propaganda. They set the press the task of presenting the so-called clerical reaction “as warmongers, enemies of peace, land reform and our democratic achievements, and agents of foreign imperialists. The press was expected to assist the “peoples’ movement”, “facilitate the enhancement of the peoples’ movement to peasantry and women, beyond the youth, and the detachment of the masses from the clerical reaction”. The work plan also confirmed that they connected the persecution of the church with the persecution of peasantry: “Present [i.e. the press] the entanglement of the kulaks and clerical reaction, do not wait for damage and sabotage but make it impossible from the outset.” Do this with articles which “are based on local events, real life and not on general findings.”

Although the press was only one of the tools of propaganda and agitation, its role can be regarded as one of the most important ones. The communists assigned a significant role to the work of people’s educators and individual agitation in which ideological writings published in the press, especially in the central daily paper were used, and the propaganda committee of the communist party also drew the attention of propagandists and agitators to this. The propaganda and topic of this dissertation is typically press-related agitational mass propaganda.

Resources and method of research

The main source of my dissertation is a single daily paper, Szabad Nép. I am not doing a comparative study and given the conditions of the party press and the increasingly homogeneous position of the contemporary press, I do not see the need to analyze articles in other communist newspapers. As a central daily newspaper, Szabad Nép set the direction for other communist newspapers. The press from among the sources of “reaction” is worth having a look, as there may be articles worth examining in the catholic Új Ember or in the reformed weekly, Az Út.

Besides all these, party documents are important sources. The documents of the different organisations, committees and departments of the Hungarian Communist Party and the Hungarian Workers’ Party (for instance the Political Committee, the Organising Committee,

the Agitation and Propaganda Committee and the Press Department) provide an insight into the functioning of the press and the propaganda – going above and beyond the communication of a party as well. The committees and the departments were continuously discussing the propaganda of the party. Blueprints with lengthy explanations were drafted, many of which never reached a decision however, they also shaped the thinking of party functionaries.

My third large group of sources is ideological works and party teaching materials of the time. These are also important sources of the party propaganda even if a substantial part of their content seems a rigmarole, boring text without real content at first sight. These writings repeat each other many times, yet they indicate the directions of propaganda.

I use the memoirs of the late historic figures like László Ravasz, József Mindszenty, Mátyás Rákosi or Dezső Sulyok. They expressed ideas which are also important pieces of additional information on the decisions and behaviour of the communists. These recollections must always be treated with appropriate source critique by the historian, as numerous inaccuracies and material errors can be found in Rákosi's recollection.

This dissertation examines the press qualitatively, by means of text analysis. The purpose of this dissertation is neither a quantitative content analysis nor the creation of statistics and tables. The creation of these and the description and analysis of further subtopics were not even possible within the defined volume. The dissertation aims to present the content of the published articles, its changes and is looking for connections between the different sources. The question is, for example, to what extent did the party control its own press? This would not be a really relevant question if there had been a real, pluralistic press structure in operation in the Hungary of the late 1940s. The question has become an adequate one because the press, which was becoming more and more unanimous and paramount, could reach millions – almost as a compulsory reading – even in the time of the communist takeover.

Press and propaganda had been connected for the communist politicians since the beginning. A longer quote from one of the people responsible for Hungarian communist propaganda, László Orbán, who called propaganda “the great weapon” of the party is worth reading. “Press is the tool of propaganda that is the most widely enforceable tool, a »collective propagandist and agitator« (Lenin.) It is the editors' priority to fully understand the politics of the party to be able to make it known, explain it and articulate certain questions in a sharp, definite and concrete

way. Comrade press officers and editors must thoroughly study the publications dealing with the party politics (materials of the party conference) and the central press itself.” The author emphasized: “It is not enough to write strongly worded articles against reaction; each reactionary phenomenon must be revealed and revenge must be demanded.”

The propaganda expert of the communist party also drew attention to the need for the propagandists and the press to engage with the countryside as well. Therefore he suggested that they write about the villages, too. He emphasized that the editors pay attention to the quality of the papers, avoiding “phrases and meaningless commonplace expressions”. The authors and editors were not keen to take this warning of László Orbán, as expressions like these exactly were ubiquitously published in the communist papers.

The Educational Department of HCP (MKP) published practical knowledge of rural propaganda as well. Based on earlier communist theories, the publication summarized the most important information on propaganda. The task of propaganda was also drafted in it: the propagation of the party and informing the party members of Marxist theories.

It is worth illustrating it with three examples of what their propaganda emphasized according to the author, Kálmán E. Kovács, and what the party and the state ruled by the party was really characterised by. First of all, the party has a “nationalist characteristic” (in reality, its purpose was internationalism). Secondly, the party protects the “private ownership of the workers, and common people” (in reality, its purpose was nationalization). Third, they are not against religion (in reality, they spread the words of materialistic ideology and politics intending to eliminate churches). This also highlights that communist propaganda was based on lies.

The real question is whether public opinion or propaganda is more worth researching? Although it may be a more worthy and noble task to research the responses of society to the actions of power; I am more interested in how the dictatorship-building power was trying to exert influence on the members of society. Although more and more works aim to examine the public opinion and its research has become easier today than it was in the 1990s, the resources for propaganda research are still more available. The topic of the present research is mostly the ideological position of power and how it may have become a social practice.

When my first study on the propaganda of the beginning of the Rákosi era was published in 2005, I wasn't aware that a few years later such works of historians would be published which examine the communist propaganda. At that time, even rural history research was not carried out on such a large and institutional scale as recently. This gave me a lot of motivation to believe that it is worthwhile to continue working on the topic.

I have divided the dissertation into eleven main chapters. The introduction and the part on historiography are followed by the first larger part which introduces propaganda and press language in general. From among the theorists of propaganda, I would like to highlight Bartlett, Domenach, Ellul and Szulczewski; out of the creators of propaganda- and press theories I would like to highlight Azizjan, Belkov, Kalashnikov, Kalinin, Lenin, and Oszkár Bethlen, and László Orbán from Hungary. Dimitrov, Marr, Stalin, Zoltán Kodály, Lajos Lőrincze and József Révai also reflected on the use and language of the press in the period.

The chapter summarizing the press of the second half of the 1940s deals with the role of the Allied Control Commission and the subsequent press management and control system. It can be stated that the intention of the Communist Party, which had been striving to control the press since 1945, was realized entirely by 1948 in practice. Since June 1948 the high-quality, pluralistic press of the coalition period was becoming more and more monotonous and the main tool of the communist propaganda. This part of the dissertation describes the peculiarities of the centralised Hungarian communist press and is looking especially into the central daily paper Szabad Nép.

The following three chapters contain the analysis of the topic in the title of the dissertation as well. They introduce how the communist press propaganda appeared regarding the church, the protestant denominations and the peasantry, respectively. One part is about the connection between church and state, about the school nationalisation campaign and the press campaigns on the cases of Bakonykúti and Pócspetri.

The second one introduces the appearance of the protestant church leaders in the press, the school nationalisation and the resonance of the agreement between the church and the state. The third deals with the creation of producers' cooperatives, the connection of the "struggle against clerical reaction" with the "peasant issue", and it deals with the use of the expression "kulak". The dissertation concludes with a summary and a list of resources and literature.

The results and conclusions of the research

Based on the contemporary methods of propaganda theory of the period of the communist takeover, it is worth reviewing what characterized the Hungarian communist press propaganda of the period in the examined subject. Based on the categories of Jean-Marie Domenach it can be concluded that

1) the principle of simplification can be continually observed in the propaganda articles. The categories of the three Ts (prohibited, tolerated and supported, in Hungarian: tiltott, tűrt, támogatott) are attributed to the cultural policy of the Kádár-regime and to György Aczél, yet the principle itself appeared in the propaganda of the communist takeover affecting the countryside.

Regarding the church, the church leaders who were unwilling to cooperate with the communists fell into the forbidden, i.e. persecuted category. The tolerated ones, the ones to be convinced, were the church people whom the communists were able to turn to support their side, for example with a leading position. The supported category includes the members of the so-called clergy, who the politicians wanted to win for themselves during this period, and therefore they even gave them some sonorous office.

Such a person was the priest of Bakonykúti, who “was given a leg up” by Rákosi and the communists, and even after his ecclesiastical “torture” he was referred to as an example in Szabad Nép.

There were several events for the propaganda that the Communists did not anticipate, as the events that broke out were not included in their propaganda goals, yet they took advantage of the opportunities inherent in the particular cases. Examples of this could be the aforementioned cases of Bakonykúti and Pócspetri. Once, the case of a village vicar was taken up by the communists, then several people were convicted by martial law. What they had in common, though was that the party and the propaganda attack was aimed at the leaders of the Catholic Church. According to the principle of simplification, an artificially created new term or phrase was used to refer to people who were considered enemies.

Regarding the peasantry, a threefold distinction is visible. The farmers declared “kulaks” were the persecuted ones, it was the middle-peasantry that the communists wanted to win for themselves, and the so-called working peasantry was supported and considered an ally. The articles also revealed that the classification “kulak” was not an economic but a political category. Anyone could be a “kulak” who was thought to be one by the party functionaries and the local communists. Although there was an objective definition of them by the party, that was continually re-evaluated.

Certainly, a twofold distinction also appeared in the propaganda: the categories of good and evil. In the examined period it is less the revelations, much rather the clarification of concepts and the announcing of slogans is characteristic of propaganda. Reaction was evil, and the people and groups conforming to the interests of the power were on the good side. The countryside was a particularly difficult field to the communists, who were unable to communicate with the village including the autonomous farmers and church people.

In the propaganda, it was not the reasoning, but the definite statements that were featured heavily, and it could not be left out of the toolbox of propaganda to evoke emotions, spread lies and fake news, or keep repeating them.

2) Domenach considered amplification a journalistic technique, and the distortions and exaggerations were also given space in the articles of Szabad Nép. Examples of these may be the unique word compositions and phrases. For the purpose of stigmatizing and forming negative opinions, newer and newer expressions were continually created in the communist press. After a while, however strange these may sound, it became almost natural to read “clerical reaction” and “kulak”. This illustrates – as the old song says it – “the word is a dangerous weapon”. It was considered a combat tool by the communists as well, and they preferred using war terms in their rural-related propaganda.

An example of the method of amplification can be a case from June 1948 which sheds light on the operation of the controlled press. The session of the MKP PB (the Politburo of the Hungarian Communist Party) made a commanding decision on 10 June: “Based on the already published material, Szabad Nép is to fiercely attack the Barankovics-party on Sunday, and by next Tuesday, the 15th, a declaration of immunity or conflict of interest must be made to the

Speaker against the maximum number of their representatives”. With this, Rákosi’s purpose was to cut the strength from under the Democratic People's Party as it was obvious that by the time of the parliamentary vote on the nationalization of schools, a thoroughly weakened party of Christian democratic roots could exert less influence against the government. So, the PB session decided on the topic and the publishing date of the Szabad Nép article, and the paper published Imre Patkó’s publication attacking István Barankovics and his party, the last paragraph of which was, using the propaganda tools of amplification and distortion, as follows: “Barankovics incites along with the rush of reactions raging within his party. But in this struggle, the reactionary resolution of Barankovics and his party-men cannot be disguised even by the cope in front of the people”.

In the case of Pócspetri, simplification was a characteristic tool, but besides that, information was amplified, facts were distorted and the same message was continually repeated. The case of Pócspetri also illustrated how dangerous a propaganda weapon bombardment and lies were, and how propaganda and terror are connected.

Propaganda appeared in several genres in Szabad Nép, not only in journalistic genres but in literary ones as well. In my dissertation, I examined articles belonging to five genres: three informative ones (news, report, reportage) and two journalistic ones (editorial, ideological article-note) genres, but the appearance of genre marks was not the subject of the analysis. In terms of the structure of journalistic articles, it is clear that all writing began with a review of the situation, and/or with references to the past. This was followed by an explanation of the findings with specific reasoning, and then the article was closed by some threat or encouragement. The headlines and titles were impressive. News and reports were published with long quotations or almost short news-like content, and journalism was usually published with a short and specific title. The language of the writings was often non-Hungarian, and there were also grammatical errors.

3) The orchestration of a given topic means that the propaganda bodies kept endlessly repeating the same messages in different variations and combinations, depending on the addressed audience. In the case of the press, readers are homogenous in the respect that they consume the content of a given newspaper. This principle appears here the way that the articles had to be continuously created in the same style (or in the same unstylish way). Yet, there might be differences in the readers’ needs: there are ones interested in certain topics, and there are ones

explicitly looking for certain genres. Although Szabad Nép was published in a continuously increasing number of copies of hundreds of thousands a day, it targeted the audience sympathising with the communists.

For example, before the most important message of the particular issues became an obligatory topic in the Szabad Nép half-hours, they were the ones the party could expect to be the readers of the paper. During the Szabad Nép campaign it also became apparent that it was not easy to recruit the reading party members from among the party membership.

All in all, it is certain that the leaders of the editorial of Szabad Nép were the same people who participated in the direction of party propaganda. Therefore, it should not be surprising that relatively few specific party instructions were received by the national press from the party's governing bodies. These were not necessary, as József Révai and Márton Horváth were not only given roles in the editorial and in the direction of propaganda, but both were members of the PB of MDP as well. It can be ascertained that in the period examined in this dissertation the Hungarian press was under increasing pressure by the communists and this is even more observable after the merger of the workers' parties.

Everyone necessary in the party propaganda from the general secretary of the MKP (then MDP) to the factory workers could get publicity. Opposing opinions, however, were sharply separated even in the titles of the writings. Anyone who did not support the government's policies was labelled reactionary and anti-democratic. The communists emphasized that they were the ones who represented the ideals of democracy, republic, development and modernisation. According to left-wing propaganda, the churches "incited" against all these, representing the spirit of the past, the ruling class, and being "feudal" and "fascist".

Politicians and journalists have used such and similar offensive concepts without making their meaning clear. For example, the issue of the nationalization of schools was seen by the Communists as a political struggle, and all means of agitation and propaganda were used to reach the objective.

4) According to the principle of transfusion, propaganda always relies on the generally accepted values inherent in people's thinking and begins to manipulate the masses by utilizing them. It can be observed in propaganda that the communists were striving for the gradual approach.

Although Stalin also drew Rákosi's attention to the gradual takeover of power, impatience can be observed many times in the criticism received from the Soviet leadership. Several times, this caused haste and confusion in the process of propaganda and the taking over power in Hungary, no matter how well organized it was and how seemingly contradictory it seems. In connection with propaganda, it happened that the press was specifically asked to retreat.

Systematically, using the well-proven “salami tactics,” church and peasant leaders were removed. The activity of the press was a great support and persuasive power in this process. New organizations (e.g. Défosz) were created behind which the communists pursued their own interests as if it had been the interest of the groups they embraced (e.g. the “working peasantry”) to achieve their goal. Meanwhile, they were increasingly ruthless with those they considered enemies. Restriction became termination, “people’s democracy” meant dictatorship, “strengthening private property” meant collectivization, and the mentioning of religious freedom translated into religious persecution. After all, for the communists, the peasantry was seen as a social group to be conquered, an enemy.

5) The rules of unanimity and distribution can also be observed. They say that one of the basic mechanisms of totalitarian propaganda is that it evokes a sense of unity and is used simultaneously as a means of encouragement and intimidation. And an enemy was continuously necessary.

The way how the communists used church people for their own purposes can be seen in the case of the priest of Bakonykúti. This could be observed in connection with the reformed church as well: they were writing about the community of the reformed people as long as it was necessary for the propaganda. For example, as long as they could divide not only the denominations but their membership and leadership as well. After the reportage on the “Agreement”, at the end of 1948, the Reformed Church was not mentioned in a lengthy manner in Szabad Nép. Although some of the writings mentioned the protestant denominations which had come to an agreement with the state as examples to follow, as a separate topic they were not given space for. Of course, the communist daily did not even look for topics concerning Protestants that it could have dealt with on the merits – as this was not in their interest at the time because the nationalization of the schools had already taken place, and the church leaders had been made to sign the agreements. Therefore, the current political goal was achieved. It is clear that in addition to the publication of objective, fact-based news and reports, the thoughts

on the Reformed Church published in Szabad Nép served entirely the propaganda of the Hungarian Communist Party and then the Hungarian Workers' Party. The methods of propaganda – repetition, rule of unanimity, distortion and discrediting – were applied against the reformed and other protestant denominations as well. The idea of cooperation between the church and the state could have been mentioned at least in a sentence in an article not dealing with the reformed church.

A longer article on Albert Bereczky's presentation, published in January 1949, is also worth placing in the concrete political sphere for the Reformed bishop was a church leader who could be portrayed as a good example during the campaign against Mindszenty.

Using the tools of counter-propaganda and attacking the weak points of the “enemy”, the communists were trying to discredit the people or ideas they considered hostile. An example of this is when they responded in their own press to articles published in the paper titled Hazánk. Anyone who the communists believed were in the way of reaching their goals could be an enemy. The stigma, for example, “reactionary”, “kulak” or “fascist” involved its punishment as well. Propaganda and terror were connected.

Summary

Who were considered enemies regarding the countryside in the press propaganda of the discussed period? From the second half of 1947 until June 1948, it was the church people (not only leaders), and the institutions like parishes running schools; it was the church schools themselves where the communists thought “the peasant- and workers’ children were persecuted”; it was the so-called smaller schools; priests and pastors; and, specifically, it was Pócspetri and the female students of Sopron. After the Cominform meeting in Bucharest, until the spring of 1949, it was the wealthier peasants, the farmers classified as kulaks, who were targeted by rural propaganda. It is obvious that in this respect, June 1948 must be a caesura. Each and every tool of propaganda was used against the groups and people which were considered enemies, including methods of counter-propaganda in the Domenach sense, if necessary. The latter included the discrediting of the enemy and their subjects, making them ridiculous, and attacking their assumed weak points.

June 1948 meant a clear dividing line in the propaganda, but not only in the aforementioned sense. Following the MKP's confident and ever-intensifying spring press campaign, criticisms at the Cominform meeting in Bucharest and in the form of Soviet diplomatic documents seemed to have somewhat uncertain the MDP. This can be seen in the fact that statements made by the Hungarian party leaders were somewhat different in the issue of the producers' cooperatives. In several cases, it turned out that it was unclear what exactly should be stated in this matter. In the case of the school nationalization, the communists stated that – since Mr Ortutay was the Minister of Public Education – they will not be responsible, but they could no longer point to other political formations in connection with producers' cooperatives.

Although thoughts such as “the incitement of kulaks and reactionary clergy to be eliminated from the peasantry” have appeared earlier in Szabad Nép, propaganda about peasantry and “kulakism” gained momentum after the guidance of Cominform. While until the end of June there were hardly a few articles a month that included the term “kulaks,” this number multiplied after July, and articles about farmers were given a prominent place in several genres in the columns of the paper. With this, the preparation of the assembly of Kecskemét in the press was realized as well.

Communication was an important tool of ideology and intimidation was an important tool in its toolbox. Total ideology provided guidance to both party members and non-party members regarding the class struggle. Political power used language as a tool in an increasingly conscious way and kept that language under constant control in order to maintain its dominance. Both in the press and during everyday interactions, there was a constant search for enemies. In constructing and describing the political enemy, it also became necessary to give a new meaning to some new concepts.

The Communists widely used the tools of agitational political mass propaganda. They paid attention to classifying the players into good and evil categories by means of simplification, applied magnification and distortion, and they kept repeating the messages and creating a sense of unity. In order to achieve political goals, communication did not fail to leave an impact on emotions, nor did it fail to tune the social groups against each other. It was not rational explanations that were considered the goal, but the influencing of community opinions and feelings.

The aim of the communists was to completely reshape society and public thought, so by changing the meanings of language, great emphasis was also placed on the transformation of communication. The vocabulary of military language was a typical source of official relations and the use of language in the press. The meanings of words gained new interpretations. All this was determined by political considerations and the directed communication of power. The terms typical of wartime conditions and the stock phrases that constantly encouraged fighting left no calm for either the reader or the “enemy”.

It is also worth mentioning that communist propaganda did not ignore lies and misleading either. As we know, the Bolshevik system was built on lies and quoting Bartlett, it can also be said that propagandists are “crooks”. A definite example of lies may be the issue of kolkhozization. On the 19th of August, 1947, towards the end of the electoral period, an editorial was published in Szabad Nép with the title “Canteen cup and kolkhoz”.

The article showed how quickly the communists changed their points of view, or - what is far more serious - they did not tell the truth. Denying the purpose of the kolkhozization in Hungary, the author wrote: “We intend to win the working peasants over, not to push them away. Thus we believe: the private ownership of peasants must be consolidated, it must be protected from cartels, agricultural price-scissors, and bank usury. Also, the organisation of peasants into cooperatives is only necessary for the strengthening and protection of individual peasant farms, and for nothing else.” It is worth quoting the threat at the end of the article written in the usual scheme: “Whoever incites against the communists using the kolkhoz-story is the agent of reaction, whichever party membership book he may have in his pockets; a wolf no matter what sheep’s clothing he may be in.” A year later Rákosi announced the organisation of producers’ cooperatives in Kecskemét.

Rákosi’s speech in Kecskemét was also full of misinformation and lies that could easily be refuted by the events of the following period. In reality, differences between the city and the village did not cease to exist; moreover, the contrast became even greater. There might have been a cinema in the village, but the country suffered from food shortage in the hardest times of the Rákosi era. Although communist leaders presented the standard of living of the working class as an example to follow, in fact, several layers emerged within the working class, and more and more people fell into extreme poverty. Despite the fact that machinery was available to the peasantry, productivity did not increase. Hundreds of thousands of people left agriculture

because they could not bear the increased burdens. Propaganda thus tried to impress the readers' feelings with misstatements.

Communist agitational mass propaganda was continuously characterised by urging changes. This was the reason why even well thought-over messages suffered blunders from time to time and had to be corrected later. A definite example of this can be the use of the concept of kolkhoz which was being explained for months. In any case, there was regular contact between the party leadership and the politicians responsible for the propaganda and the press. This was based on the – earlier mentioned – fact that many times the same people represented different but interconnected institutions, which also constantly referred to each other.

There is also a sense of fear in the behaviour of politicians and in the communist propaganda that engages in “struggle”. Fear of the real or putative dangers, of the enemy, of the reactions of own fellow party-members, of the reproach of the Soviet leaders, and the consequences of the illegitimate execution of power. But there is a fear of farmers with strong self-awareness and expertise, of believers who trust in God's power, and perhaps of the wonders of history, which László Ravasz described in a 1949 sermon: “In the place of the disillusioned and disintegrated ancient world, early Christian congregations blossomed like roses in the desert. Wild, barbarian peoples were tamed, temples were built for the glory of God, and the Gospel was spoken among the Germanic, Slavic, Celtic, and Turkish-Tatar peoples. If one looks at an island or an African settlement where the first Christian congregation was formed among cannibals, bounty hunters and groups of people troubled by blind fear, hatred and revenge, and the cannibal's son as bishop testifying of the Lord Jesus Christ at the Synod in Amsterdam says: the Word and the Holy Spirit are more realistic powers than any physical force, capable of transforming and saving the world.”

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