

BUILDING DEMOCRACY: INSTITUTIONAL TRANSFORMATION IN HUNGARY

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In this paper I identify the main stages of political change in Hungary between 1987 and 1990, in order to gain a closer look at institution-building in the process of democratization. Political transition in Hungary can be characterized by three different stages. The first stage was the revitalization of civil society. In this stage social movements started to emerge outside of the communist party (Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party, the MSZMP) and independent initiatives developed within the party. The second phase was characterized by negotiations between the old and new political elites in an attempt to bring about a peaceful transition. It was during the second phase that the civil society was transformed into a political society. Finally, in the third phase, individual citizens were able to take part in the transitional process. They participated in a referendum, were subject to electoral campaigns and finally took part in free parliamentary elections.

Under the previous regime, Hungary's constitution could be described as a Soviet-type one. The constitution was passed in 1949, following the pattern of the 1936 Stalinist constitution of the Soviet Union. Although the Hungarian

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constitution had been modified slightly in 1971 during the reform years of the former communist leadership, the constitution was still a legal obstacle to democratic change. It upheld the leading role of the communist party within Hungarian society and asserted the superiority of collective (state-owned) property over private property. Thus the democratic transition from communist rule was dependent on prior legal and constitutional change.

In Hungary, the process of political change began in 1987 when reformist communists and the moderate opposition (who later became the Hungarian Democratic Forum, the MDF) agreed to formulate a declaration in support of the democratization of Hungarian society at their meeting in Lakitelek. (Agócs and Medvigy 1991) While the declaration signified a political commitment to change, which was subsequently underpinned by constitutional reform and free elections, the restructuring of Hungarian society on an economic level was much more difficult to achieve.

Social scientists have yet to agree on a theoretical explanation of post-communist transitions, although many have been looking at ways of adapting models which attempt to explain the transformation of totalitarian or post-totalitarian systems in a more general sense. Existing explanations of transitions from authoritarian to democratic rule in Southern Europe and Latin America have tended to emphasize the importance of the actions of elite groups, particularly splits within regimes, as a key to explaining both the origins of democratic transitions and their future development (O'Donnell-Schmitter 1986; Share 1987; Burton, Gunther, and Higley 1992) The process of political change in Eastern Europe tends to support the view that the actions of elites play an important role in shaping transitions. Furthermore, existing explanations of transitions also clearly illustrate the importance of pressure from the international political and economic environments on the process of democratization.

However, the East-Central European transitions have not followed a single pattern, and we can identify important differences in almost every country. In Poland, for example, a strong and a relatively uniform opposition (Solidarity) faced a relatively uniform authority, and the political struggle took place at roundtable conferences which resulted in a pact allowing for restricted elections. In Czechoslovakia and in the East Germany the pressure from ordinary citizens effectively led to the collapse of the communist system. Thus the political system fell before any modifications were made to the legal framework. In Romania, the revolution was much more violent and power was transferred on the overthrow of the totalitarian system by combining revolution and coup d'état.

Although there are significant differences in the processes of transition in the different countries of eastern Europe, there is a clear pattern which we can identify. The first transitions occurred in the least autocratic systems, and in these countries it took place in a more peaceful and evolutionary manner. In

those regimes where human rights were most severely curtailed, the more drastic the changes occurred. (See in details Bozóki 1992.) In other words, forms of transition from communism are affected by the nature of the old regime.

THE DECAY OF COMMUNIST RULE: THE BEGINNING

After the suppression of the 1956 Hungarian revolution, the communist leadership gave up the idea of creating a totally politicized society or of mobilizing the citizens in order to legitimize their system of rule. They were basically satisfied with the fact that most people had resigned themselves to the existing system and had accepted their inability to bring about change through collective political actions. During the 1960s the Hungarian political system ceased to be "totalitarian" (in the sense that it has been defined by Friedrich and Brzezinski 1956; and Arendt 1958), and instead became a "soft" dictatorship. This post-Stalinist, authoritarian-paternalistic system, hallmarked by Kádár's name, was based on the political neutralization of the citizens and no attempts were made to achieve ideological legitimation. Kádár implemented economic reforms and helped bring about a political and economic stability which many people considered to be more important than ideological legitimacy.

There was a society infantilized in the face of the representatives of the different levels of counterselected state bureaucracy, and the former one escaped into private life and hoped for the "good king" during the decades after 1956. Passive neutrality became the most important life strategy of people to make the system more tolerable and life easier to endure.

Later, from the late 1960s onward, political "participation" through informal pressure groups meant that more and more sections of society felt that they were able to have some indirect influence on the system and therefore had something to lose when it began to disintegrate.

The communist political leadership of the 1980s reacted to the erosion of the system with the introduction of assorted liberalizing reforms which helped to prevent the development of a cohesive and unified political opposition through creating divisions of interest. From the late 1970s onward, any political opposition which emerged was diffused through creating divisions and isolating those elements of the opposition which were perceived as most threatening. However, when conflicts emerged between politicians and those holding key economic positions, this opposition could not always be diffused through "divide and conquer" strategies.

The political leadership needed to be able to work with the economic elite in order to maintain both its own political dominance and social stability in the wider society. The growing petty bourgeoisie who started to emerge in the

1970s as a heritage of Kádàrism, gradually disrupted and disintegrated the monolithic structure of the economic system, which was neither based on plan nor market, and the intricate economic bargaining mechanisms with which it was associated. This process of economic transformation was implicitly encouraged and justified by Gorbachev's ascent to power in the Soviet Union.

The development of critical initiatives and alternative strategies within civil society did not arise solely on a political and economic level: during the 1980s avant-garde literary and art groups, alternative ways-of-life movements, and some "single issue" groups, such as the peace movement and the environmental movement were also important. The revival of critical attitudes, especially among young intellectuals, was first indicated by the formation of subcultures. These fringe cultural groups which organized around new, alternative styles in music, were marginalized during the early 1980s. The politically interpretable songs focused more and more on global problems such as the future of mankind, and the chances of human survival.

After a series of sociographs and other documentaries at the turn of the decade, the various avant-garde "postmodern" groups started to call for greater aestheticism. These cultural trends cannot be described as a new social movement but the emphasis of cultural transformation, aesthetics, and values had an important social impact. Since the negativity of the existing society had its complement in the positivity of art, poetry, and literature as capably of bringing about an aesthetic transformation of social reality. Central to this viewpoint was the rejection of "social reformist illusions," and the best works of literature were written "in the spirit of exact, light neutrality" (István Kemény) and explained the existing social environment as a context of "unbearable lightness of being" (Milan Kundera).

The alternative lifestyle movement can also be seen as an avenue for the expression of critical attitudes within an authoritarian social structure. These can be exemplified by the establishment of psycho-clubs, yoga movements, free religious communities, and by an increasing interest in Eastern religions and mysticisms. Each of these movements represented as "escapist" ideology and were a mixture of idealism, transcendentalism, and other, indirect, expressions of a critical attitude (for more details see Bozóki 1988). Although these activities were non-political, or even anti-political, they created autonomous spaces in society, and the communists, regarding this as potentially threatening, tried to politicize them in order to marginalize their activity from the everyday routine of "normal" behavior.

The single issue movements in Hungary tried to resist these pressures by putting themselves between the authorities and the opposition circles and by declaring their goals as "beyond politics." In 1982-1983 the Dialogue Peace Group represented the beginning of the peace movement, while in 1985-1986 the Danube Circle served the interest of the environmental movement. Both of these single interest groups could be characterized by their efforts to

maneuver toward a constructive critique of the regime. Yet many single interest groups were hindered by a series of internal conflicts. The Dialogue Peace Group, for example, had protracted discussions over the elections of a leader, ultimately leading to a rift between the "radical-autonomist" and "moderate-constructivist" groups. This internal crisis of the Dialogue, which was common to many other movements in this period, served to weaken its effectiveness. The "constructivists" accused the other wing of "extreme radicalism" while the "autonomists" spoke about the illusion of self-limitation. Yet, the demise of the Dialogue Peace Group was not simply a consequence of internal conflicts, after the "hot autumn" of anti-nuclear protest in 1983, the peace movement had also declined in many parts of Western Europe.

During the period of late Kádàrism, the Danube Circle and other environmental pressure groups had gradually become umbrella organizations of different kinds of political groups, who were not able to express their political goals directly. Many of these single issue interest groups faced a crisis during the period of political change. Although the Danube Circle was large and influential in the late Kádàr period, once people were able to organize democratic political parties many left the ecological movement and the Hungarian Green Party received less than 1 percent of the votes in the 1990 elections.

Strong demands for democratic political institutions began to emerge during the mid-1980s and there was an increase in the number of clubs and groups who discussed these issues at their regular meetings. Many members did not accept the "old" consensus agreed upon by their predecessors after the 1956 revolution and considered that the time had come to redefine social and political conditions within a more democratic framework.

Observers, and the participants themselves, often regarded these initial movements as constituting a "revitalization" of civil society (Miszlivetz 1993). In fact this phrase became a slogan during the transition and a means by which the intellectual elites within the movements started to define the term "civil society" in a political as well as in an economic sense. This definition made it possible for people to distinguish between "us" (the autonomous, politically independent avant-garde of human rights and civic liberties movements) and "them" (the old-fashioned communists, represented by the party-state bureaucracy which maintained its rule through the oppression of society). Thus, the concept of civil society was not confined to the economic sphere but included a broader notion of citizenship along with a development of ethics and critical thought. On a political level the notion of civil society implied a rejection of the system of informal relationships which operated behind the facade of a communist dictatorship in the Kádàr period. The term "civil society" was also understood as a sort of substitute for "bourgeois society" and it carried the implicit suggestion that democracy was achievable without the existence of a bourgeois class.

MOVEMENTS INTO PARTIES: THE FORMATION OF POLITICAL OPPOSITION

The first phase of systemic change (from September 1987 to February 1989) was characterized by the appearance of autonomous initiatives within the state party, and by the growth of social movements outside of the party. These movements gradually underwent a process of politicization and were finally transformed into parties. The internal disintegration taking place at this time was sensed by politically aware citizens and many autonomous organizations began to engage in party-like activities (for more details, see Jenkins 1992). Between November 1988 and February 1989 a multi-party system was placed on the political agenda.

After the May 1988 party conference of the communist party (MSZMP) constitutional reform was placed on the agenda by the leadership. While the leadership was willing to facilitate political reform, they wished to keep the process of liberalization within the framework of "socialist pluralism," which involved bringing about a greater involvement of non-political social organizations which had not posed a threat to their own monopoly rule of power. In other words, it entailed the continued exclusion of rival political parties and trade unions while allowing for a limited expansion of social dialogue through which they hoped to achieve a national consensus. However, the acceptance of limited elements of democracy had unexpected consequences which fundamentally challenged the framework of the one-party system. Once the process had started, neither the communist party, nor the government or the Parliament were able to control reform as they lacked the necessary political legitimacy.

The first meaningful legal change took place with the amendment of the Act of Association, accepted by the government in November 1988 and passed by the Parliament at the beginning of January 1989. This act created a legal framework for the evolving political organizations. Although there had been no legal barrier to the setting up of political parties, the police would have harassed leaders of any new political opposition using a restrictive interpretation of the law and suspecting oppositional groups of participating in a conspiracy against the state.

At first there were also problems in interpretation associated with the Act of Association. According to the broader interpretation, the right to association included the right to organize political parties, and the act was seen as creating the legal conditions for a multi-party system. The old parties, which had been active in the 1940s (such as the Independent Smallholders' Party and the Social Democratic Party) interpreted the act in this way and between November 1988 and January 1989 they started to reorganize. Some of the new groups emerging out of the established social movements (such as the Hungarian Democratic Forum, Alliance of Free Democrats, Federation of Young Democrats), also

saw the act as creating the conditions which would allow them to organize parties. As a consequence of the act, a de facto multi-party situation evolved within the institutional framework of the one-party system.

However, the hardliners in the communist party, including the secretary general, interpreted the law more narrowly. The Act of Association was seen as applying to interest groups, not political parties, although they expected to pass a law specifically dealing with political parties at a later date so as to regulate their activities more closely.

The period of rapid party formation in Hungary took place at the end of 1988 and the beginning of 1989. During this period the Federation of Young Democrats (FIDESZ), the Hungarian Democratic Forum (MDF), and the Alliance of Free Democrats (SZDSZ) were formed and some of the old parties which had been forced out by the communists at the end of the 1940s (such as the Independent Smallholders' Party [FKGP], the Hungarian Social Democratic Party [MSZDP], the Hungarian People's Party [MNP], and the Christian Democratic People's Party [KDNP]) also reappeared.

During this initial period, the main aim of the new parties was to broaden political communication between individuals and groups, although each party tried to meet these objectives through different means.

The first moderate opposition organization, the Hungarian Democratic Forum made efforts to cooperate with the reform wing of the state party, represented by the soft-liner communist Minister of State Imre Pozsgay and located itself between the government and the opposition. In the beginning it rejected both Soviet-type communism and western-type capitalism, consequently it was often referred as a "third way" political organization.

This idea of a "third way" was based on a position developed by populist writers in the 1920s and 1930s, although it was subsequently suppressed in the communist period. During the 1920s and 1930s, intellectuals in Hungary often saw themselves as either "populists" or "urbanists," the central issue being whether Hungary should develop from within, in its own organic way, or whether it should try to push itself forward by importing the modernizing principles of western countries. Populists were concerned with establishing a national identity and promoting their countries' cultural and historical heritage. On the other hand, urbanists espoused the idea of human rights and attached a central importance to the concepts of status and citizenship. Populists sought organic improvement and adhered to the notion that Hungary had to follow an internal value-system which suited its own collective identity because accepting external, global ideas was regarded as a cause of alienation. According to the populists, economic and political spheres in themselves were not able to touch the deeper strata of national existence; economic philosophies such as socialism and capitalism could operate only on the surface of the national interest.

It was in this populist tradition that the MDF was formed as a discussion forum for different groups of democratically committed people in September

1987. It reorganized itself as a political organization at the second Lakitelek meeting a year later in September 1988. Before the elections the MDF gradually abandoned its original populist "third way" philosophy in favor of a new strategy designed to win center-right votes. This strategic change was accompanied by the selection of József Antall as the party leadership and Antall became prime minister in the 1990 elections. Under Antall's chairmanship the MDF became a center-right, Christian-conservative political party with populist and sometimes nationalist overtones.

On the other hand, the radical-liberal opposition groups and movements (out of which the Alliance of Free Democrats later emerged) were attached to the principles of human rights and saw themselves as an oppositional force. Consequently they rejected the idea of cooperation with the MSZMP leadership. The radical-liberal opposition groups also transformed the language of political discourse and generated public interest in political issues, especially among intellectuals. These intellectuals edited *samizdat* journals, like *Beszélő*, *Hírmondó*, and *Demokrata* during the 1980s which reached in the region of 10,000 readers.

During this period, people in the communist countries had to read between the lines in the official newspapers in order to understand the real political situation. Underground opposition journals broke this "metaphoric" tradition of political discourse by discussing political problems frankly and openly. In turn this affected the official media and forced them to formulate their opinions in a more straightforward manner. Members of these radical-liberal groups were closely linked with various opposition groups in other Eastern bloc countries, like the Charter '77 in Prague and KSS-KOR (Workers' Self-defence Committee) in Poland in which group of workers and intellectuals helped to launch Solidarity. These links facilitated a useful exchange of information.

The immediate precursor of the SZDSZ was an organization called the "Network of Free Initiatives" which was created in May 1988 to establish communication between various unofficial groups. However, this initiative soon proved to be inadequate. During the months of the disintegration of Kádárism this type of loose cooperation became politically insufficient. Members of the network eventually came to the conclusion that a party-structure had advantages and, as a result, the SZDSZ was formed in November 1988. The SZDSZ defined itself as a social-liberal party and in spring 1989 became the first party to call for radical break with the communist regime.

The Federation of Young Democrats (FIDESZ) was formed as the first political organization of opposition in March 1988. Its founding members were mostly university students of law and economics. Most of them had been involved in earlier movements which had tried to create self-governing colleges which were independent of the university bureaucracy. The political orientation of the FIDESZ developed during the last phase of the Kádár era out of its dissatisfaction with the higher education system as well as the broader political

system, as a whole. Human rights issues were at the forefront of their program and individual liberties, constitutionalism, and non-violence were all core concerns.

Originally the FIDESZ was launched as a youth organization, a simple alternative to the Communist Youth League (KISZ), but by 1989 (after the disintegration of the KISZ) the FIDESZ went further and became a political party under the flag of radicalism, liberalism, and alternative values, primarily mobilizing youth. One of its leaders, Viktor Orbán gave a famous speech at the burial of Imre Nagy and his fellow-martyrs of the 1956 revolution on June 16, 1989, when he openly called on the government to negotiate the immediate withdrawal of Soviet troops from Hungary. Although at the time the FIDESZ had been regarded as too radical, this claim was echoing in the society and they subsequently managed to secure 9 percent of the vote and a place in the new Parliament.

During this early period, members of the three new political parties (MDF, SZDSZ, and FIDESZ) cooperated quite closely. In contrast, all that the "historical" parties had in common was a 40-year-old history and a suspicion on the part of the old guard of new recruits from the younger generation. For each of these parties, much time and effort was needed to bring about party unity. Indeed, neither the Hungarian Social Democratic Party (MSZDP), nor the Hungarian People's Party (MNP) have been able to achieve a unity to this day. The Independent Smallholders' Party (FKGP) was reborn as an agrarian party with a program which included total reprivatization of the land, while the Christian Democratic People's Party (KDNP) became a small and modest party representing religious (especially Catholic) values and institutions. After the 1990 elections FKGP and KDNP joined the MDF as partners in the governing coalition.

POLITICAL EXTRICATION AND CONSTITUTION MAKING

The second phase of political transition (March-October 1989) was characterized by negotiations between the state party and its satellite organizations on one hand, and the opposition on the other. The significance of the phase is also indicated by the fact that a number of social scientists call the Hungarian transition the "negotiated revolution" (Tökés 1990; Bruszt 1992). It was during this period that the opposition managed to secure a role in the scrutiny of new legislation and laws were no longer imposed without first achieving a broad consent.

In late January 1989, the reform wing of the party reacted to recent political changes and Minister of State Imre Pozsgay announced the reevaluation of 1956 to the public, and the notion of "counter-revolution" as it had been used

in the communist phraseology, was replaced by the concept of "popular uprising."

Following an internal struggle within the central committee of the party, the principle of a multi-party system was finally accepted in mid-February, and the communist party accepted that it could no longer insist on playing a leading role in the party. Yet they attempted to safeguard their longer term position as a leading party by asserting the "socialist" nature of the state within the new constitution. While the multi-party system was accepted in principle, the only parties which could function legally were those which accepted this socialist network. The principles were to be upheld by a new constitutional court. Naturally the party leadership wanted to avoid the risk of free elections and envisaged a negotiated power-sharing arrangement rather than an open competition. Through this strategy, the MSZMP aimed to keep the still embryonic opposition divided, and in this spirit negotiations were conducted separately with these organizations in February and March. The leaders of the state party proposed entirely free elections only for 1995.

Meanwhile a negotiated type of transition began in Poland with the participation of the most important political forces. The Polish pattern seemed to work and was adopted both the MSZMP and by the opposition, although each of them laid an emphasis on different elements of the model. Once it had accepted the principle of a multi-party system, the objective of the MSZMP was to reach a compromise similar to that reached in the Polish roundtable talks. This position would have meant retaining the essential traits of state socialism. Realizing that they were weak and lacking in organization, the divided opposition forces accepted that they were powerless to hinder the efforts of the MSZMP. The fear was that the MSZMP would dictate the nature of reforms steps and the speed of the transformation and would do everything in its power to maintain the existing framework. The MSZMP were advantaged by the fact that the opposition had not formed a single organization of national liberation, as had been the case in Poland, but had developed a plural system of opposition. Consequently the divided opposition needed to reach some agreements. On March 21, 1989, only a few days after an important opposition demonstration of March 15, the opposition roundtable was set up with the theoretical and practical help of opposition lawyers. Nine oppositional organizations were represented at the roundtable: the Hungarian Democratic Forum, the Christian Democratic People's Party, the Bajcsy-Zsilinszky Friendship Society, the Independent Smallholders' Party, the People's Party (conservatives), the Alliance of Free Democrats, the Federation of Young Democrats (liberals), the Hungarian Social Democratic Party, and the Independent League of Democratic Trade Unions (social democrats). (For more on the formation of the opposition roundtable see Bozóki 1993.)

The new situation was frustrating for the MSZMP, as its leadership had hoped to coopt some of the new organizations which they thought to be

dependable into a power-sharing arrangement. The united opposition, however, was much more dangerous. The opposition roundtable did not give in to the continued efforts of the MSZMP to create divisions between them, and decided not to attend the negotiations scheduled for April 8, 1989 to which a selection of oppositional parties had been invited. Even negotiations over the seating arrangements for the "roundtable" talks proved difficult. While the MSZMP wanted the parties to be seated at a round table, where the parties of opposing interests would have been seated side by side, the opposition insisted on an angular negotiating table so that the representatives of authority and of the opposition would be seated in a more confrontational manner. After months of talks, the parties eventually agreed on a triangular table with the MSZMP at one side, the opposition parties along the second and communist satellite organized interest groups along the third. Thus, after a tenacious struggle the opposition roundtable could retain its unity and became the participant of real negotiations from June 1989 onward.

The meaningful phase of the trilateral negotiations lasted from June 13 until September 18, 1989, and the issues of political as well as economic transition were equally dealt with. After a couple of weeks, however, it became clear that the political negotiations were much more important than the economic issues.

Initially the participants of the opposition roundtable thought that only the key issues which constituted the preconditions of peaceful and democratic transition should be negotiated (such as the electoral law, the amendment of the penal code, the act of information). The MSZMP proposed a much broader discussion including all political, economic, and social issues which they considered to be important. The position of the opposition was that, as the national assembly elected in 1985 was not legitimate, they did not have the right to influence issues which were not directly related to the transition. Consequently negotiations on the constitution, the office of the president of the Republic, and the Constitutional Court were opposed by the opposition roundtable. Yet the introduction of these legal institutions were considered important by the MSZMP because it had come to realize that its plan for negotiated elections was unlikely to come to fruition. The MSZMP had to accept the fact that there would be free elections in Hungary and wanted to exercise some control over the transitional process by providing a candidate for the presidency and by shaping the constitutional framework to incorporate socialist principles.

Finally the parties agreed to discuss the political issues in six subcommittees the amendment of the Constitution (president of the republic, Constitutional Court, etc.); law on political parties including financing; electoral law; principles of the amendment of penal law; publicity, information policy; and safeguards for a non-violent transition.

The following table shows the initial standpoints of the MSZMP and the opposition roundtable over these political issues and focuses on the main

Table 1. Major Agreement and Disagreement between the MSZMP and the Opposition Roundtable on Policy Issues

MSZMP	Opposition Roundtable
1. The question of constitution-making	
The position of the President of the Republic set up before the should be free elections.	Only the newly elected Parliament should make a decision over the new constitution.
Agreement on the modification of the Constitution by the parties. Agreement on the legal status of the President. Agreement on a parliamentary type democracy.	No agreement over the time and method of the Presidential election.
2. The question of political parties	
Multi-party system is accepted and the new political parties can claim a small amount of money from the budget.	The Communist Party should account for its property to the society, and this property should be equally distributed among the political parties.
Party political activity should be allowed in the workplace.	Party political activity should be forbidden in the workplace.
3. The question of electoral law	
The dominance of individual constituencies over the party-and proportional party representation (PR).	Equal division between individual constituencies (IC) lists.
Five per cent threshold.	Three per cent threshold.
Agreement on the electoral law, two-vote system, equal division between IC and PR, county-lists, national compensatory list, 4 per cent threshold.	
4. The question of penal law	
Similar standpoints.	
Agreement on the liberalization of the penal code and the elimination of 'political crimes'.	
5. The question of media and publicity	
Agreement in principle to create an impartial committee to supervise public mass media.	
No agreement on the members of this impartial committee which was never actually established.	

(continued)

Table 1. (Continued)

MSZMP	Opposition Roundtable
6. The question of guarantees of the peaceful transition	
The Workers' Guard (the paramilitary troops of the Communist Party) should be maintained in a different form.	The Workers' Guard should be eliminated, because democratic parties can not maintain armed troops.
<p>No agreement, the parties agreed in principle that secret police should be separated from the communist party, although in practice the secret police continued to give information to the Hungarian Socialist Party the successor of MSZMP) about the activities of the opposition until the 1990 January wire-tapping scandal.</p>	

differences between them; it includes the major agreements, and shows the issues on which the parties could not agree.

During the first phase of the negotiations it became clear that the opposition roundtable was not able to maintain its initial standpoint; it had to discuss the modification of the constitution. As it was forced to negotiate despite its original intentions, the opposition roundtable strove to supervise the entire constitution item by item, sentence by sentence, even though it held the view that the Hungarian constitution could not be reformed, and that the newly elected national assembly should create an entirely new constitution. However, the amendment of the constitution was initially started within its original framework, thus significantly contributing to the completion of the "constitution of transition."

After a heated debate, the parties agreed that Hungary should be referred to simply as a republic rather than a "people's republic." The Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party applied the definition "independent, democratic socialist state based on law," whereas the Opposition Roundtable wanted to eliminate the ideological elements from the Constitution, and proposed the formula "independent democratic state based on law."

After long disputes the terms "bourgeois democracy" and "democratic socialism" were given equal weight within the constitution, in keeping with the September agreement. Accordingly, "the Republic of Hungary is an independent democratic state based on law, where the values of bourgeois democracy as well as of democratic socialism have an equal standing."

The constitution was also amended to incorporate a multi-party system and it was recognized that political parties could be set up and could function freely. While they cannot exercise public authority, they may participate in the shaping and expression of popular will. The amended constitution also made provisions for the setting up of two new legal institutions, the Constitutional Court and the State Audit as the economic and financial control agency of the national assembly.

The greatest debate ensued around the issue of the replacement of the Presidential Council with the office of the president of the republic. The MSZMP held the view that the president should be directly elected by the people as this would ensure that presidential authority could be asserted in situations where the political legitimacy of Parliament was being challenged. On the other hand, the opposition roundtable held the view that only a freely elected national assembly had the authority to decide the terms for the selection of a president and that neither the existing assembly, nor the participants of the tripartite negotiations, had the authority to introduce such a fundamental constitutional reform.

Indeed, the problem of legitimacy became a key issue for the opposition roundtable as none of the participants in the transitional negotiations had any real political authority. The opposition organizations had not acquired the political legitimacy needed to engage in a constitution-making role which they agreed could only be derived from popular will expressed in free democratic elections.

Despite these concerns, the opposition roundtable agreed to provide principles governing the institution of the president in the new constitution, although they left the role of the presidency "weak." The president was to act as a "balance" between the legislative and executive authorities, and would lack an autonomous power base. The office of the president was not to be set above legislative and executive branches of authority and power could only be exercised through the government. It was agreed that the speaker of the national assembly would temporarily exercise the rights of the head of state during the transitional period. The opponents also agreed that the election of the president should not be decided by the existing Parliament. However, no agreement was reached on who should elect the president (either the Parliament or the people), and when the president of the republic should be elected (before or after the parliamentary elections).

The MSZMP held the view that the president of the republic should be elected directly by the people. One can take the view that this idea was truly democratic as a national election is the best way to select the holder of presidential office. However, the MSZMP still controlled the media and had a popular reformist communist leader (Imre Pozsgay), whereas the potential candidates of the opposition were almost totally unknown by the population due to their lack of access to the popular media. According to the MSZMP, the temporary power-vacuum which would occur during the transition strengthened their argument for a president who could help avoid political chaos.

The initial position of the opposition roundtable was that a parliamentary democracy, and not a presidential system should be built in Hungary because, after 40 years of communism, such a system was seen as offering safeguards against the dangers of autocratic rule. The opposition roundtable held the view

that the elections of the President by Parliament is no less democratic than election by a direct vote of the people, and, in a parliamentary system, is a typical, constitutionally acceptable solution.

The MSZMP thought that the presidential elections should take place before the parliamentary elections so that the stability of public authority could be maintained. But the opposition roundtable was of the view that the political situation was not so unstable that presidential elections should be given precedence. Most of the opposition parties were also worried that if the presidential elections were held before the free parliamentary elections, it might influence their outcome and would allow the communists to save their political power. The opposition roundtable was concerned about avoiding the Polish pattern of change, and thought that the dismantling of the old system would not be complete if a communist leader of the past became the head of state at an early date. The Polish opposition, aware that it might be able to make changes at a later stage, was able to compromise with the communists. The Polish opposition was strong enough to accept the communist General Jaruzelski for the position as he had suppressed the "self-limiting revolution" of Solidarity in 1980-1981. Paradoxically, the Hungarian opposition was too weak to accept this type of compromise and maintained its efforts to secure a rapid democratization of society.

In Hungary, the MSZMP wanted more than a temporary influence on the presidency and came to consider the break-up of the unity of the roundtable to be central to its own political survival. Reformists within the MSZMP made secret contact with the moderate opposition parties in order to convince them of the necessity of step-by-step change instead of radical transformation. In this four-actor game (Przeworski 1992) the parties each played different roles. The hardliners in the communist party refused the idea of an agreement with the opposition while the reformist communists first tried to compromise with the "constructive" opposition, and when these attempts failed, started to bargain with them. Among the opposition, the moderate wing considered the cooperation shown by the reformist wing of the MSZMP to be a major guarantee of a non-violent transition. On the other hand, the radical opposition did not want to make any pacts with the communists which would limit their future scope for action and emphasized the political importance of the break with the old regime.

During this phase of transition, the reformist communists and the moderate opposition started to cooperate informally against the conservative hardliners on one hand, and the radical opposition on the other. Going against the agreed position of the opposition roundtable, the Christian Democratic People's Party, and the Hungarian People's Party both proposed the election of the president by plebiscite in July 1989. Furthermore, the representative of the KDNP suggested that free elections could be secured only if there was a sizeable time lag between presidential and parliamentary elections. Consequently they

suggested that the presidential elections should be given priority over the parliamentary elections. The spokesman of the Hungarian People's Party also proposed giving priority to the presidential elections, but in this case because of the implications for foreign policy. It was argued that speedy presidential elections would pacify the Russians who could otherwise interfere into the Hungarian transition process. The MNP saw the reformist Imre Pozsgay as the only personal guarantee for peaceful change. These two parties were joined by the Bajcsy-Zsilinszky Friendship Society and the Independent Smallholders' Party. This body of opinion put pressure on the Hungarian Democratic Forum who in some senses held the political balance among the opposition.

Gossip in the lobbies of Parliament held that the MSZMP was interested in a deal whereby it would sacrifice the Workers' Guard, the paramilitary unit of the state party, in exchange for the position of the presidency. In mid-August one member of the Third Side, the Democratic Youth Alliance (DEMISZ, the former League of Young Communists) started a petition for an early presidential election. Though the MSZMP dissociated itself from this action, the opposition roundtable regarded this stance as one which undermined the agreement which had formed the basis of their negotiations.

Finally the MDF altered its position. While as a general rule they agreed to the election of the president by the new Parliament, they regarded the first occasion as different and agreed that on this occasion the president should be elected by plebiscite before the parliamentary elections. Thus the opposition roundtable was divided over this central issue: four parties were left in minority (FIDESZ, SZDSZ, MSZDP, and the Independent Trade Unions' League) as against five, who insisted upon the original agreement, thus there was a rift between the moderate and radical wings of the opposition.

As the opposition roundtable was based on the principle of consensus, no decision could be reached for a long time because of the different views of the organizations represented at the roundtable. At the trilateral negotiations, the roundtable kept avoiding making a definitive statement and kept postponing discussions. This went on until September 18, 1989, to the last meaningful stage of talks.

In the third month of the talks, there was a growing tension among the parties of the opposition roundtable as well as among participants at the trilateral negotiations. The public was calling for results, and the MSZMP was willing to make minor concessions to try to resolve outstanding issues. Government ministers also informed the opposition that law-making procedures could not be slowed down and the government intended to introduce bills to Parliament without first seeking a consensus. The reform wing of the MSZMP also wanted to reach an early agreement so that it could report its achievements to the approaching party congress in October.

The majority group of five at the roundtable held the view that their achievements should not be risked and the agreement with the MSZMP had

to be signed despite the difference of views among the roundtable. In contrast, the four minority groups thought that no democratic state could be evolved if the election of the president preceded the parliamentary elections. They also thought that democracy would be under threat as long as the Workers' Guard survived, if the MSZMP did not give an account of its wealth, and if it remained legal to maintain its political activity in the working places. As a result of these differences, the radical members of the opposition roundtable did not sign the pact at the plenary session on September 18. However, they did not hamper the progress of the moderates and gave up their right of veto. On that day the real history of the opposition roundtable came to an end and the meaningful phase of the trilateral talks was also terminated. At this meeting the SZDSZ asked for the people to be allowed to decide the four unsolved issues mentioned above and were supported in their motion by the FIDESZ and the Social Democrats. The FKGP decided to lend its support to the campaign a few weeks later.

The tripartite negotiations were central in the success of the Hungarian transition, since those functioned in a political vacuum as a kind of National Assembly (Kukorelli 1991). Nevertheless, the talks themselves proved to be not enough to complete the process of democratization, which fact underlines the revolutionary character of the change.

POLITICAL MOBILIZATION AND EMERGING PLURALISM

The next phase of the political transition lasting until the free elections (October 1989-April 1990) can be characterized by a broader social participation in political life. After the roundtable pact of September 18, the SZDSZ campaigned for support so as to settle the outstanding issues. The referendum of November 26 sharply marked the split between the radical and moderate opposition. In the meantime the old MSZMP ceased to exist at the October party congress and it was replaced by the politically much less influential Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP).

The topics of the tripartite negotiations in the summer of 1989 were almost totally unknown to the people. The MSZMP did its best to prevent a wider knowledge of the negotiations which had taken place, supposedly in order to prevent the negotiations from being used as political propaganda. The opposition roundtable agreed to this suggestion at the initial meeting on June 10.

Consequently most citizens had little knowledge about the talks. This aroused suspicions in which the opposition roundtable were seen as implicated in a behind-the-scenes deal. Some smaller parties outside the roundtable utilized this generalized suspicion by claiming that what was happening was

in fact a disgusting political bargain between the old and a new political elite over which the public had not been consulted. Although the opposition roundtable did whatever was possible to dissipate such suspicions, its room for maneuvering was severely limited by the June 10 agreement. While the lack of publicity did not cause conflicts between the negotiating elite of the parties and their membership, it caused a number of misunderstandings in the wider society. The public only became fully aware of the different standpoints represented at the roundtable on September 18 when the plenary session dealing with its breakup was broadcast on television.

From that point on, the radical opposition parties attempted to mobilize public support so as to make clear the ways in which they differed from the moderates. While in the first phase of transition, the struggle of conservatives and reformers within the state party was in the forefront, followed in the second phase by confrontation between the power elite and the opposition, by the third phase, with the retreat of the old power elite, the struggle of the moderate and radical opposition forces became dominant. In Hungary, unlike in other post-communist countries, a *de facto* political pluralism was developed before the first democratic elections. The old cultural gap between "populists" and "urbanists" was reformulated in political differences and played an important role in the early emergence of the competitive multiparty system.

The divisions which existed between the various opposition groups did not jeopardize the success of political transition in Hungary. The pact entered into by the oppositional groups safeguarded the agreements and allowed the framework for the transition to be laid down. On October 23, 1989, on the thirty-third anniversary of the 1956 revolution, the Republic was proclaimed and the national assembly passed the renewed constitution. By refraining from signing the pact, the Hungarian opposition was able to avoid entering into temporary pacts with the communists. In Poland such a pact had resulted in restrictions on the first free elections and in 1989, the success of Solidarity was limited by an agreement. With the fall of the Berlin Wall and the rapid collapse of the communist regimes in East-Germany, Czechoslovakia, and Bulgaria it became clear that no real change was possible without public participation. In Hungary, the public attacked and finally broke the cooperation between the reformers and the moderates. The moderates could no longer afford to collaborate with the reformist communists because of the changing mood of the society. By late autumn of 1989 even cautious people realized that the system was changeable. While it was an advantage to be seen as a moderate during the negotiations, by the time of the plebiscite and the election campaign it had become a disadvantage as anti-communist emotions became manifest. For this reason the Hungarian Democratic Forum changed from a "middle-of-the-road" party and adopted a vehement anti-communist style just three months before the March 25, 1990 elections.

It was characteristic of the Hungarian political transition that negotiations were pursued as far possible but that once agreements became difficult, they did not constrict further development. Realizing the apparent success of the petition demanding a referendum, the old Parliament itself hastened to decide on three of the four questions on the proposed agenda of the referendum. It was the plebiscite of November 26, 1989 that finally removed the last obstacles from the road to free elections. It made possible what the parties of the opposition roundtable were not strong enough to achieve, the complete dismantling of the party state so as to make way for a parliamentary system.

CONCLUSION

In Hungary, the historical importance of the opposition roundtable lay in its ability to unite the previously divided opposition forces. The appearance of the opposition roundtable meant a choice between reform and democracy, and it also meant a political commitment to the latter. The birth of the opposition roundtable served democratic transition but, paradoxically, did so by its death. By not standing in the way of competition, and by not becoming a sort of national liberation movement, the opposition roundtable helped to preserve the peaceful character of the transformation and did not stand in the way of a multi-party system.

In this respect the Hungarian transition came somewhere between the purely negotiated Polish transition and the Czechoslovakian "velvet revolution" which was basically a non-violent mass mobilization. In Hungary, the "soft" dictatorship of Kádàrism made possible that the second generation of the Communist party was represented by technocrats rather than ideologically committed cadres. Those new technocrats (Szalai 1990) were able to negotiate with the opposition and were much more willing to compromise with them. On the other hand, the revolution of 1956 gave a pattern, in both positive and negative sense, for the new opposition of the late 1970s and early 1980s. This opposition was deeply committed to democratic values but politically could behave in a self-limiting, pragmatic way. The Hungarian transition to democracy was strongly affected, if not determined, by both the memory of the 1956 revolution and the legacy of the informal-paternalistic style of Kádàrism.

Today, four years after the first parliamentary elections, the process of institution-building is still going on. The victory of the socialists (MSZP) in the 1994 elections does not reverse this process. The constitution is basically the same as that which was accepted on the 1989 negotiations. Parliament made slight modifications in the summer of 1990 and since then the Constitutional Court continuously adds to an "invisible constitution" through its decisions. But these actions are rather parts of the settling and consolidation of a new democracy than of the political transition itself.

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