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The Far-Left in
Postcommunist Hungary:
The Workers' Party

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The Origins Of The Workers' Party: Reform Socialists And Reform Communists

The emotional euphoria of the East European regime changes in 1989–1990 and the subsequent implosion of the Soviet system led to a widespread view in both West and East that communist parties would disappear and become a matter of only historical interest. Closer analysis of political processes raised doubts about this view. Whatever rational or irrational reactions emerged about the post-Soviet communist parties, they were forces deeply rooted in twentieth century history and were unlikely to disappear in a quantum leap of change. It is the hypothesis of this inquiry into the radical left, which had enjoyed considerable support in the aftermath of World War II, that it was capable of surviving the crisis and may remain a part of the political realities for some time to come.

The lifespan of Hungarian communism ranges from the first Bolshevik regime in 1919 through the resistance in World War II to the 1956 revolution and the 1989 collapse of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party (HSWP; Magyar Szocialista Munkaspart, MSZMP), the sole source of political power for forty years. What remains of this party after the 1990 system-changing elections is the HSWP II, in January 1991 renamed the Workers' Party (WP; Munkaspart), basically the spiritual successor of the HSWP. It calls itself a "modern reform-communist party"; Marxism-Leninism and committed anticapitalism remain its central dogma within a rigid organization. Nonetheless the party survived two national and two local elections and remains a player on the political scene: it consistently holds the position of the largest extraparliamentary party since 1990. The object of this study is the analysis of the present status and future prospects of the Workers' Party by exploring its infrastructure and external relations and how it relates generally to the larger component(s) of the Hungarian left and the post-Soviet region.

The emergence of the new/old party began prior to its actual appearance on the political map in late 1989. The growing latent opposition within the HSWP during the Kadar era, especially in the late eighties, foreshadowed the eventual fracture of the party. After the 1988 party conference that removed the Kadar entourage from the bastions of power, the party had reached a crossroad where it would have to choose its future. This collision took place at the 14th Party Congress in October 1989, which also became the first congress of the newly formed Hungarian Socialist Party (HSP; Magyar Szocialista Part, MSZP).

This "double congress" was a battleground between reform-communist and reform-socialist delegates, ended with the decisive victory of the latter. A majority of delegates (1202 of 1,274) approved proposals laying the foundation for the social democratic orientation of the new party. The final result was the termination of a "liberalized" Bolshevik-type party and the possibility of the emergence of a European-style social democratic party.¹ Formally unity was preserved; however the far-left opposition in the congress and in the party organizations and their supporters actually rejected the congress's decisions and separated from the mainstream of the party, eventually creating its true descendent and organic survivor: the HSWP II.

The first HSP congress succeeded in making key decisions rejecting state socialism, advocating a mixed economic system, and discarding the Bolshevik-type party organization. Observers, however, correctly noted that the change was ambiguous: the new party was not able to move toward a genuine social democratic model fast enough, resulting in its relatively poor showing on the 1990 elections.² Nonetheless, the beginning of the beginning was accomplished and, perhaps prematurely, the president of the party requested immediate admission to the Socialist International—a desire not fulfilled for a long time.³

The reform-communist group took the position that the 14th Congress amounted to a coup and what followed was illegitimate, hence the congress fictionally "remained in session" after the establishment of the new socialist party and "continued" its work in December 1989. According to the 272 delegates

opposing the congressional decision to found the HSP, the outcome did not reflect the real views of the grassroots of the party and the delegates were "duped" into acceptance. Karoly Grosz, former first secretary of the party, took a mediating position and reached a compromise with the HSP elite, agreeing not to split, and not to form a new party immediately. However, many local organizations strongly rejected the congress's outcome and called for the continuation of the former ruling party.⁴

The leftist platform at the congress and support groups formed around Janos Berecz, former member of the Political Bureau, Karoly Grosz, and Frigyes Puja. Hard-liners in the old party reached a consensus to establish a new organization, (Ideiglenes Szervezo Bizottsag) and on 7 November 1989, they formed the Temporary Organizing Committee, which soon decided to act as the Preparatory Committee for the party congress. This committee, in turn, set up the Organizational Bureau of the congress, headed by Gyula Thurmer, who eventually became the president of the resurrected Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party. The congress, held on 17-18 December 1989, identified itself as the (legitimate) 14th Party Congress, signaling the conservative intention to continue the former ruling party, now in opposition. The composition of the delegates remained somewhat of a mystery: representatives were "delegated" by local organizations according to the real or assumed size of the supporting membership and by the functionaries of the former Central Committee. Thus was born a new/old party that retained its Marxist-Leninist direction while incorporating some theses of the previous reform circles. Soon after the congress, however, radical hard-line conservatives withdrew but they failed to establish successfully a rival party.⁵

The announced program and the atmospherics of the reborn party came closest to the early seventies Kadar model. While the claim that there was a "coup d'état" distorting the rank-and-file views in October cannot be substantiated, there was some support for the reform-communist line, especially on the local organizational level, where information was lacking and where the beneficiaries of the collective agriculture and socialist industrial giants were apprehensive of the

danger of a "right-wing drift and capitalist restoration in the party and the country as well."⁶

The communique released by the party Secretariat drew a sharp line between the HSP and the HSWP II and made it clear that the party is Marxist, representing "progressive and communist traditions" as well as the time-honored values of the international workers' movement. It pledged cooperation with communist parties elsewhere and advocated the predominance of socialist collective property in the economy—but separated itself from "past crimes and distortions of the principles of socialism." The party claimed to represent a strong, coherent, leftist opposition and called for support of the functionaries of the former nomenklatura including the members of the Workers' Militia.⁷

Thus this congress laid the foundations for the rebirth of the old Marxist-Leninist party. While disavowing itself from some of its characteristics, the party retained the central core of the old party views, ranging from the principle of democratic centralism to the predominance of a command economy. It is natural that its supporters came from the beneficiaries of the ancien régime: educated technocrats in the government and economic bureaucracies, members of the nomenklatura and party organization including the military, the Workers' Militia, and the functionaries of former mass organizations.⁸ It follows that these supporters were older, and their gradual demise partly explains the progressively shrinking rank and file.

Establishing the firm identity and separate organization of the HSWP II, the congress pledged to observe "every useful tradition of the former communist movement" and elected members of the leading organs of the party: the Secretariat and the Central Committee. Gyula Thurmer became the new president; Karoly Grosz remained a member of the Central Committee—which included quite a few former high-level political figures, even of the pre-Kadar era.

The emergence and organization of the HSWP II indicate that this party became the true ideological successor of the former ruling party. The HSP inherited the economic/organizational assets of the HSWP, but subsequent policies

moved it toward a coalition with liberal forces and it was even accused of abandoning the "solidarity" idea. Thus, by the end of 1989, an old/new socialist party was born, with the potential of becoming genuinely social democratic; and a new/old party was resurrected from the ashes of the former ruling party, pledging to continue the traditions and principles of the previous forty years. The former rode to electoral victory in 1994, while the latter remained stagnant as the relatively largest extraparlimentary party.

The Ideology And Program Of The HSWP II

The Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party II was ideologically defined in December 1989 as a Marxist party, rooted in leftist social-democratic and reform-communist views. It recognized the "positive contributions of the forty postwar years," including the period since the 1988 party conference, which ousted the Kadar leadership. The party opposed "right-wing capitalist forces"; saw potential in the renewal of a predominantly collectivist modern economy; and pledged solidarity with other socialist, left social-democratic, and communist forces both at home and abroad. At the 14th Congress, claiming both continuity and a new beginning, it kept open the door for cooperation or coalition with other leftist forces, particularly the HSP. Its economic policy remained centered on the predominance of socialist (state) property, while also allowing the possibility of private ownership, but rejected "capitalist restoration." In foreign policy the party stressed cooperation with socialist countries and the Soviet Union. Overall, it seems that very little imagination went into this program: even within the confines of a reform-communist Gorbachevian policy, more flexibility and adaptation was needed to appeal to the electorate in the upcoming 1990 general elections.

The ideological-political foundation of the new/old party is unequivocally stated in the Secretariat's closing communique at the 14th Congress: "The HSWP

is a Marxist political party embracing the progressive historical values of the Hungarian people and is the heir to the international worker movement following the traditions of communist and left social-democratic values."⁹ There is no doubt about the main policy thrust at this time: while disassociating themselves from vaguely defined past mistakes, the party put the emphasis on the predominance of "social property," calling for the support and participation of former members of the parent party and the Workers' Militia.¹⁰

The meaning of the HSWP II communique becomes clearer in the words of Karoly Grosz, member of the new Central Committee and prime minister in 1988–1989. Grosz characterized the decisions of the October congress, which practically terminated the old HSWP and organized the new Socialist Party as a "putsch" that destroyed the party not from without but from within. He explained that, in contrast to the Socialist Party, which now became reactionary by supporting capitalist restoration, the priorities of the HSWP II would be defined by close cooperation with "communist, social democratic, and other progressive" parties and, most of all, with the Soviet Union. The party organization would be "democratic" with "inevitable centralist elements"—echoing the survival of the classic principle of democratic centralism. Class differentiation and elitism also found their place: the new HSWP was to be primarily the party of "industrial workers and peasants, the educated strata, and finally those who know that the party best represents their interest."¹¹

These statements make it clear that the HSWP II had not adjusted to changing political realities and was unable to perceive the near total rejection of Marxism-Leninism in 1989 and 1990. Essentially stagnant, the party went down in defeat in two national and two local elections in 1990 and 1994. Nonetheless, the party has survived with more or less steady support, and a half decade later its ideology and program have been fine-tuned and moved somewhat away from the original blueprint. The 1994 election program contained less Marxist-Leninist phraseology but the total context is unmistakably the voice of the radical left in Hungary. In January 1991 the party changed its name to Workers' Party, but not

much of its substance, and it "does not give up the firm belief in a collective society."¹² There is a frank realization that working people would be unable to govern themselves in the prevailing domestic and international environment, but the party rejects a return to past mistakes. Without invoking Marxist authorities, the program document makes clear that the party's *Weltanschauung* is based on class-conflict.¹³

The pragmatic political proposals in the 1994 program are vague and sound like theses of former communist parties everywhere; there is no specific policy proposal for the broad, ideologically determined slogans. New employment and income policies and the equality of opportunity for women and youth are key points. Crucial views about the economic system have not changed since 1990, and the WP still pays only lip-service to the private sector; business will be primarily collective or nationalized. This is especially stressed in the key sectors of energy, transportation, and banking—the classical targets of nationalization in postwar Western socialist efforts as well as in Soviet-type drives for total control of the economy. Hungarian industry ought to be nurtured through a protectionist economic policy, hardly a solution in the era of global high technology. The agricultural sector is supposed to include a mixture of property forms, but "the quantity of privately owned agricultural land ought to be limited." There is not even one specific solution provided to implement these theses.¹⁴

The governmental institutions proposed in this program reflect past ghosts: a parliament composed of "workers, peasants, technical specialists, and educators" and last also the "creative intelligentsia"—a fallout from orthodox ideology. It also suggested that recall elections should be held by popular initiative and that the recall of elected representatives should be possible if the initiative established that "the representative violated his mandate"; the party itself may also initiate the recall for the mentioned reasons.¹⁵

The projected social composition of the legislative body and the vaguely defined normative reasons for recall are reminiscent of past communist parliamentary theory and practice. On the other hand, the WP program proposes

that the most important questions should be submitted to direct democratic decision making, that is, a popular referendum. The old naive slogan that the legal system ought to be understandable for all found its way into this party program, as did restrictions imposed upon the secular role(s) of the churches, including education.

In foreign policy the simplistic clichés continue: normalization of relations with neighboring countries and support for Hungarians abroad. However, the most crucial difference from all other parties in Hungary is the WP's absolute neutrality policy; a popular referendum opposing NATO membership was proposed in 1995, but was turned down by Parliament (see below). To pursue these goals consistently, the party also opposes Hungary's aspirations for membership in the European Union; it argues that this would take place under disadvantageous conditions and instead, Hungary should work for European integration as an outsider, on its own terms. It objects to "foreign control" and recommends public referenda on important treaties. These foreign policy ideas are similar, if not identical, with populist, right-wing views.¹⁶

To pursue these goals, the 17th Congress in November 1996 took a more focused position on economic policies. The proposals were viewed also as a preventative to the dangers of populist, right-wing demagoguery. Economic expansion will boost the GDP yearly by 4 to 5 percent, but the proposals did not explain what resources would make this possible. Modernization through information technology should be the key, together with the decisive role of the state in the management of the economy: a "Republic Economic Council" is needed. To succeed, the payment of interest on foreign loans has to be terminated and the capital debt return suspended for three to six years, disregarding the international consequences which would undermine Hungary's partnership credibility. While recognition is given to mixed property forms, the overwhelming weight of the collective sector would prevail, and foreign citizens could not acquire land. Privatization implemented by former governments ought to be reviewed and, if necessary, reversed.

The list of sectors excluded from private ownership encompasses all key businesses: transportation, energy, food processing, military production, the

banking system, health services and retirement funds, and most educational institutions, which would provide free services. To gain domestic support, national and local referenda are proposed, together with the reinstatement of the death penalty for corruption and "economic crimes." Hungary should set the conditions for European cooperation and should reopen ties with the Soviet successor states, the People's Republic of China, and the Arab countries.¹⁷ This program did not disavow the former ideological pronouncements and it is more pragmatic, but at the same time, it projects a starker future vision of a recollectivized system, expecting modernization within a rigid command economy.

Comparing the various program pronouncements since the party's inception, there is no substantial move away from the original theses. The language of the congress communiques is relatively mild, but reflects the ideological position of the former HSWP and the late Kadar era. The basic objectives are, *mutatis mutandis*, similar if not identical with the professed program of the Russian Communist Party. It is clearly stated that capitalism is rejected;¹⁸ the long-run objective is the "building of socialism," even if this requires radical departures from the existing status quo for the creation of not only a "welfare state" but beyond it, a "welfare society."¹⁹ This road to the reborn utopia is to be promoted and operated by a broadly based "People's Democracy" secured by a new constitution, the institutional structure of which is left vague. The ideological projection also stresses "modernization" without defining it and charts a course of realpolitik for the WP as a true leftist party, separating itself sharply from the Socialist Party, which compromised leftist values through its coalition agreement with the liberal-bourgeois Alliance of Free Democrats (AFD; Szabad Demokraták Szövetsége, SZDSZ). The socialists are viewed as social democrats building capitalism, and the WP's self-image calls for "different ways, truly socialist ways."²⁰

Therefore the WP promises to concentrate on promoting the weakening and/or dissolution of the current coalition power while professing that the party will

operate as a "constructive opposition" to the socialists yet is ready to maintain "normal" interparty relations with them, a contradiction in terms.²¹

Party Organization

Although the party program pledges democracy and constitutionalism, in the absence of normative definitions the means of implementation, and hence the party infrastructure, assume special significance. If a political party is defined as a group of voters sharing common interests in promoting public policy and/or seeking governmental power, the characteristics of the membership and the method of operation will be definitive.²²

In postcommunist pluralist systems the degree of democracy largely depends on the nature of the party systems, and there are major deficiencies in this in all the regional states, not excluding Hungary.²³ Party infrastructure is generally weak or nonexistent, and there is a tidal wave of voter movements across the political spectrum; the fluidity of citizen support and the extraordinarily high percentage of undecideds creates a volatile situation.²⁴

The Hungarian Workers' Party is a well-organized force within a rigid structure; it is ideologically focused and defined by a hierarchical apparatus. Two key questions are how far removed is the party today from the archetype communist parties and to what extent is the internal life of the organization democratized in terms of rank-and-file decision-making input.

The bylaws provide for a clear hierarchy of party organs, the highest dominating all lower levels. The 859 basic (primary) organizations are bound together by the territorial coordinating committees, which merge into the national party congress; the congress elects the nine members of the presidency, including the party president and vice presidents. This model is reminiscent of the classic communist pattern; caution is needed, however, to avoid superficial prejudices.

Functionally, party life could outwardly reflect this pattern, but substantively, actual behavior within the party may be somewhat different.

The bylaws in force at the time of this writing were adopted in 1994, revised in 1996, and reflect changes in comparison to the 1991 version.²⁵ Missing from part One ("General Principles") is the 1991 preamble's specific commitment to "scientific socialism and the heritage of Marx, Engels, and Lenin and the creation of the socialist society." Instead, there is a commitment to constitutional order and democratic procedures to attain goals. The status of party members and their rights and duties (bylaws part II) is defined in a rather orthodox way and reflects a relationship of subordination; nonetheless, there are more flexible provisos as compared to 1991. The age requirement for membership has been reduced to sixteen from seventeen, but part II, paragraph 1 restricts members from participation in other organizations "in opposition to the Party's views." In the absence of a normative definition, what qualifies as an oppositional organization, remains a discretionary decision. Party membership is tied to an admission procedure, following the old communist pattern: prospective members have to apply, and the membership meeting of the basic organization decides the question. This procedure was changed at the 17th Congress in December 1996, and membership is now open to all applicants, provided that the "bylaws do not bar it"—a rather discretionary clause.

The rights and duties of members are precisely circumscribed in many ways. Key provisos specify that members' duties include compulsory financial contributions, recruitment of new members, participation in policy implementation, and representation of party policy in other (civil) organizations. Nominally the entire membership decides about basic questions of the party's legal status, such as mergers with other parties, transforming the party into two or more parties, dissolution of the party and/or change in the name of the party, and the open nomination of the president and vice presidents. Such decisions are subject to party referenda which the Central Committee has to call on any issue if one-third of the total membership so requests.²⁶ The rules of the voting are left open: the bylaws

preserve the right of the Central Committee to prescribe the terms of the voting as it sees fit—"a merely technical question," according to functionaries responding to interview inquiries.²⁷ In the absence of normative definitions, however, such discretionary decisions could substantively influence the outcome of voting and reduce it to an empty formality endorsing the party elite's will.

The legal status of members of any social, political, or civic organization is crucial in determining their relationship to it. The WP retains the image and status of members as "soldiers" in a command organization: they are expected to follow party discipline. Part II. Paragraph 6 of the bylaws specifies that members may be censured and/or expelled if they "take a position against the party's objectives/ program(s), or if they violate the bylaws or do not participate in party work." For this purpose a code of conduct was to be established but which does not exist at the present time; the 17th Congress called for it again. It has to be noted, however, that the regulation in force is much milder than the 1991 version, which prescribed "party punishment" consisting of warning, censuring, and purge by the basic cells with an appeal possible to the party Ethics Committee and a final decision by the highest organ, the Central Committee (*Bylaws*, 1991, Pt. I. par. 7). The 17th Congress somewhat refined these provisos on party discipline.

The Operational Guidelines (Pt. III) call for "unity of action" and collective leadership. Decisions reached by "democratic majority voting" in party organs at different levels are binding on all members and party units. While eschewing any reference to the term "democratic centralism," strict party discipline is in essence a continuation of the *modus operandi* of orthodox communist parties; formerly the democratic centralism was incorporated in the 1991 bylaws (pt II. par. 2). However, this conservative tradition still gains functional expression; after decisions have been properly passed, further discussion or debate is regarded as obstruction and is not permitted. To strengthen the centralist rule, there is a prohibition "not to organize political platforms and factions in the party," although the forbidden activities are not normatively defined.²⁸

While the bylaws formally refer to democratic principles, the total context of the document weakens this claim. The crux of the matter would be democracy in voting which, however, is seriously deficient. The rules "allow" multiple candidacy nominations for positions but does not make it mandatory, thus giving power for the party elite to manipulate voting (III.7). Furthermore, nominations are open and the elections take place either by open or closed balloting, again leaving opportunity for the elite to prevent real democratic input by the rank and file or by representatives of dissent. The fact is that so far the dominant pattern is a single-member nomination system, and the Central Committee has jurisdiction to "annul" lower-level decisions "if they violate the party program and/or the bylaws," but again, in the absence of substantive definitions, a centralized discretionary power predominates (IV.A.2).

The next higher level above the basic organizations (minimum three members) are the territorial coordinating committees (the equivalents of the former political committees, *partbizottsag*). These committees tie together the grass-roots organizations in a synchronized way, supervising and directing them; they are organized according to public administration and/or regional units, especially taking into account national and local election districts. They in turn are integrated into the higher coordinating committees of Hungary's twenty territorial units, operating as "middle-level leadership" (nineteen counties/*megye*/ and Budapest). The committees' powers are significant in overseeing the party organs under their jurisdiction, and therefore it is significant that members are "delegated," not elected, according to the bylaws. (IV.B. 2 and 3); This is all the more important because the committees play a major role in nominating candidates to national and local elections (IV.B.4).

Nominally the highest party organization is the congress called into session every two years, or at the discretion of the Central Committee, or upon the request of one-third of the membership at any time. A new rule adopted by the 17th Congress also provides that when important policy issues arise, the Central Committee can call for a national party conference and determines the relevant

procedures (IV.C.1). Following the classical pattern again, the congress sets party policy and elects the president and vice presidents, the Financial Control Committee, and the Party Ethical Committee (IV.C.2). There are no provisos for the nominations; the procedural rules governing these elections and the composition of the congress are also to a large extent determined by the party leadership. The congress deputies come from the basic organizations who "delegate" them: according to available information, this means "elections," but in the absence of specifics the outcome may be controlled and the rules are set by the Central Committee ad hoc. In past practice, a general operational principle was that delegates were sent proportionately by the basic organizations, resulting in too large a body (1,047 in 1996) for any serious decision making (IV.C.3).

By far the most important unit is the Central Committee which, following the traditional pattern, exercises all jurisdictions of the congress when not in session, including selection of electoral candidates for territorial lists in national elections (IV.C.C.1). Decisions of this body are mandatory; its authority includes proposals for amending the bylaws and formulating the party program. The lower party organs "delegate" members to the committee proportionately, but the rules set its maximum size at eighty-nine. The collective presidency members are also members ex officio of the Central Committee, which meets at least every second month or as needed, but the 17th Congress stipulated that the committee has to be called into session if one-third of its members so request (IV.CC.3).²⁹ The committee can create working groups and advisory panels, but its most important power is the right "to dissolve those basic organizations and coordinating committees which deviate from the policy, program, and bylaws of the party" (IV.CC.7). The classic principle of democratic centralism (although the term is not used) gives virtually absolute control over the entire party to the Central Committee—and by inference the presidency: there is no substantive definition of the objectionable limits of unacceptable views.

Most of the Central Committee members are former HSWP members; approximately 25 percent are in their forties, and more than 50 percent belong to

the generation over fifty years old.³⁰ Thus ten years ago this large group was already well positioned and played important roles in the apparatus of the late Kadar years, which determined the political profile that they more or less retain today. Conversely, it is unlikely that prereform, orthodox communists are present in large numbers; the Central Committee political profile seems to resemble the reform-oriented communist image of the late 1970s and early 1980s.

On top of this pyramid is the presidency, which has virtually unchecked authority whenever the Central Committee is not in session; the body assigns operative tasks among themselves on a discretionary basis (IV. 1). Ex officio members of the nine-member group are the president and the three vice presidents who are nominated openly by the party organizations but formally elected by the congress, leaving five to be elected by the Central Committee (IV. 1–3) at the recommendation of the nominating committee constituted by the Central Committee. It is not specified how the composition of this very large body is arranged; there are forty-one members altogether representing the twenty regional units of the country, leaving twenty-one seats to be filled discretionally.

The nine members of the Presidency in 1996–1997 are all former HSWP members, and both the blue-collar and educated strata of society are well represented: all members have working-class backgrounds, seven are professionals, and the rest are former apparatus functionaries.³¹ The partially (re) elected body on the 17th Congress is relatively young: five members are in their forties, two in their fifties, one in his thirties, and one is over sixty; two are women. The new governing body reflects a move toward a more pragmatic, technocratic profile.

The characteristics of the infrastructure are typically traditional, yet they also reflect some movement away from the old model. A rigid, hierarchical pattern is established with the potential of elite control inherent in democratic centralism, even if the specific reference is avoided. However, there are several aspects that show an increasing distance from the traditional type organization.³² The adherence to the *Rechtstaat* and the democratic political order in postcommunist Hungary are points of departure in the WP bylaws (I.3). The possibility of multiple candidacy,

the easing of membership requirements, the more frequent meetings of both the party congress and the Central Committee are but a few points to indicate a movement away from the classic communist model. If we would define the Bolshevik model on a scale of one to ten, it is not unrealistic to place this party between five and seven in fulfilling the criteria. The nature of the organizational rules and procedures indicate that the party's self-image is still the elite of the "working classes" and believes that the party ideology and program are the only exclusive truth. This could lead to potentially messianic feelings and an irrational belief in the long-term and inevitable collective/socialist solution for the problems of society, both within and without Hungary. Hence, there is a charismatic reverence attached to the importance of the fine-tuned, horizontally and vertically coordinated party structure.

Nonetheless, it would be too easy to consider only the formal texts without looking into the actual life and functioning of the party. Consultations and interviews with party leaders and rank and file created the impression that within this organizational hierarchy the old archetype transmission of the political elite's will does not operate the same way. There is a friendly, close-knit attitude predominant in the life of the party today, which makes everyday functioning somewhat different than what could be expected in light of the text that defines party organization. This is natural considering the quarantined position of the party on the Hungarian political scene, but it could become worrisome if the party were to grow in influence, since the bylaws include the potential to return to a rigid and authoritative application.³³

That this can happen was demonstrated in the preparation of the 17th Congress in 1996. The bylaws stipulated that the election of the president and vice presidents is the authority of the congress (IV.C.2), but the actual nominations were ordered by the party elite to take place by open voting in the party organization units. In a press conference in October 1996, President Thurmer acknowledged that in the interest of direct democracy, the usual procedures were bypassed by this modification, but that formally the congress would still be in

charge. These procedures are an arbitrary extension of the meaning of bylaws, II.5, giving power to the Central Committee or Congress to call for party elections in "other questions." In the total context of the document, this paragraph was not intended to change otherwise well established rules for intraparty elections.

The circumvention of the bylaws underscore the above comments. The Congress Preparatory Committee, in a communique, instructed the candidates that "they should refrain from discrediting the policies of the party and the personalities of the candidates" and "they should keep in mind the common interests of the party."³⁴

The Workers' Party and the Left

1990: Electoral Success or Failure?

In virtually all postcommunist states, socialist/social democratic trends survived strongly during the systemic transformation, and their political potential should not have been discounted. The Lithuanian, Bulgarian, and Romanian cases particularly supported this perception, and leftist tendencies were clearly visible in the Polish, Czech, and Slovak cases as well. In Hungary there were several left parties in 1990, and leftist factions were present even within the liberal opposition; public opinion surveys indicate that the political culture carries with it social values that are generally in favor of the redistributive and protective roles of the state.³⁵

The 1990 elections resulted in limited representation for the socialists in Parliament, only 33 of 386 seats, and none for the HSWP (see table 1). The socialists were the only left component in opposition to the governing right-of-center coalition parties: the Hungarian Democratic Forum (HDF), the Independent Smallholders' and Citizens' Party (ISP) and the Christian Democratic People's Party (CDPP). However, the left's limited parliamentary presence is not a realistic measure of voter preferences, because the 1989 electoral law introduced an

exclusionary rule of 4 percent of the total national vote: parties polling below this threshold did not receive legislative representation. From among several such parties, the most significant ones were the reform-communist HSWP and the Hungarian Social Democratic Party (HSDP; Magyar Szocialdemokrata Part); the picture was also blurred by the large number of nonvoters whose political preferences remained uncertain (35 percent in the first round and 55 percent respectively in the run-offs).

In spite of the larger potential on the political map, the HSP remained the only visible left-socialist opposition present in Parliament. Notwithstanding its losses in individual districts, with the help of the more realistic territorial lists and the added support of the rechanneled "fragment votes" to the national list, the socialists became the fourth largest party in the legislature. However, as the only party with a social-democratic/socialist platform, and lacking an effective alliance with the other opposition parties, its role was severely curtailed. Nonetheless the HSP was the best-organized left-of-center force, guided by an experienced and politically sophisticated leadership. It was likely that it would retain its prominent role in all left opposition before and after the 1994 elections.³⁶

The three major socialist-left parties were the Reform Communists, the Socialists and the Social Democrats. The Agrarian Alliance, which drew its support from the large-scale state and cooperative sector, also belongs in this category. The socialists were able to break into Parliament, but the others polled under the 4 percent national threshold and thus were excluded. The figures for the more representative first round indicate, however, that the left votes comprise about one-quarter of the total, more than it appears in the light of the parliamentary mandates.

Table 1
Summary of Final Returns for the Six Major Parties, 1990

Party	Vote %	Individual District Mandate	Territorial Mandate	National Mandate	Total Seats
HDF	24.7	115	40	10	165
AFD	21.3	34	34	23	91
ISP	11.7	11	16	23	44
HSP	10.9	1	14	18	33
AYD*	8.9	1	8	12	21
CDPP	6.5	3	8	10	21
Agrarian Alliance	3.0	1	-	-	1
Independent Joint	N.A.	6	-	-	6
Candidate	N.A.	4	-	-	4
Total					386

Sources: Data compiled on basis of RFE Research, 27 April 1990, 12; and Thomas Moldovan, ed., *Szabados Valasztott-Parliament Almanach* (Budapest: Indegenforgalmi Propaganda Kiado, 1990), 44.
* Alliance of Young Democrats.

Table 2
Socialist-Left Vote in Territorial Lists, 1990

Party	Percent	Votes
HSP	10.89	535,064
HSWP	3.68	180,964
HSDP	3.55	174,434
Agrarian Alliance	3.13	154,004
Total	21.25	1,044,466
Abstainers	+5 (estimate)	
Total socialist-left	26.25	

Source: Compiled by author. See *Magyar Kozlony*, 13 May 1990, 1082-83.
Note: Based on 35 percent nonvoters, the estimated 5 percent abstainers is a conservative figure.

The low performance in individual districts was partly due to competition among the leftist parties. The three parties combined show an impressive force, but they were in competition—united, they could have made a difference; fragmented, they lost. The analysis of the returns suggests that both in individual districts and on the territorial lists the combined totals of the three left parties were higher than the separate outcome for the socialists. On the territorial lists, all the left votes combined would have resulted in the left forces taking three out of twenty counties (Jasz-Szolnok, Nograd, Somogy), and such an alliance was the second choice in six other counties.

Table 3
HSP, HSDP, and HSWP Combined Totals in Territorial
Lists (Ranking in Counties Compared with Other Parties), 1990

List	Rank	List	Rank
Budapest	3	Jasz-Szolnok	1
Baranya	3	Komarom-Esztergom	3
Bacs-Kiskun	4	Nograd	1
Bekes	3	Pest	4
Borsod-Abauj	2	Somogy	1
Csongrad	2	Szabolcs-Szatmar	2
Fejer	3	Tolna	3
Gyor-Sopron	3	Vas	4
Hajdu-Bihar	2	Veszprem	2
Heves	2	Zala	3

Note: Two of the first-ranking counties are in the east (Jasz-Szolnok, Nograd), one in the west (Somogy), and from the second group only Veszprem is in the west.

Source: Figures computed on basis of official data released in *Magyar Kozlony*, 13 May 1990, 1082.

If we look at the HSWP returns separately, territorial list votes exceeding 4 percent are exclusively in the east and none in the west (Nograd County 10.2, Heves 6.1, Szolnok 5.4, Bekes 5.3, Szabolcs-Szatmar 5.2 and Borsod 4.5 percent).³⁷

The electoral law mechanism was set up so that the rechanneling of fragment votes added to the national list. The territorial lists and the swollen national list protected party elites whose seats were secured through this system, even if they were soundly defeated in their districts. Thus the party elites, irrespective of popular support and without rank-and-file input, dominated all parliamentary parties, government coalition and opposition alike. If any of the extraparliamentary parties had broken into the legislature, according to voting patterns in 1990, the results would have been similar, favoring the respective party elites.

The individual mandate districts appear to have similar results to the territorial and national lists. It is noteworthy that the highest percentage of votes for the left also emerged in the north and on the Plainland but not in Transdanubia, reflecting the same pattern discussed above. This political-cultural division in the country is put in sharp focus by the highest/lowest percentage return by the left parties, shown in table 4.

If we look at the HSWP data separately, we find that in fifty-six of eighty-six individual mandate districts with HSWP candidates the party scored more than 4 percent and in all such cases the district was in the east or in Budapest. (There were nineteen such districts in Budapest.) All other districts in which the HSWP candidate scored below 4 percent were elsewhere in the country (west).³⁸

There was a difference in participation between Transdanubia and the Plainland; the activity in the former was generally more intense and produced more liberal (AFD) victories, both on the territorial lists and in individual districts.³⁹ Perceptions about geographical differences and their meaning vary, and factual differences are palpable between the two regions and were recognized in the past by outstanding historians.⁴⁰ The eastern parts of the country generally produced

Table 4
Combined Percentage Returns of HSP, HSWP, and HSDP
in Individual Districts: Highest and Lowest Figures
in the First Round, 1990

County	Voting District	High(%)	Voting District	Low(%)
Baranya	1	20.60	5	8.60
Bacs-Kiskun	1	15.88	6	5.09
Bekes	6	22.28	5	11.45
Borsod-Abauj	11	64.82	13	10.92
Csongrad	6	14.22	2	8.82
Fejer	3	25.54	7	11.20
Gyor-Sopron	7	19.78	7	5.86
Hajdu-Bihar	6	36.24	7	8.91
Heves	2	20.86	4	13.04
Jasz-Szolnok	6	26.31	8	9.75
Komarom	3	15.77	5	7.44
Nograd	1	31.74	4	11.97
Pest	9	13.44	5	4.80
Somogy	4	32.87	5	17.91
Szabolcs	3	22.35	4	6.45
Tolna	1	21.02	3	6.09
Vas	1	15.39	3	5.01
Veszprem	7	22.31	1	9.11
Zala	1	20.89	3	5.50
Budapest	14	27.70	25	8.49

Notes: (1) In the "high return" category, out of seven county districts with 25 percent+ return only two are in the west. In the "low" category, with less than 8 percent, five out of nine districts are in the west. (2) Based on vote totals, in five of the seven highest districts, the three-party combination would have been the highest vote getter (Borsod-Abauj District 11, Hajdu-Bihar 6, Jasz-Szolnok 6, Nograd 1, Somogy 1); in two districts the second highest (Fejer 3, Budapest 14).

Source: Author's compilation based on figures obtained from the Institute for Public Opinion Research, Budapest.

more leftist votes, and the data seem to go in tandem with today's economic (unemployment) figures; in the northern, hard-hit industrial areas support for the HSWP is highest. Similar results were already observable in the 1985 elections when this writer found that correlated percentages of run-off elections and close races by geographical distribution showed that challenges to the political establishment were somewhat greater in Transdanubia; one could speculate that this political dynamism was also characteristic and reflected regional dissimilarities.⁴¹ In the foregoing analysis these findings are corroborated by the WP's highest/lowest support both in 1990 and 1994.

Political Earthquake in 1994

Since 1992 the left-of-center forces have gradually gained strength in the post-Iron Curtain region (e.g. especially in Lithuania and Poland), and Hungary is no exception. The right-of-center coalition government exhausted its political potential and lost its credibility. The left came back with unexpected strength, not even foreseen by the most optimistic socialists. The reasons for this are complex and discussed elsewhere; there seems to be consensus, however, that economic transformation, frustration with unemployment, the lost status of the worker strata, and psychopolitical nostalgia for past security played the major roles.⁴² From the perspective of the Workers' Party, the emergence of the left did not bring significant breakthroughs: it became even more overshadowed by the suddenly giant HSP.

In 1994, the socialists won the strongest party position with a 32.99 percent score on the territorial lists, and they swept into absolute victory in 149 (85.6 percent) of the 176 individual districts. With the input from the national list and rechanneled fragment votes, the socialists took control of 209 (54.14 percent) of the parliamentary mandates, while their coalition partner AFD took 28 (19.74

percent) on the territorial lists and 16 (9.1 percent) of the individual mandates, translating into 69 (17.87 percent) parliamentary mandates; thus the socialist-liberal coalition controls a total of 278 (71.97 percent) seats in the legislature. All other opposition parties together control only 106 seats or 27.46 percent.

Table 5
Territorial List Votes and Parliamentary Mandates, 1994

Party	Votes		Mandates	
	N	%	N	%
HSP	1,781,504	32.99	209	54.14
AFD	1,065,889	19.74	69	17.87
HDF	633,770	11.74	38	9.84
ISP	476,272	8.82	26	6.74
CDPP	379,523	7.03	22	5.70
AYD	379,344	7.02	20	5.18

Source: "Report of the National Election Committee," *Magyar Kozlony*, 70, 28 June 1994.
Note: 12.66 percent of the votes were cast for parties below the 5 percent threshold; two individual district mandates were won by the Agrarian Alliance.

Table 6
Territorial List Votes for the Three Left-Socialist Parties, 1994

Party	Votes (%)
HSP	32.99
WP	3.19
HSDP	0.95
Total	37.13%

Source: Compiled by author based on Report of the National Election Bureau, Ministry of the Interior, *Magyar Kozlony*, 70, 28 June 1994.

Excluding an estimate of nonvoters, it is obvious that the left component significantly grew compared to 1990, and while the WP proportionately weakened as compared to the HSP, the social democrats virtually disappeared. The regional trends in the country are similar to the previous election data: the strongest left votes were cast in the northeast and east, mirroring the historical precedents in 1985 and 1990.

Table 7
HSP, HSDP, and WP Combined Total Vote in Territorial Lists, 1994
(WP% in parentheses)

<u>List</u>		<u>List</u>	
Budapest*	37.79 (2.64)	Jasz-Nagykun-Szolnok'	41.29 (4.74)
Baranya	36.82 (3.13)	Komarom-Esztergom	43.58 (3.39)
Bacs-Kiskun	30.57 (3.00)	Nograd*	45.39 (10.60)
Bekes	39.11 (5.46)	Pest	33.65 (2.19)
Borsod-Abauj-		Somogy*	42.46 (1.86)
Zemplen*	44.43 (4.31)	Szabolcs-Szatmar-Bereg	37.77 (3.54)
Csongrad	32.40 (3.47)	Tolna	35.18 (2.59)
Fejer	37.20 (2.63)	Vas*	27.98 (2.15)
Gyor-Moson-		Veszprem	32.30 (2.10)
Sopron	30.04 (1.93)	Zala	32.98 (2.13)
Hajdu-Bihar	39.49 (2.46)		
Heves	40.82 (4.71)		

Notes:

(1) The HSDP did not establish lists in five counties; in these the respective numbers are the combined HSP and WP votes only; these counties are identified with an asterisk.

(2) The highest combined percentages (40 percent plus) are in the east, with the exception of Komarom-Esztergom and Somogy. The lowest percentages are all in the west (below 35 percent) with the exception of Bacs-Kiskun, Csongrad, and Pest.

(3) The WP was strongest in absolute numbers in the same areas: Budapest, Borsod, Bekes, Jasz-Nagykun, Nograd, and Pest, with approximately 50 percent, i.e., 92,134 of the 179,109 total vote in the west. Within that figure Budapest represents 29,458, approximately 31.9 percent of the total.

Source: Compiled by author based on Report of the National Election Bureau, Ministry of the Interior, *Magyar Kozlony*, 70, 28 June 1994.

If we look at the breakdown of the 1994 votes among the three left-socialist parties, the correlation of political strength has decidedly changed since 1990. The HSP reinforced its position as the major figure of the left, and the other left parties once again remained outside parliament, not exceeding the modified 5 percent national threshold rule. The WP performed somewhat less well than in 1990 but still remained the leading extraparliamentary party. The overall election

results showed once again that the society basically retained its one-third structure politically: socialist-left, liberal, and right-of-center. However, within the left component the relative strength of the parties underwent significant mutation, and the WP position shrank. The territorial list returns for the three parties combined are shown in table 6.

The data also indicate that support for the WP was predominantly in tandem with the socialists; higher HSP votes went together with higher WP votes. All counties (*megye*) in which the WP gained over 4 percent of the votes were located in the eastern and northeastern heavy industrial sectors where "socialist" nostalgia, unemployment, and past conditioning are the strongest. It is noteworthy that in no other areas can we find WP support exceeding 4 percent. These crisis communities are targeted for some financial support by the government, and it would be insightful to see how a successful economic revitalization would affect left votes in general and within it, the WP ratio. Both the percentage distribution and the absolute numbers shed sharp light on demographic factors, indicating strong industrial blue-collar and former apparatchiki identification with the WP.

It is not surprising that the individual district election returns corroborate the pattern of the territorial lists. Workers' Party candidates scored over 4 percent in forty-one electoral districts in ten counties, including only two in the west and in Budapest. In twenty-five districts WP candidates scored over 5 percent, all located in the east or northeast, except for two in the west (Baranya, Komarom) and one in Budapest.

The two districts with the highest scores for the WP were in Nograd County with 18.24 percent and 11.50 percent respectively, in competition with socialist candidates (Salgotarjan and Paszto Districts 1 and 2). This shows the relatively heavy WP voting in the "rust-belt" industrial areas where poverty is rampant. The average nationwide vote was between 2 and 3 percent and many WP voters shifted their votes in the second round to the HSP.⁴³ Disregarding the above high concentration in the industrial belt, electoral support nationally was fairly evenly spread and points to steady but weak support for the WP, surviving even

the Socialist Party's absolute victory in sweeping the majority of the individual districts in 1994.

Local Elections

The 1990 elections for self-governing cities, towns, and villages took place in September and the run-offs in October.⁴⁴ The returns indicate that the HSWP results were even lower than in the national elections. The party won only five mayors, and forty-three local council mandates in the first category (small lists); in the second category the list-ratio was only 1.28 percent (as compared to 3.68 percent in parliamentary elections) and the party took only seven individual district mandates.⁴⁵ In Budapest the party did not break the 4 percent threshold (3.61 percent) and did not win any mandates.

The results indicate that hostility and "voting against the past" were stronger locally than nationally. However, the nationwide data also show that the parliamentary parties generally were weaker on the local level; especially in smaller localities the elections were often dominated by "independents," including a high but unspecified number of former (communist) officeholders who were sympathetic to local voters irrespective of their previous party affiliation. A seemingly paradoxical result for the HSWP was the lower than average voter participation (20–25 percent) in heavy industrial areas where left sympathies otherwise ran higher—a sign of political apathy: "they did not know who to vote for."⁴⁶ It should be also noted, however, that the HSWP—in all electoral categories—usually retained its ranking proportionate to the national election pattern and, with some exceptions, retained its first rank in the group of extraparliamentary parties.

The data in 1994 basically reflect similar trends for the WP. In the 1994 modification of the law (Law LXIII), run-offs were eliminated and all localities elected mayors directly (formerly this occurred only in the small-list category, the

others elected mayors indirectly by representative bodies).⁴⁷ This time the HSP-AFD coalition did not show weakening as the former coalition parties had in 1990, but once again the "independents" played an important role.

On the small-list level "independents" took 81.37 percent of the mandates; the WP nationally won only 1.15 percent and 122 mandates. On the next "mixed" system level the party fared better with 3.59 percent of the votes (exceeding the parliamentary election ratio of 3.19 percent) but its mandate proportion was only 0.34 percent in individual districts and 1.79 percent on the lists. On the county (*megye*) and Budapest returns, the WP gained modestly, exceeding the national election returns with 3.88 percent and took 27 mandates in the representative bodies—thus once again defending its seventh position, just below the six parliamentary parties' results.⁴⁸

Both the 1990 and 1994 local elections corroborate that the WP mirrored fundamentally the national election pattern; both participation and results demonstrate the party's relative strength in the northern and eastern industrial areas and weakness everywhere else, but also that low participation in these crisis areas indicate potential radical tendencies. Finally, it also is established that among the "independent" voters and candidates there are a number of WP sympathizers, former supporters and functionaries of the HSWP, who are acceptable to local communities because of their performance; thus local electorates may include a number of "dark horses" who, under certain circumstances, could turn toward the WP.

Assessment: Left "Defeat" Turned to Victory

The apparent "defeat" of the left in 1989–1990 was somewhat of a mirage. Both Western and postcommunist analyses misjudged the relevant political, economic and social factors under the euphoric influence of the collapse of party states at the polls.⁴⁹ On the Hungarian scene the above data indicated the strength

of the "socialist left": the socialists, reform-communists, and social democrats.⁵⁰ The socialists became the most significant leftist force in 1990 and built the basis for a resurgence of the left in general in 1994.

The Social Democratic Party showed the weakest leftist support in 1990 with a national vote of only 3.55 percent (174,434 votes) and no wins in individual districts. The party's record was marred by often trivial internal conflict. Not finding its ideological identity, lacking competent leadership, backed by an older membership without youth support, historical social democratic traditions did not balance the party's weakness.⁵¹ In the early 1990s the HSDP progressively declined and paid a heavy price for its failure to emerge as a viable force: in 1994 its national vote ratio fell to 0.95 percent and the party ranked eleventh nationally and fifth among extraparliamentary parties.

During the four years preceding the end of the parliamentary cycle in 1994, the presence of the left progressively increased under the spearheading role of the socialists. The right-of-center coalition suffered a defeat in 1994 and the HSP was swept to absolute victory at the polls. The dimensions of the socialist victory further overshadowed the WP which, however, retained its firm position as the strongest nonparliamentary party although declining both in absolute number of votes and also in relation to the socialists—the gap between the two became wider. The WP national vote ratio declined from 3.68 percent to 3.19 percent while the overall left component grew from 26.25 percent to 37.13 percent (see table 6). A careful assessment, therefore, would indicate that, depending on other crucial factors, the WP has a small but solid base on which it could build in the future, provided it could infuse itself with a number of life-saving changes.

Demographic Profile

Since its emergence in 1989 the WP has had perhaps the most stable membership composition of any Hungarian political party. While its electoral successes are limited and varied, the number of registered members has remained by and large the same. There were approximately 21,000 card-carrying members in 1996, and both the registered members and supporters are highly motivated and disciplined.⁵² Only the Socialist, Free Democrat, and Smallholders' parties exceeded this membership size (37,000, 32,000, and 65,000, respectively), while the other parliamentary and outsider parties had less. The grass-roots organization of the party is excellent with about one thousand local cells in 1995, second only to the HSP with twenty-five hundred and the ISP seventeen hundred. Furthermore, financial contributions, which totaled 13 million forints in 1995, were the second highest after the Socialists (21 million Ft/year), testifying to the commitment and discipline of party members.⁵³

Local party cells may not have more than three members, but the total number of local organizations was 859 in 1996. On the average this means that there are close to fifty locals in each of the twenty administrative units. The ratio of women is surprisingly high at 33 percent, and in Budapest 45 percent. This is partly due to mortality statistics indicating a ten-year gap between men and women because of shorter male life expectancy; thus couples where both partners were members eventually show the woman surviving, resulting in proportionately higher female presence. The crucial problem, however, is the lack of youth in the party. This phenomenon occurs also in the HSP, but it is more pronounced in the WP. Younger people are generally less ideologically and politically motivated, but even in this context the WP's problem is still significant. The number of members below thirty-five years of age is approximately one thousand, or 0.5 percent. The problem has been recognized, and the 16th Congress called for the "rejuvenation" of the party on all levels, including the party elite; yet success is less than certain in a

society that has a disproportionately large elderly population due to the high mortality and low birth rates.⁵⁴

The strongest presence in the party is the old guard inherited from the former HSWP, which is gradually aging and dying. Of the total membership, 16.5 percent (3,555) were not formerly members of the parent party. This is an increase as compared to the 1992 and 1993 data (7.2 and 10 percent, respectively). Viewed from another perspective, 83.5 percent of the members are former communists.⁵⁵ This does not mean that these members always agreed with past party policies; nonetheless, the ideological, political, and psychological influence of the past cannot be entirely disregarded.⁵⁶ As mentioned above, the majority of the Central Committee's eight-nine members are former HSWP members; approximately 25 percent are in their forties, the rest in their fifties or older. The presidency in 1996 includes several younger members in their forties, but the overall membership status is still heavily tilted in favor of the older generations. These data indicate that unless the membership mass is rapidly replaced by new cadres, the party is doomed in the future and will lose even more members and voters in future elections.

In terms of occupation, the bulk of the party members comes from former party and government cadres, the nomenklatura, worker guards and the dispossessed strata of the "loser" elements of privatization, mostly blue-collar workers. Thus pensioners are perhaps the largest group, and their special interests are recognized in several party documents. Personal observation of party events make this clear: photos and films taken at public party activities show a predominantly older generation participating.⁵⁷ The party leadership is aware of the problem and advocates measures that would address the "realistic life situations" of the younger generation, such as jobs, affordable housing, proper child-care opportunities, and other programs, which are being downsized everywhere. Aside from the problems of addressing social welfare in today's economic climate, the party seems to be resigned to its failure to attract younger members; it is held to be a national and world phenomenon and "other parties have similar problems

including the HSP."⁵⁸ It is painfully obvious, however, that without a quick and radical change in the composition of the party, long-run survival remains the single most crucial issue to be faced and, short of the rejuvenation of the party leadership, the current elite may also fade away.

Stepping outside the formal party membership, public approval/disapproval rates directly or by inference also have some demographic relevance. The Marketing Centrum survey in March 1996 provides some insight into the party's image in the society and also sheds light on the demographic profile of party sympathizers.

Table 8
Public Perceptions of the Workers' Party, 1996
(in percentages)

The Party leadership is	Competent 15	Incompetent 19	Neither 25	Does not know 40
The leadership is	Moderate 14	Extremist 26	Neither 19	Does not know 41
Party policy is	Pragmatic 15	Passive 24	Neither 20	Does not know 41
The Party represents	Positive values 16	Negative values 20	Neither 26	Does not know 38
The Party image is	Positive 14	Negative 30	Neither 20	Does not know 36

Source: Marketing Centrum Országos Piackutató Intézet Survey, March 1996, based on 1,000 randomly selected interview groups, Szabadság, 26 April 1996.

The data show that the positive rating in each category is relatively low, and the high percentage of "does not know" responses suggests lack of information about the question or the party. However, the combined "negative" and "neither" responses underscore the low approval rating of the party. Fifty-six percent of the respondents perceive the party as "leftist," and HSP respondents in the sample had proportionately more positive views than others. Generally the higher and lower educational strata and more women viewed the WP more positively. The approval rating was also higher in the countryside than in cities.

An important statistical finding is that one-third of the interviewees did not respond to the questionnaire. The survey analysts attribute this to lack of information, but this is by no means proved. It is more meaningful that WP sympathizers are present in all social groups and that HSP voters are disproportionately represented by about one-fourth of the total, exceeding their presence in the voting population generally. This fact may somewhat underscore the view held by the WP elite that future problems in the Socialist Party could result in a drift of some of its voters in the direction of the WP. Considering the entire political map, however, this expectation is not plausible; voting preferences may fluctuate but a move of such magnitude is highly dubious at the present time.

These data are supplemented by another survey in June 1996 basically reporting identical results, but also showing that Janos Kadar, former secretary general of the HSWP, remained relatively popular in Hungarian society. Based on a sample of 1,001 citizens, 57 percent regarded Kadar as spokesman of the average people (*egyszeru emberek*) and a progressive politician. However, while 24 percent responded that he sometimes served foreign interests, only 19 percent held the view that Kadar's policies followed predominantly foreign interests.⁵⁹ This is significant for the WP. Kadar, whom they regard as reform-communist, is their hero; consequently the party promotes his cult and believes because he is still well regarded, he may give them an opening for a comeback in the future. It has to be noted, however, that while the Marketing Centrum Survey methods are

questionable, the reported main trends conform with other data presented in this study which are derived from a number of reliable sources.⁶⁰

The Workers' Party and the Left: Relations to Parties and Social Organizations

As mentioned earlier, the HSWP was reborn at the December 1989 party congress and has remained a modest player in Hungarian politics ever since. However small the party may be, it is the successor of the ruling party of forty years and since 1990 it has remained consistently the largest extraparliamentary party. This is a meaningful political fact with both domestic and international implications. Communist parties not only survived but, in several countries, increased their influence after the implosion of the systems and the disintegration of the Soviet Union.

If the "left" is defined as a party with at least some Marxist background, four leftist players are significant in the mid-nineties on the political scene. The key figure of course is the Socialist Party, followed by the largest organized labor force, the National Federation of Hungarian Unions (NFHU), the HDSP and the WP. It stands to reason that other left elements are also present: the liberal AFD has leftist components, and there are populist "leftists" on the right in the ISP and also in the CDPP. Our interest, however, remains focused on the mentioned four key figures noted above, especially the HSP and the NFHU.

In the early 1990s the Socialists in opposition claimed to be the spokesman for all left forces outside Parliament. However, official contacts between the communists and socialists remained limited and a political alliance between them never materialized. The HSP itself was for a long time in a political quarantine,

and the Workers' Party was virtually ostracized by the media and the majority of public opinion.

In an attempt to broaden the left alliance, several social democratic parties put out feelers concerning rapprochement. In February 1991, a joint meeting of social democratic movements and parties pledged political coordination but not unification, and the HSP held a parliamentary meeting with the social democrats (but not the communists). There were more obstacles to HSWP ties, but the chances improved somewhat after the party began to soften its postcommunist image and changed its name.⁶¹ These coordinating efforts remained merely symbolic, however, and yielded only limited results in a few local elections with an alliance among the HSP, HSWP, and the HSDP.⁶²

The socialist "leader of the left" role was only moderately fulfilled by the parliamentary faction; outvoted and isolated, socialist politics were confined to a modest, circumspect strategy which did not allow cooperation with the outcasts of the outcasts: the HSWP. To be sure, the WP search for left allies was always the key objective. At the 15th Congress in 1991, it became clear that the party was consistently present and was able to move masses; the congress called for a broad alliance with any potential left allies. The rigid, orthodox nature of the party nevertheless prevented such conciliatory moves by other political forces.⁶³

The WP, however, maintained the pressure: Party President Gyula Thurmer continued to call for leftist cooperation in 1992 and 1993. One form of this would have been a national roundtable and alliance with all left forces, provided they would not have to compromise their philosophy as the socialists did.⁶⁴ Unfortunately the WP placed the responsibility for the failure of left cooperation unilaterally on the socialist and social democratic leadership, disregarding factors inherent in its ideology and objectives. Friendly critics warned that in the absence of a bolder, forward-looking, modernization-oriented Marxist outlook, the party would remain isolated in the new political environment.⁶⁵

With the approach of the 1994 elections the WP continued its drive for recognition by the parliamentary parties. In April 1994 Thurmer proposed an

Italian-style communist-socialist alliance and began to stress the neutrality issue, which was to play an important role later. The party line, however, became increasingly inconsistent. It stood by its quest for cooperation with the socialists and simultaneously attacked them; yet, at the same time, suggested that the WP would operate as a "constructive opposition."⁶⁶

This ambiguous relationship to the socialists continued. In February 1995, Thurmer demanded the resignation of Prime Minister Gyula Horn and requested him to meet President Milosevic from Yugoslavia for the purpose of preventing Hungary from participation in the NATO-IFOR operations. On the domestic front Thurmer initiated consultation with the HSP parliamentary faction leader Imre Szekeres and pressed for the abandonment of the economic stabilization program.⁶⁷ Increasingly, the NATO question became the focus of the party's public campaign which eventually led to the initiative referendum launched by the Workers' Party. In conjunction with this internationally sensitive issue, Thurmer and the WP invited Mira Markovic (Mrs. Milosevic), leader of the Communist Leftist Union of Yugoslavia, to Budapest for consultations about the Bosnian war and the Hungarian minorities question. He arranged a meeting for her with President Goncz and Imre Szekeres. The negotiations also included the establishment of a joint information center in Budapest.⁶⁸ The plan never was implemented.

Looking at the issue from the HSP's perspective, even after the 1994 elections swept the party to victory, it was still fighting the stigma of the past—it carefully avoided official association with the WP. Closer cooperation with the WP would have been detrimental because the right-of-center opposition still labeled the socialists "crypto-communists" and/or lackeys of the liberal AFD.⁶⁹

Gradually the WP has taken a more critical and somewhat schizoid attitude toward the ruling socialists. While recognizing the ideological affinity of the two parties, the WP alleges that the HSP ceased to be "socialist" and a leftist force, that it abandoned the solidarity agenda and compromised itself through the coalition with liberal capitalists. Yet, given the political and parliamentary realities, the HSP is *the* major force to the left of the conservatives, and therefore the WP would be

willing to cooperate and guide them in the "correct" direction to a true leftist stance. This being impossible because of socialist unwillingness, the WP seeks contact with the "leftist groups" within the HSP.⁷⁰

Among these the most articulate is the small Leftist Platform (Baloldali Tomorules) which comes closest to the WP on the political scale and is highly critical of the HSP leadership.⁷¹ It is noteworthy that the ideological stance of the WP and the Leftist Platform overlap substantially, but there are major differences in their visualization of a neosocialist future. The program of the Leftist Platform, most comprehensively expressed in the communique released at the HSP 4th Congress at Miskolc City in November 1995, can be summed up in the following main points.

1. After the implosion of Soviet-type socialism, the advanced capitalist drive toward a world system is based on the concentration of international capital by corporations and financial institutions, leading to the marginalization of peripheral countries/regions, the attrition of the industrial worker classes, and a general crisis of our era.
2. The crisis strengthens the political right, swelling nationalist populism; the absence of a well-defined left strategy results in the defeat of both traditional communist and social democratic streams.
3. The United States is taking advantage of the situation because it is the sole beneficiary of its superpower position militarily and economically.
4. Reconstruction of the old "socialist" model must be excluded. In the long run, the Leftist Platform favors a new, as yet unborn system based on decentralized, "direct democracy."
5. The HSP has an obligation to restrain unlimited recapitalization and to provide safeguards for the legal protection of the "basic social rights."
6. The desired solution is the rejection of the "socialist-liberal" merger and the (re)creation of a broad alliance of the left for the pursuit of "solidarity" and social justice.

7. The new elites are essentially the beneficiaries and heirs of the old elite and protect their economic interests.
8. In foreign policy the Platform is critical of the one-sided EU and NATO orientation and looks for rapprochement among the conflicting interests in the Carpathian region within an all-European security system.

It is apparent that the Leftist Platform and the WP programs suggest largely identical solutions, but there are some crucial differences. The WP looks *more* for a reconstruction of the *ancien régime*, and there is a difference in the perception of the self-governing, direct decision-making model, although neither is conceptually clear. The Platform has no sympathy with an orthodox party structure and looks for a "neosocialist" orientation. There is also asymmetry in the emphasis on "collective ownership": the contradiction is between state and cooperative predominance. The WP concentrates more on the defense of (collective) state capital, while the Platform calls for a mixed economy, cooperative ventures, worker shares, and democratic socialism.

There are only limited expectations by leading WP figures about the possibility of left-socialists voting for WP candidates and joining the party formally. The small HSP contingent identifying with the Platform is sharply critical of the WP as the ghost of past failure. Nonetheless there is also mutual sympathy in regular, friendly communications between these similar/dissimilar forces. A split in the Socialist Party could possibly lead to a new political force on the left; understandably, the WP would be prepared to be the nucleus of such a new formation, but the Platform feels this is unlikely and unacceptable.⁷²

The WP's cooperative efforts are not confined to the HSP left factions. It maintains an active presence elsewhere, especially in the NFHU, the largest labor organization, and to some extent in the LIGA and the Autonomous Unions (independent large labor associations) and in certain civil organizations.⁷³ The WP is officially present in the NFHU through the Leftist Worker Platform as well as

in the Worker Councils and on local elections formed ad hoc coalitions with some success for WP candidates. In future elections similar strategies are planned.

Finally, it has to be noted that ideologically the Hungarian Social Democratic Party would be also a natural ally, as well as an opponent of a communist-type worker party. There is, however, very limited opportunity to bring this about. On the one hand, the HSDP suffered a humiliating defeat in 1994 (0.95 percent of the votes) and on the other social democrats and communists are historically antagonistic. While the WP would try to capture those voters, the net gain expected from this source is negligible. The other dwarf social democratic organizations and parties have no voter support at all at the present time.⁷⁴

International Connections

The Workers' Party's program and organizational characteristics also define the main thrust of its international activities. As a "modern Marxist communist party" its foreign policy centers on the cooperation with sister parties and the promotion of interparty relations.⁷⁵ It is acknowledged that the information society is based on the capitalist system at present, but this may change in the long run. The party holds the view that for the purpose of economic exploitation, it is in the interests of the West to penetrate the post-Soviet region and keep Russian development at bay, especially communist influences.⁷⁶ This perception of Western expansion explains the rationale for a community of interests between the different regional parties and the Russian Communist Party. Within this context the WP identifies three key points in its foreign policy aspirations: (1) opposition to Western/NATO dependency; (2) closer economic and political ties with regional countries including the CIS; and (3) regular cooperative activities with European communist parties with special emphasis on neighboring countries.⁷⁷

Interparty connections are particularly promoted with Hungary's neighbors, Austria, Slovakia, Romania, and Yugoslavia. The ideology and programs of these respective parties, *mutatis mutandis*, are to a large extent similar. The Austrian Communist Party is present in various industrial self-governing bodies but similar to its Hungarian counterpart, does not have parliamentary representation; the two parties take an identical, negative position regarding the European Union and participation in NATO. The Czech Communist Party and the smaller Czechoslovakian Communist Party are rival organizations, the latter having seceded from its parent body. The Czech Communist Party is the stronger, with about 250,000 members and parliamentary representation. In 1994 it received 17.7 percent of the vote in local elections, and in 1994 10.5 percent nationwide.⁷⁸

The Slovakian Communist Party is a splinter group from the Party of Democratic Socialism and as of 1995 has no significant political influence. In Romania, the Communist Party was outlawed after the 1989 revolution, but since 1991 the Romanian Socialist Labor Party under Ilie Verdet's leadership has offered a reform communist program with influence in industrial regions. It was also part of the governing coalition until 1995. The newly organized Romanian Workers' Party professes to be the true descendent of the Romanian Communist Party which disintegrated in 1989. Neither party gained parliamentary mandates in November 1996.⁷⁹

The Yugoslavian Communist Party is of special significance for its Hungarian counterpart because of its geographical location and the special ties between these parties. After the dissolution of the Alliance of Yugoslav Communists, its successor organization in 1993 became the Communist-Alliance Movement for Yugoslavia, but it failed to win legislative representation. A reorganization followed, and from about twenty left-socialist, environmental, youth, and women's organizations the Yugoslav Leftist Union was founded in 1995 under the leadership of Mira Markovic (President Milosevic's wife): Today it is Yugoslavia's most significant communist organization. As noted above, the WP invited a communist delegation headed by Mira Markovic to Hungary in 1995 at

the height of the Bosnian war and before the NATO-IFOR was established; the delegation was recognized and officially received by Hungarian President Arpad Goncz.⁸⁰

Aside from the neighboring communist parties, the WP also maintains active contacts with other European organizations, including the Polish, German, French, Italian, Greek, Portuguese, and Spanish parties. These connections are not as significant as the ones with the neighboring countries, with the notable exception of the Russian Communist Party. Finally, the party also cultivates exchanges with the ruling parties in China, Cuba, and Vietnam.

By far the most important foreign connection for the WP is the Communist Party of the Russian Federation, from which it takes its historic origin and inspiration, and with which communications are the most frequent. The similarities between Yugoslav and Russian foreign policy goals are well known, and this explains why relationships with these countries have the highest priority in Hungary's foreign policy. The Russian Federation's Communist Party is an alliance among various communist groups which established a common platform in 1995 and accepted the party's program at its 3rd Congress in January 1995.⁸¹

There is a basic similarity if not identity between the *Weltanschauung* of the Russian Communist Party and the WP. However, due to their different cultural contexts, the Russian version is more articulate and openly Marxist-Leninist, while the WP soft-pedals but has not abandoned these same views. "Democratic self-government," but not necessarily a multiparty system, is the basis of constitutional government under the projected Russian communist reconstruction, which is supposed to correct all the inequities and social injustices of the "high-tech" neocapitalist system. The Russian program looks at domestic problems in a worldwide context and envisions a fundamental societal transformation resulting from postindustrial technology. Hence the crisis will inevitably grow, as a matter of historical determinism. Raising the question of historical culpability for the destruction of communism and the Soviet Union, the program promises reconstruction of Soviet power and a return to etatism through central control of

the economy. In the first phase of transformation a mixed economy will exist; a socialist mode of production will predominate in the second; in the third phase, a fully developed socialist model as defined by Lenin will be achieved. The party infrastructure is based on a rigid hierarchy, including strict party discipline and democratic centralism combined with innerparty democracy and collective leadership.⁸² As of April 1996, the party had a half-million members, 150 newspapers and regional TV stations, yet there are internal groupings, especially left radicals, challenging the leadership.⁸³

The Russian program was a powerful magnet for the resurgence of communists and sympathizers at home and abroad. In the 1995 and 1996 elections it became clear that communism was the second most important force in Russia and that its future prospects are not all illusory. The foreign policy priorities of a reconstructed communist regime might be expected to extend imperial aspirations toward East Central Europe. In this context it is almost natural that the WP regards Russian connections as its highest priority and cultivates intensive ties with that country. Party President Gyula Thurmer was educated in the Soviet Union and has many contacts not only with the communist elite but also elsewhere. He takes frequent trips to Russia, and is on record as publicly hailing the aborted communist putsch of August 1991.⁸⁴

The leadership of the WP holds the view that to balance the asymmetrical German-American orientation of the coalition government, it is necessary to cultivate ties with the East; distance from NATO would serve communist interests and benefit both Russia and Hungary because "there would be no danger in a resurgent communist power." There is also an awareness, however, that communist domination in Russia could have a negative backlash in Hungary and weaken the WP's future prospects because it would trigger painful memories.⁸⁵

It appears that the WP is far from being skeptical of its own future or the prospect of a communist renaissance. On the international scene, events seem to confirm that such expectations, even if exaggerated, are not entirely without reality. The 1996 electoral advance of the Italian Rifondazione Comunista in Europe and

of the Japanese Communist Party in Asia on the July 1996 elections are perceived as logical reactions to shattering changes in the lives of the traditional worker classes that have resulted from high-tech corporate downsizing and the concomitant shrinkage of the labor force and the welfare network. In this context, the WP places high priority on its foreign policy agenda.

There are frequent visits and consultations among the parties, not only regarding abstract political or ideological questions but also about strategic/tactical coordination, including the need for an international forum for more effective communist collaboration. The latter item does not at present enjoy strong support, however. The French are particularly opposed, fearing that such an effort in the current phase of international political development(s) would trigger strong resentments and, justifiably or not, could resurrect fears from past ghosts. For the Hungarians, however, it is an objective to be pursued. The party supported the establishment of international cooperation and the creation of an international information center, negotiations for which commenced in 1995–1996, but neither has yet materialized.⁸⁶

In this perspective the WP initiative in 1995 to put Hungary's NATO membership to national referendum takes on added significance. The party program advocates neutrality as the central plank of its foreign policy and calls for conditional participation in European organizations while remaining out of NATO.⁸⁷ President Thurmer stressed that security would not be guaranteed by NATO, especially if admission of regional countries proceeded on an uneven basis, admission could be even harmful. For him, genuine security rests in neutrality, an increasing trend in Europe.⁸⁸ This position, reflecting Russian diplomatic thinking, contrasts sharply with the socialist-liberal coalition's unequivocal commitment to NATO and EU membership.⁸⁹

Neutrality is not alien to public opinion in Hungary, and it is rooted in the historical past; one of the central themes of the 1956 revolution was separation from the Warsaw Pact, and as a last desperate act the later executed Prime Minister Imre Nagy issued a declaration of neutrality under UN protection. Bitter

experiences with unwilling entanglements in two lost world wars are also alive in the collective memories of society; neutrality, as opposed to NATO membership, thus strikes a psychological response in many Hungarians. Sensing potential popularity gains in 1995, the WP launched a campaign to initiate a popular referendum on the NATO issue: focusing on the controversy also served a foreign policy objective for both the Hungarian and Russian parties. By October 20, 1995, the party had obtained 181,160 verified signatures on its petition, more than the 142,440 required by law. Parliament thus faced a crucial issue without public debate in the society which gave only weak assent to NATO at that time.⁹⁰

In December 1995 the parliamentary committees and the plenum deliberated and on December 19 voted to reject the petition (292 in favor, 4 against, and 14 abstentions).⁹¹ This decision was promptly declared unconstitutional by the WP, which turned to the Constitutional Court for review. The court speedily acted upon the issue and on February 20, 1996, rejected the petition because of lack of jurisdiction, effectively upholding the legality of the legislature's position.⁹² The high court's legal position was based on the proviso of the referendum law that allows constitutional review exclusively on grounds of procedural deficiencies, that is, primarily the required number of verified signatures. Thus the court did not rule in the substantive legal controversies.⁹³

The NATO referendum initiative raised complex legal questions interwoven with sensitive political issues. The crux of the legal dilemma can be summed up as follows: the 1989 Public Referendum Law (Nepszavazasi Tarveny, Law XVII) provides for decision-making and/or advisory referenda under prescribed formal requirements. Parliament took the position that in this case conditions for the question were "not timely" and that the criteria for either a decision-making or advisory vote were absent. It also stressed that a vote at this time would have prevented a referendum at a later date since the law prohibits a repeated referendum on the same question within two years of the initial vote, thus preventing a public vote if the specific issue (i.e., formal membership) emerged subsequently. Critics challenged this position, arguing that Parliament's decision

was basically political and the legal reasoning for rejection was not sound.⁹⁴ Without going into all the legal details, this writer's opinion is that both Parliament and the critics were somewhat bypassing the gist of the dilemma. There was no question to decide at this point because there was an absence of a diplomatic overture or draft treaty regarding Hungary's NATO membership, consequently, neither decision-making nor advisory vote would have meant anything more than a dubious exercise in public opinion survey.⁹⁵

In light of the above, it appears that Parliament was not exclusively politically motivated, as some critics and WP supporters claim. The absence of a "justiciable" issue basically indicates the soundness of the decision to deny the referendum, even if formalistically some of the arguments are controversial. Thus the WP's effort went down to defeat, but not without accomplishing two objectives: the procedures triggered considerable publicity in the media and stirred up public opinion pro and con NATO, attracting attention to the party and demonstrating the relative strength of the largest extraparliamentary party. Last but not least, the systematic effort to keep Hungary out of NATO was an important manifestation of the WP's foreign policy favoring a more eastern orientation.⁹⁶ It should be observed, however, that the advocacy of neutrality comes from a party professing an interest in the reconstruction of a past "socialist" system and which thinks positively about the Russian communists' interest in reviving the Soviet empire, and thus the coveted neutrality likely would end up in another, less than neutral, political alignment.⁹⁷

Before closing the discussion of the WP's foreign policy contacts, it has to be noted that a position on the status of minorities in the surrounding countries, specifically in Slovakia, Romania, and Yugoslavia, is an integral part of any Hungarian policy. The party advocates "reasonable" steps to improve relationships, which comes close to the current positions of the Socialist Party and the coalition proposing "historical reconciliation" with the successor states.⁹⁸ The long-term perspective of the WP, of course, is that if communist parties played important roles in the respective countries, the conditions for a human-rights-oriented

approach would be vastly improved through a cessation of "nationalist-populist demagoguery." One ought to think, however, that such an expectation could be illusory in the light of past experiences when communist-block countries were unable to overcome national-ethnic tensions and only kept a lid on them.

The Workers' Party's Present Status and Future Trajectory

The Hungarian Workers' Party is a fixed star at the outside perimeter of the political galaxy. It still glimmers but it may fade away or, in the best case, it could become brighter without really flaring up.

The party was born out of the collapse of the parent HSWP at the 14th Party Congress in 1989, transforming the old party into what was intended to be a (social democratic) socialist party. The secessionist diehard core of the HSWP rose out of the ruins of the forty years ruling party as a reborn new/old party in December 1989. Its legitimation on the grass-roots level was dubious, but the transferring former elite(s) continued in the orthodox tradition of Marxism-Leninism and adjusted to a cloudy notion of modernized reform-communism. The December 1989 congress was viewed by the party as the "true 14th congress of the true socialist party," while the newly formed HSP was said to have emerged as a result of a "party elite putsch." The successor HSWP II showed all the characteristics of a "Bolshevik" party with a rigid, conservative organization. Over a period of seven years the party slowly and reluctantly has backed away from some of the most characteristic features of past communist parties and inched toward grudging acceptance of pluralism and partial tolerance of a market economy—a mixed economy with predominantly centralized features.

The inner procedures of party life are rigidly cemented in the charismatically revered bylaws. The former dogma of democratic centralism at first survived; later at the 16th Congress it was formally abandoned, yet in essence it

was retained. Minorities are not to obstruct decisions that higher-level organs, and ultimately the Central Committee, may annul at their discretion on grounds not defined in merit. Thus the centralized leadership is firmly built into the procedures of the party, exercising direct/indirect oligarchic power through domination. Nonetheless, this power is not consistently practiced and is sometimes bypassed in favor of reconciliation and mediation leading to compromise in conflict resolutions.

The party elite's discretionary power to manipulate procedures otherwise determined by the bylaws was demonstrated in the preparation of the 17th Congress. The open, partywide voting determined the composition of the presidency, predecided by the center and finally rubber-stamped by the congress, without a single change. Membership requirements became more open, however, by eliminating the application requirement and canceling rules about party punishment and censuring. There is now somewhat wider opportunity for primary organizations to vote on questions and, on the highest level, between congresses party conferences may be called more frequently and with greater procedural flexibility. In the final analysis, however, the infrastructure of the party can be still controlled from above; democratic election processes are limited and can be suppressed by arbitrary, top-down decisions.

Since the system-changing events of 1989–1990, the WP much longer than the socialists, has remained the captive of societal quarantine. Citizen support and electoral success remain limited but steady, keeping the party's position stable as the leading extraparliamentary force with 2–4 percent support nationally (significantly higher in the northeastern and eastern regions as indicated in the election analyses). In 1994 the WP lost some votes, but it should be kept in mind that this took place amid a sweeping electoral tide for the socialists, who attracted likely WP voters. These trends seem to have been firm throughout two national and two local elections, indicating a potential basis for a future breakout under certain conditions.

The demographic profile of the party shows clearly a core of older, members and supporters, chiefly from the previous party-state's apparatus and

nomenklatura, and a serious absence of youth that could be lethal in a few years unless reversed. The strongest backing is visible among former blue-collar industrial and agricultural workers and pensioners, especially in the less-developed and economically critical eastern areas. If the party is able to hold onto this core, and if the present political balance unravels and disenchantment within the HSP becomes significant, there could be some shift of voters toward the WP. The surveys cited above also indicate that more citizens think favorably, or at least not too critically, of this party—which is generally recognized as representative of leftist values—than actually vote for its candidate. However, such sentiments are obviously soft, and the identification of the party with past communist politics—rightly or wrongly—makes it suspect and alien in the political culture of a postcommunist society. It is therefore a curious phenomenon that on certain issues, like the referendum initiated to prevent NATO membership, the party was able to generate positive responses beyond its actual voter base.

The crucial question regarding the WP's status is how the party fits into the entire political landscape and what openings are available for it to break out of its confinement. Indeed, the gate to the promised land of legitimacy and parliamentary presence is very narrow. The party's relationship to the (presently) defining left factor, the HSP, is deteriorating, and lip-service to a broad left-coalition aside, the socialists are the main targets of WP attacks as traitors to left solidarity.⁹⁹ Deprived of its potentially largest left ally, the WP stands alone because the disappearing social democrats no longer weigh in the balance and anything "right" of the socialists, with the exception of some solidarity-concerned Christian democrats and Smallholders, is unequivocally rejected by the communists.

Thus the political isolation of this party is partly self-imposed, partly a product of societal disaffection; media treatment is also less than impartial in covering relevant news. The party's active, cooperative efforts concentrate on the NFHU Leftist Worker Platform and the Leftist Platform in the HSP, but, save for extraordinary circumstances, voter gain from these sources is likely to be minimal. If the HSP separates into two or several parties, a new radical left may emerge in

which the WP could form the nucleus—or more probably only a part, if a merger took place.¹⁰⁰ Neither in the HSP nor in other left quarters is there a positive sentiment about potential WP leadership in a new left formation.

Economic stabilization measures and falling wage levels caused growing restlessness in Hungarian society, and the concomitant radicalization has led to substantial gains for the right-conservative forces, especially the ISP, raising the specter of a potential upheaval in Hungarian politics in the near future. Considering the psychological state of society, which is characterized by fears from past bitter experiences with revolution and radicalization, an apocalyptic episode affecting the democratic order is not likely, in this writer's opinion. Nonetheless, a collapse of public trust and tolerance in political institutions and the elite cannot be excluded, and some early signs at the end of 1996 point in this direction: the radicalization of the right as well as the left. So far the tide is moving toward the right and not the left, virtually excluding a WP gain on this count. If the present trend continues and the HSP is negatively affected, some convergence between socialist and WP support may occur. Historical experience shows, however, that verbal radicalism is generally stronger in Hungary than radical activism. The lessons of the past have taught Hungarians the advantages of flexible, adaptable pragmatism.¹⁰¹

The programmatic characteristics of the WP predetermine its international connections and foreign policy objectives. As a small communist party, it must broaden its foreign ties in order to break out of its domestic confinement. International cooperation is a Marxist-Leninist tradition and the WP cultivates such ties with great care. Aside from Hungary's neighbors, the most important contacts are with the Russian Communist Party, undoubtedly the largest communist force globally aside from ruling parties.¹⁰² Relying on past traditions of an eastern orientation and coveted notions of neutrality, the various communist parties' interests converge in keeping NATO at bay; they advocate an all-European security system based on the European Organization of Security and Cooperation (EOSC). If there were a renaissance of the Soviet empire or of Russian (communist) power however, apprehension would be justified that neutrality might be captured into a

renewed Russian/communist geopolitical zone of influence, closing the full circle from anti-NATO neutrality to pro-Russian alliance.¹⁰³

The WP unrealistically holds today that such dangers are only phantoms. Historically, Hungary has been Western-oriented, both culturally and politically, and it is therefore a serious weakness of the WP's international policy that it shows no interest in studying Western European (communist) models—their programs, organization, and strategies for adapting successfully to political competition in pluralist democratic systems.

The various programmatic pronouncements and position papers of the WP are not only centered on Hungary, but its international policy notes that, with the collapse of the former socialist systems there are no counterweights to capitalist expansion which today exploits the high-technology and information revolution to its advantage, the United States and the West profiting most. This process of market globalization results in impoverishment of blue- and white-collar workers and, simultaneously shrinking social welfare networks act as a pincer movement that recreates increasing poverty. This is an issue for all sides of the political spectrum because the trend creates explosive pockets of discontent.¹⁰⁴ The right-wing conservative-nationalist-populists use the problems to promote their political agenda, while social democratic and center forces cannot solve the crisis. The radical left (communist) parties also profess a high degree of interest in counteracting what they perceive as unlimited capitalist restoration. They offer another "neocommunist" solution to the emerging technological collectivism and propose grass-roots, direct democratic control of these antisocial, destructive trends. While serious problems undoubtedly persist and even worsen, the far left parties react to them in a one-sided way and fail to realize the immense complexity of contemporary trends.¹⁰⁵ Their proposals are based on neo-Marxist concepts and the pursuit of political power, but the controversial global issues defy a single-minded, dogmatic solution as advocated by the communist parties, including the WP.

After the implosion of the Soviet-type systems, it was generally held that the days of collectivist Marxism-Leninism defined communism were over. In today's world, however, these forces appear to be on the rebound. They apparently believe that long-term technological and economic trends will not only justify their resurgence but create the conditions for their renaissance. While such beliefs are farfetched, we cannot disregard the continued strength and, in some cases, new influence of several communist parties. As heirs of the Euro-Communist tradition, some parties are successfully active in the 1990s—especially the Italian, French, Spanish, and German—concentrating on current economic woes of unemployment and welfare cutbacks and distancing themselves from Soviet-style (reform) communism of the past. The Italian Party of the Democratic Left, in power in 1996—the dominant force in the Olive Tree Coalition (L'Ulivo)—is the transfigured mainstream of the former communists; the more radical Marxist left Rifondazione Comunista, in alliance with them, scored 8.5 percent in the April 1996 elections. Privatization of "strategic industries" and NATO, is rejected, but capitalism is not viewed in one-sided, negative colors. In France, the Communist Party molded a new, more flexible image with an open style, and while disassociating itself from the Russian party, it remains attached to communism as a model of the future; it won 8.7 percent in the 1995 presidential elections.¹⁰⁶ The Spanish Communist Party is a part of the United Left, an alliance of a variety of left groups which won 10.5 percent in the March 1996 parliamentary elections. Elsewhere in Germany, the Party of Democratic Socialism represents considerable strength, especially in the east. In postcommunist Eastern Europe, the strongest communist party is the Czech party with 10.53 percent,¹⁰⁷ and, of course, in Russia it is the second largest force. On the global scene, the Japanese party also shows some resurgence: in October 1996 it almost doubled its parliamentary mandates from 15 to 26 (out of 499). These are only representative examples, but generally the impression is that both in Europe and elsewhere postcommunists and neocommunists are self-confident again and feel they have a bright future.¹⁰⁸

The Hungarian Workers' Party fits into this general picture except for its certain opportunity to improve its status in the 1998 election year. In terms of *Weltanschauung* and its approach to Marxism, technological revolution, and etatism, the party is, by and large, very similar to its European counterparts, but in operations and atmospherics it is somewhere between the Russian and Western parties. It is trying to move toward a more open, modernized model while being pulled back by late-Kadar reform-communist perceptions.

In the larger perspective there is nothing strange or unrealistic about the WP's survival and future expectations. Only some diehard zealots are dismissing left radicalism in favor of its extreme right version. Whether the party as it operates in the 1990s can make headway is another question. To be sure the 17th Congress in November 1996 committed itself to concentrate on youth support, modernization, and the innovative analysis of current societal problems, and it pledged to abandon past cliches in favor of democratization of the party infrastructure.¹⁰⁹ It appears to this writer, though, that there is neither enough commitment nor workable pragmatic methodology at the disposal of the party to stay successfully competitive in the political struggles of the next few years.

To some extent the party is still the captive of the past combined with a utopian future vision; it has no "bridge to get to the 21st Century" as the party program suggests. The rank-and-file membership is still dominated by nostalgic, backward-looking apparatus people, and youth is dramatically absent. The best scenario would be a genuine modernization of the party infrastructure through genuine democratization and more compromise with the market economy and the private sector. The party could achieve this while continuing to disassociate and differentiate itself from current social democratic trends. In doing so, if there would be an intense weakening of the mainstream left HSP, the WP could get some voter support from the disillusioned and dispossessed classes, system losers, and left-socialists. This would enable the party to either be a new nucleus of new forces or part of a new left alliance.¹¹⁰

The WP ought to get out of the societal and political quarantine. It has a legitimate place on the Hungarian political map on two accounts. First, it is the inheritor and true successor of a traditional ruling party for 40 years which made, at least in its perception, some positive contributions. Secondly, it could be claimed by some that it is a force representing the newly dispossessed members of the capitalist restoration. In the democratic process, both right and left radicalism has the constitutional status to freely exist, and perhaps expand.

If the party would modernize, as it has vaguely promised, it could possibly play an increasing role in the period leading up to the 1998 national and local elections. Paradoxically, its chances largely depend on the future trajectory of its main left competitor, the HSP. If the socialists hold together, the WP outlook is more limited; if the HSP subdivides, the WP may well benefit from shifting voter support. So far, however, disenchanting socialists and supporters have not moved toward the far left but instead to the far right ISP.¹¹¹ The late 1996 political trends, as mirrored in voter surveys, show a voter realignment away from the left toward the ISP, which is neck and neck with the socialists and the formerly liberal Fidesz-Citizens Party now leaning to center-right.¹¹²

In this volatile situation the radical left has only limited chances. It has to achieve at least 5 percent of the vote nationally to surpass the electoral law threshold in order to get into Parliament—what it failed to accomplish in 1990 and 1994.¹¹³ If successful, the party could escape from its isolation and become a legitimate left-left opposition against a social democratic-liberal coalition and/or against a center-right alliance.¹¹⁴ If this fails, the WP will stagnate on the 2-4 percent level or could even slowly fade away. Only the future will tell which of these alternatives becomes reality, and this depends on presently uncertain fermentations. The outcome of these volatile conditions remains to be seen.

Notes

This research was based partly on interviews. Special thanks are due to the leading politicians of different political parties, particularly the Workers' Party and the Hungarian Socialist Party, as well as the countless citizens who shared their views.

1. For a detailed analysis of the various platforms at this congress see Mihaly Bihari, "Ket Kongresszus Magyarországon" (Two congresses in Hungary), *Társadalmi Szemle*, 1 (1990): 19-30; Rudolf Tökés, *Hungary's Negotiated Revolution*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996): 347-56.
2. Barnabas Racz, "Political Pluralization in Hungary: The 1990 Elections," *Soviet Studies* 43 (1991): 107-36.
3. Letter from Rezso Nyers to Luis Ayala, General Secretary of the Socialist International on Nov. 1, 1989, *Társadalmi Szemle* 45 (1990): 32-33.
4. Interview with Gyula Thurmer, WP president, June 1996. See also Bihari, "Ket Kongresszus Magyarországon."
5. Robert Ribanszky and Janos Berecz.
6. Interview with Gyula Thurmer, June 1996.
7. See communique, of the HSWP 14 Congress, in Sandor Kurtan, Peter Sandor, and Laszlo Vass, eds., *Magyarország Politikai Évkönyve* (Budapest: Aula-OMIKK, 1990): 574-75.
8. Andras Bozoki, "Politikai Irányzatok Magyarországon," in *ibid.*, S. Kurtan et al., 184-92. The Workers' Militia (Munkasorseg) was organized by the Kadar regime after the 1956 revolt and was disbanded by Parliament in 1989.
9. Documents of the HSWP 14th Congress, Kurtan et al., *Magyarország Politikai*, 1990, 568-75.
10. *Ibid.*
11. *Ibid.*

12. Documents of the 16th Party Congress, in *Elveink es Tetteink* (Budapest: Progressio, 1995): 28–29.
13. *The Workers' Party's Election Program*, (Budapest: Party Communique, 1994): 6.
14. *Ibid.*, 3.
15. *Ibid.*, 5–6.
16. Specifically the Independent Smallholders' Party or ISP, (Fuggetlen Kisgazda Part, FKP) and the Hungarian Justice and Life Party or HJLP (Magyar Igazsag es Elet Partja, MIEP).
17. This program was endorsed by the congress in "With the Workers' Party into the 21st Century," Supplement, *Szabadsag*, 9 Aug. 1996.
18. A summary statement without further specification.
19. Documents of the 16th Party Congress, in *Elveink es Tetteink*, 29.
20. *Ibid.*, 31.
21. *Ibid.*, 33.
22. William H. Young, *Ogg and Ray's Introduction to American Government* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1962): 169–70.
23. Charles Gati, "The Mirage of Democracy," *Transition* 2, no. 6 (Mar. 1996): 6–12.
24. Data from the Szonda-Ipsos polling agency show an average of 34–40 percent undecideds in 1996.
25. The following analysis is based on the *Bylaws of the Workers' Party*, a unified text published in a supplement to *Szabadsag* (Budapest), 9 Aug. 1996.
26. General vote (*part-szavazas*) of the membership, *Bylaws*, Pt. II. par. 9.
27. I conducted interviews with several members of the presidency, including Party President Gyula Thurmer.

28. In interviews it was stated that "the restriction does not apply to views," leaving the question vague and meaningless.

29. In the 1991 version of the bylaws the Central Committee met only four times per year.

30. Based on party functionaries' statements.

31. Five members were replaced of which three had actual worker status.

The president of the WP since 1989 is Gyula Thurmer (b. 1953), military family background; "Red Diploma" at the Institute of International Relations, Moscow, 1976; Doctorate in Politology; Party Political Academy, 1982; diplomatic service at the Moscow Embassy, 1980-1982; Soviet affairs advisor in the Foreign Affairs Section of the HSWP Central Committee, 1982-1988; foreign affairs advisor to Karoly Grosz, prime minister and party secretary; party member since 1961.

Eva Fitos, Szollosine (b. 1943), police staff family background; high-school teaching diploma from L. Kossuth University (Hungarian/History); active high-school teacher; WP vice president since 1994; early supporter and organizer of the WP since 1989; party member since 1968.

Janos Vajda (b. 1950), agricultural worker background; chemical engineer diploma, postgraduate philosophy studies; political specialist in HSWP Central Committee apparatus; member of the presidency since 1995; vice president, 1996; chief of party publications; party member since 1972 and active in various local organizations.

Attila Vajnai (b. 1963), high-school teacher family background; university education in the Soviet Union as electrical engineer, works at Paks Nuclear Energy Plant; organized the communist party locally 1989; vice president since 1994; party member since 1987.

Biographical data based on "Congressional Report," *Szabadsag*, 9 Aug. 1996.

32. For typical communist (Bolshevik) party organizational characteristics, see Mihaly Bihari and Bela Pokol, "*Politologia*" (Budapest: Lexicon Nyomda es Kiado, 1994): 203-15.

33. This criticism was expressed by Adam Wirth in challenging the Thurmer leadership at the 17th Party Congress; he stressed lack of internal democracy and authoritarian leadership. See *Szabadsag*, 9 Aug. 1996.

34. See Communique by the Election Preparatory Committee, *ibid.* F. Morva, a party member also expressed sharply critical views about Thurmer's authoritarian leadership and "undemocratic" elections for the congress. See *Nepszabadsag*, 29 Nov. 1996, 11.

35. Ivan Szelenyi, "Van-e szavazobazis a kozepbalon?" (Is there a voter-base on the centre-left?), *Nepszabadsag*, 19 Jan. 1992. For a sociological survey of social values in Hungary see the excellent analysis by Gyorgy Csepeli and Antal Orkeny, *Ideology and Political Beliefs in Hungary: The Twilight of State Socialism* (London: Pinter, 1992); and the same authors, "Trends in Perceptions of Social Injustice in Hungary, 1989-1995," paper presented at the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies Convention, Boston, 16 Nov. 1996.

36. There are 176 individual district mandates, 152 territorial list mandates, and 58 national list seats. See Racz, "Political Pluralization in Hungary," 8-10, and "The Socialist-Left Opposition in Post-Communist Hungary," *Europe-Asia Studies* 45, (1993): 647-70.

37. Data supplied by the Institute for Public Opinion Research, Budapest.

38. Data based on figures from *ibid.*

39. Territorial list voting was highest (66 percent) in four counties and Budapest, all in the west; lowest (64 percent or less) in nine counties including only two in the west. There is a wide spread: highest ratio was in Vas County, (76.71 percent), lowest in Szabolcs-Szatmar (53.62 percent). Individual district returns show similar patterns in both rounds. Data computed from official figures in *Magyar Kozlony* 44 (13 May 1990): 1013-82.

In the nine Transdanubian counties the AFD won fifteen districts, in the other ten counties only ten districts, and in Budapest nine out of thirty-two. See Tamas Moldovan et al., eds., *Szabadon Valasztott-Parlamenti Almanach* (Budapest: Idegenforgalmi Propaganda Kiado, 1990): 42-43; and *Magyar Hirlap*, 10 April 1990.

40. Mihaly Vajda, the philosopher, referred to this on election night on TV Budapest, generating an interesting debate in the media; see *Heti Vilaggazdasag*, 6 April 1990, 72-74.

41. Barnabas Racz, "Political Participation and Developed Socialism: The Hungarian Elections of 1985," *Soviet Studies*, 39 (Jan. 1987): 40-62.

42. See Csaba Gombar, Elemer Hankiss, Laszlo Lengyel, and Gyorgyi Varnai, eds., *Balance: The Hungarian Government, 1990-1994* (Budapest: Korridor, Centre for Political Research, 1994); and Barnabas Racz and Istvan Kukorelli, "The Second-Generation Post-Communist Elections in Hungary in 1994," *Europe-Asia Studies* 47

(1995): 251–79.

43. Data based on *Elections 1994*, the official report of the National Election Bureau of the Ministry of the Interior.

44. The Local Election Law of 1990 (Law LXIV) set up a complex, three-tier system: small settlements (under 10,000 inhabitants) use the so-called small lists, electing mayors directly; larger settlements have a mixed system: individual districts and party lists and Budapest only party lists. See Istvan Kukorelli, "Onkormanyzati Valasztasok," *Tarsadalmi Szemle* 46 (1991): 3–10; and Zoltan Toth, "Onkormanyzati Valasztasok 1990," in Kurtan et al., *Magyarország Politikai, Evkonyve 1991*, 195–206.

45. *Ibid.*

46. *Ibid.*

47. See Gyorgy Szoboszlai, "Onkormanyzati Valasztasok 1994," *Tarsadalmi Szemle* 50 (1995): 15–31; and Istvan Kukorelli, "Onkormanyzati Valasztasok 1994, Dec. 11," in Kurtan et al., *Magyarország Politikai Evkonyve 1995*, 99–111.

48. For comprehensive analyses see *ibid.*

49. See, for example, *Magyar Nemzet*, 10 April 1990; *RFE Research*, 6 April 1990, 24–25; *Ann Arbor News*, 9 April 1990; *New York Times*, 9 April 1990, 16.

50. For the purposes of this study, "socialist left" means those parties which have Marxist ideological roots even if they have moved away from them almost completely.

51. Personal interview with HSDP staff, 29 March 1990; see also *Nepszava*, 23, 24, 25, and 29 Mar. 1990.

52. WP press conference, 28 Oct. 1996.

53. Tamas Csapody, "Egy nepszavazasi kiserlet jogszerusege," *Tarsadalmi Szemle* 51 (1996): 40–47; *Nepszabadsag*, 1 Feb. 1996.

54. Documents of the 16th Congress, in *Elveink es Tetteink*, (1995): 44, 33.

55. *Ibid.*, 44.

56. These problems are also acute in other parties, especially the HSP, but former HSWP members disassociated themselves more from past dogmas.

57. Gyula Thurmer, in his May 1 celebration speech in 1996, extended "special greetings to the old guard of our party, to our older comrades" while also referring to the youth: "their voice is still weak at our festivals and in the organization." *Szabadsag*, 3 May 1996, 4.

58. Personal interview with Gyula Thurmer, June 1996.

59. Marketing Centrum Orszagos Piackutato Intezet, data based on interviews on 7 and 12 June 1996, reported in *Szabadsag*, 5 July 1996.

60. The Marketing Centrum surveys were based on personal interviews randomly selected; the method significantly reduces the reliability of information for psychological reasons inherent in the open interview process.

61. *Nepszava*, 26 June 1990.

62. Racz, "The Socialist-Left Opposition," 653-54.

63. *Nepszabadsag*, 24 Oct. 1991.

64. *Ibid.*, 15 June 1992 and 8 Nov. 1993.

65. Janos Kende, "Az MSZMP Menetelese" (The march of the HSWP), *Nepszabadsag*, 24 Oct. 1991.

66. *Ibid.*, 9 Aug. 1994.

67. *Magyar Nemzet*, 4 May 1995.

68. *Ibid.*, 4 Oct. 1995.

69. Unofficially, there is frequently a friendly, "comradely" contact between the two left parties (information based on high-level discussions with both parties, the HSP and WP).

70. The WP sharpened its attack on the socialists at the 17th Congress, but specifically called for cooperation with the leftist groups in the HSP, i.e., the Leftist Platform and the Worker Section. See p. 5 of the party program, 9 Aug. 1996, *Szabadsag*, appendix.

71. The Leftist Platform is a loose association of the radical left in the HSP, and it is not based within the parliamentary faction; its leading personalities are Sandor Balogh and Tamas Krausz, both intellectuals. The Platform is to be differentiated from the Worker Section within the HSP parliamentary faction. It has about 10 members; notable spokesmen are Sandor Szili and Pal Fillo.

72. Interview with WP leaders and Tamas Krausz, Budapest, June 1996.

73. Outside the NFHU there are five larger unions: the Autonomous Trade Unions (ASZSZ), the Democratic League of Independent Trade Unions (LIGA), the Trade Union Cooperation Forum (SZEFE), the National Federation of Worker Councils (MOSZ), and the Intellectual Workers' Alliance (ESZT). See Kurtan et al., *Magyarország Politikai Evkonyve*, 1996, 775–822.

74. The former Independent Social Democratic Party and the Social Democratic People's Party merged with the HSDP in 1993. The Social Democratic Party, another splinter group, remained outside the new HSDP. See Bogdan Szajkowski, ed., *Political Parties of East Europe and the Successor States* (Harlow, Essex: Longman Group Ltd., 1994): 228–29.

75. Documents of the 16th Party Congress in *Elveink es Tetteink*, 34.

76. "A nemzetkozi kommunista mozgalom helyzete, a Munkaspart kulkapcsolatai" (The status of the international communist movement, the foreign relations of the Workers' Party), internal study of the foreign policy working group of the Central Committee, 24 Oct. 1995, 1–5.

77. *Ibid.*, 14.

78. *Ibid.*, 7.

79. *Nepszabadsag*, 11 Dec. 1995.

80. *Ibid.*, 4 Oct. 1995.

81. For a complete text of the "Program of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation" (Hungarian translation by Tibor Krausz) see *Elveink es Tetteink*, 1995, 51-63. Subsequent references are based on this edition unless indicated otherwise. See also *Nepszabadsag*, 24 Apr. 1996.
82. "Program of the Communist Party," 54-58, 59-62.
83. *Nepszabadsag*, 24 Apr. 1996.
84. Thurmer said the following: "The consolidation can begin on the basis of the Janajev Committee principles. The Workers' Party sides with the forces of socialism and the unified Soviet Union." About constitutionalism, Thurmer commented that "there are exceptional situations in history" and also referred to regular telephone contacts with the putschists. See interview in *Nepszabadsag*, 21 Aug. 1991, 6.
85. WP leaders would welcome a future establishment of an international coordinating body: "today the Russians represent no danger." This view was expressed by party leaders in interviews with author, June 1996.
86. "A nemzetközi kommunista mozgalom," 15.
87. Documents of the 16th Party Congress, in *Elveink es Tetteink*, 31. See also the program of the 17th Party Congress, *Szabadsag*, Supplement 9, Aug. 1996, 4.
88. Interview with Gyula Thurmer, *Nepszabadsag*, 10 Nov. 1995, 7.
89. "A Magyar Szocialista Part es a Szabad Demokraták Szövetsége között létrejött koalíciós megállapodás" (Coalition agreement between the Hungarian Socialist Party and the Alliance of Free Democrats), Ch. VI.2.1.5, in Kurtan et al., *Magyarország Politikai Évkönyve*, 1995, 693.
90. A 1995 survey by Modus/Eurobarometer indicates support for NATO membership as 32 percent, with 22 percent opposed and 22 percent undecided - (Kurtan et al., *Magyarország Politikai Évkönyve*, 637). In 1996 a USIA survey reported 25 percent "strong support," 33 percent "support," 15 percent opposed and 12 percent strongly opposed, (*Nepszabadsag*), 10 Jul. 1996.
91. Constitutional Committee Proposal H. 1858, promulgated as Decision 120/1995 (XII.22) of the Parliament; for detailed minutes see *Országgyűlési Jegyzőkönyv*

(Parliamentary minutes), (Oktav Press - Esztergom No. 140), 18 Dec. 1995, 15914–22.

92. 13/D/1996/4 Decision, *Constitutional Court Bulletin*, 20 Feb. 1996.

93. *Magyar Nemzet*, 13 Feb. 1996, 4.

94. For the full debate see *Országgyűlési Jegyzőkönyv*, 18 Dec. 1995, 15914–22. For a critical analysis see Tamas Csapody, "Egy népszavazási kísérlet jogszerűsége" (The legality of a referendum initiative), *Társadalmi Szemle*, 51 (1996): 40–48.

95. It also should be noted that the referendum law was passed in 1989, prior to the systemic change, and that subsequently the constitution was essentially replaced and therefore an extensive interpretation of the law would be highly questionable on general legal principles, since the intention of the legislation emerged in a substantively different constitutional and political environment.

96. *Nepszabadsag*, 21 Dec. 1995.

97. On irredentist Russian foreign policy interest see the document by the Council on Foreign and Defense Policy, "Will the Union Be Reborn," *Transition* 2, no. 15 (July 1996): 32–37.

98. Documents of the 16th Party Congress, in *Elveink es Tetteink*, 31; also the Program Document of the 17th Party Congress, *Szabadsag*, 9 Aug. 1996, 4–5.

99. Interview with Mihaly Bihari and Bela Pokol, political scientists, about "Questions of Radicalism," *Nepszabadsag*, 28 Sept. 1996, 19.

100. This development is not in sight in 1996.

101. See the interview with Bihari and Pokol cited in n. 99.

102. The Russian Communist Party won 157 seats in the Duma elections of December 1995, thus holding the largest number of votes. In the 1996 presidential election, Gennadii Zyuganov finished second with 40.31 percent of the popular vote in the run-offs. See Robert Orttung, "Duma Elections Bolster Leftist Opposition," *Transition*, 2, no. 4, (Feb. 1996): 6–11 and "Presidential Election Demonstrates Rural-Urban Divide," *Transition*, 2, no. 19, (Sept. 1996): 33–38.

103. For aspects of Russia's power aspirations and East Europe's responses, see J. F. Brown, "Everybody Needs Russia--Including Eastern Europe," *Transition*, 2, no. 23 (Nov. 1996): 6-10.

104. See Thomas Vietorisz: "The Global Information Economy, Privatization, and the Future of Socialism," in *First International Conference of Social Critical Reviews* (Budapest: Eszmelet Foundation, 1991): 35-58; also Giuseppe Prestipino, "Production technologique et impact sur l'ambiance," *ibid.*, 59-66. In Hungary, various farmer organizations' defiant rejection of government policies brought the country to the brink of total shutdown and violent confrontation, e.g., the transportation and agro-sector boycott. See *Nepszabadsag*, fall 1996 and spring 1997 issues.

105. See Serge Latouche, "A Megagepezet es a tarsadalmi kapcsolatok szetzuzasa" (The megamachinery and the destruction of societal connections), *Eszmelet* 27 (1994): 73-89.

106. Thomas Kamm, "Western Europe's Reds Remodeled Image," *The Wall Street Journal*, 12 June 1996, A 12.

107. This is a slight decline from the 1992 figure of 14 percent. *Transition*, 2, no. 13 (June 1996): 37.

108. Kamm, "Western Europe's Reds."

109. Program of the 17th Party Congress, *Szabadsag*, 9 Aug. 1996, appendix, 4-5.

110. Szonda-Ipsos surveys in 1996 show WP support at 3 percent in September and October, 1996, *Nepszabadsag*, 2 Oct., 30 Oct. 1996; and 4 percent in July and August, *ibid.*, 9 Aug., 6 Sept. 1996.

111. Regionally, Lithuania and Romania moved from left to right in the fall 1996 elections, and both in Hungary and Poland the left appears weakening; it is too early, however, to reach conclusions for the next two years, *Nepszabadsag*, 22 Nov. 1996.

112. The HSP led in November 1996 with 26 percent of those choosing a party, compared to the AYD's 22 percent and ISP's 20 percent. In the total survey population of those not yet choosing parties, the three parties were dead even at 15 percent, *Szonda-Ipsos Survey*, *Nepszabadsag*, 25 November, 1996.

113. In personal discussions, WP leaders expressed only moderate expectations: barely over 5 percent, maximum 6–7 percent.

114. This is the party's major goal. See the program of the 17th congress, 4–5.