

GESCHICHTE

The new interpretation in 1989 of the 1956 in Hungary

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Afterwards, in 1993, Imre Pozsgay wrote that in the beginning of 1989 the Hungarian leaders did not know the limits of the perestroika or does the Brezhnev doctrine or the results of Jalta exist anymore. The statements of Gorbachev and his representatives indicated that the Soviet leader was not willing to use military force. However the key existential question was: could Moscow treat other communist as equals?¹

In May 1988 Imre Pozsgay was asked to prepare a draft of the new program for the Hungarian Socialist Worker's Party (HSWP). A committee of party historians was set by the central committee and the target was to research again the history of the previous decades for the 14th congress of the party. The work was finished until the end of the year.

From the point of Mr Pozsgay the problem was how to publish the results of the committee. Pozsgay did not wait the official publishing and on the basis of the results declared the conflict in 1956 as (*popular*) *uprising*. This so called "Pozsgay bomb" took place in a radio program "168 hours" on the 28th of January 1989.

After the declaration an enormous discussion burst out in Hungary, which more or less was connected also to the contemporary politics: memories, investigation, reburials etc. Also the decision of the multiparty system was accepted in the central committee at the

¹ The grown autonomy of the East European parties was one of the most visible signs of Gorbachev's early politics. On the basis of the direct influence to the East European governments Gorbachev supported the reformists in Hungary and Poland (Lundestad 1991, 253). Gorbachev accepted the reforms in Hungary and in Poland in the public on the 7th July. (See Ágh 1991, Beschloss 1993, 86-90; Gati 1990, 77-79, 100-103).

same time as the new interpretation of 1956. In the next chapters the results – and also the reception – of the committee are focused on little closer.

Some methodological remarks

History writing Reinhart Koselleck (1988) divides in three parts: *aufschreiben*, *fortschreiben* and *umschreiben*. *Aufschreiben*, writing down, is the first stage followed by *fortschreiben*, writing forward. The first stage includes many kinds of contemporary writings and chronic. Writing forward completes the former. *Umschreiben*, re-writing the history corrects both and expresses newly, consciously rewritten history. Rewriting the history is creative, consciously opposite to already written history (1988, 20–51).

At first comes the thing itself and then what is told about it. At first something happens and then there are stories available of it. In the story there is always the end and the beginning, "the good guys", "the bad guys" and so on. Here the history writing is also understood of telling the stories, stories based on different kind of documents.²

The stories are told through language. The language here is not understood only a medium, but also creating the world (Rorty 1989). Different worlds could mean different things to different people and in this sense the existence of the common language could be put under question.

The words themselves could become political. Beside the own concepts of politics – dealing for example with democracy, power and parties – the current political meanings of the words can be studied: how the words act politically and what kind of influences they have on the discourse. The struggle from the words belongs to politics, because the content of the words is inevitably controversial (Connolly 1983, 2–10). The concepts are essential parts of politics. When the concepts are changing, they bring changes also to politics.

Thus the language is not neutral, a medium, it includes an aspiration to persuade. Murray Edelman (1977) found out that the political debate already includes an aspiration to persuade to accept some

² The critics of this view see for example Kalela 1993.

kind of certain category of things (1977, 25–27).³ This persuasion is made through rhetoric and it is possible to argue that every kind of research work includes rhetoric: who argues to who and what kind of argument is used.

Classically the argument was divided into three parts: *ethos*, *pathos* and *logos*. The first two are depending on the speaker and the audience and the last one without the former (Perelman 1982, Summa 1989).

In the following analysis of the Pozsgay committee there is a story, a narrative of the past, in which in principle the meanings, "the politics" should be interpreted from the text. The result remains an interpretation – like also the original story –, more or less trustful story about the past but not the truth itself (see also Rorty 1986).

However this is an easy case, because it could be compared with other texts and stories, which is done at first. The questions like how did the conflict begin, who were "the actors", what was the "turn" of the plot, Kádár and the implications and what happened are briefly taken into consideration.

The brief history of the conflict

The big demonstration took place in the centre of Budapest on the 23rd October, 1956. In general the situation surprised the communist leaders. The demonstrators demanded the public discussion of the mistakes done during the last years and reforms in the university. Also there were more fundamental demands like free elections and withdrawing of the Soviet troops.

As already mentioned the conflict came suddenly. Thus the different actors tried to define several times what was going on and what has to be done. On October 24th the Moscow radio reported on *counter-revolution* in Hungary and the same was told to the soldiers. The first secretary of the ruling party Ernő Gerő did not want to negotiate with the demonstrators and defined the special audience among the demonstrators as *enemies of our people* on 23rd. In the same evening the armed rebellion began and early in the next morning, 4.30, the attack of the *fascist and reactionary elements*

³ Murray Edelman (1977) researched events classified "crises" in the USA. When something was managed to call "crises" by the politicians, it was also easier to demand economic sacrifices from the people.

was mentioned for the first time on the radio Kossuth. One hour later, at 5.30, the attackers were described as *counter-revolutionary* and reactionary elements (A forradalom hangja..., 1989).

According to the MTI the new prime minister Imre Nagy defined the events *counter-revolutionary nature* on the 24th⁴. Two days later he concluded that the situation could be called *national democratic revolution*, which however was rejected in the central committee. On October 28th Nagy spoke about *national-democratic movement* on the radio and on October 30th defined the situation already as *revolution*. The multiparty system was returned and many non-communistic ministers were appointed to the new government. The old parties activated in a few days (Ibid.; Horváth 1992).

In the contemporary newspapers the actors defined themselves as revolutionaries' two or three days after the demonstration⁵. Already at an early stage the situation was compared to 1848, which gave the ideas and the ideological background of making a revolution⁶. In general the newspaper of the Party Szabad Nép did not describe the events as a revolution, but it published many announcements, which were signed by the revolutionary committees.

On November 1st János Kádár was still able to speak about *glorious uprising*, which superseded the domination of Mátyás Rákosi. But only a few days later (4.11.) Kádár founded/was forced to found *the revolutionary government of workers and peasants* and the second Soviet invasion began. From the point of the new rhetoric there were two revolutionary governments in the country, in which the latter tried to stole the revolution from the former.

⁴ For example Balogh and Jakab (1986) accepted this version of the counter-revolution. Actually Nagy did not use the word counter-revolution, but when describing the situation he spoke about "*hostile elements*" among the peaceful demonstrators, who misled the workers to turn against the people's democracy and people's power (A forradalom... 1989; 1956 plakátjai és röplapjai 1991).

⁵ The definition is found in the first number of *Igazság*, which was published on October 25th (1956 sajtója) or 26th (1956 a sajtó tükrében).

⁶ For example the poems of Sándor Petőfi were published often in the newspapers during the uprising.

The story told afterwards

In the beginning of December 1956 the provisional central committee of the Communist Party had made an analysis of the events that had occurred in Hungary, put their cause on the record (so called "White books" were published), and mapped out the tasks for the future. In the next two years many books were published on the events – on the counter-revolution in Hungary. The central committee made known four main reasons in December 1956:

"From the end of 1948, the Rákosi-Gerő clique, which had a decisive influence in the Central Leadership of the HWPP and the Government of the Hungarian People's Republic, had started to deviate from the fundamental principles of Marxism-Leninism..."

"In the precipitation's and tragic climax of the October events, a major role was also played by that wing of the Party opposition which had developed in earlier years and had since been playing a continually increasing role, which rallied around Imre Nagy and Géza Losonczy..."

"...The counter-revolution of the Horthy-fascists and Hungarian capitalists and landowners was a basic factor in the preparation and unleashing of the October events... and they had significant forces which operated illegally in Hungary."

"...Finally, international imperialism, whose objectives naturally extended much further than the Hungarian question, also played decisive and fundamental role in the events in Hungary." (Balogh-Jakab 1986, 161).

The quotation above was taken from a book, which was published as late as in 1986. The headline of the chapter, which deals with the autumn 1956 in the book, is *"The Events of October 1956"*⁷. For the first time in 1972 János Kádár had stated that 1956 was a *national tragedy*, which name was defined scientifically as counter-revolution (see Gyurkó 1988, Lendvai 1988). However as late as 1986 the book was published⁸, with the title *Counter-Revolution in Hungary. Words and Weapons*. In the book the writer János Berecz argued that the western block planned and launched the con-

⁷ In the late eighties the "softer" name about the counter-revolution, *the events of 1956* became also common in the Hungarian newspapers (Nyyssönen 1994).

⁸ The first version was published in 1969.

flict in Hungary. Official interpretation was counter-revolution or counter-revolutionary uprising in the books published during the Kádár regime.

In the West Hungarian 1956 was an important watershed for many workers and intellectuals. In the West both the words uprising and revolution were used. Many political groups found different interpretations of the conflict, such interpretations which in some way supported their own ideas: some anarchists, social democrats, different bourgeois groups or for example like David Irving. According to Irving the uprising was directed not only against the Stalinist system but also the Jewish and the Jews.

For example the trotskyst interpretation could be found from 1977 (*1956 Die Ungarische Revolution der Arbeiterräte*). In the book the events in Hungary are culminating the revolutionary waves in Europe and all over the world: the strikes in East Germany, France and the Soviet Union in 1953, Dien Bien Phu and Algeria 1954. From this point of view the activity of the factory councils was focused on. This could also be found from Hannah Arendt (1963) and Bill Lomax (1976), who were interested in the councils as a new form of revolutionary power.

Among the emigrants the left wing got more publicity in the West in books, newspapers etc.⁹ (Litván 1993). For example the Imre Nagy Institute was established in Brussels in the late '50s. Of the many books published abroad I would like to mention here only one by Ágnes Heller and Ferenc Fehér *Hungary 1956 Revisited* (1983). In their book they revise the rather good view of the Kádár era in the West.

⁹ According to Borbándi (1989) the expression "war of independence" (*szabadságharc*) rooted more to the right-wing, national or nationalist minded emigrants, who distrusted the supporters of revolution. The firmer concep was understood also nobler than the latter. „Ám a politikai színskála jobb- és szélsőjobb oldalán, a nemzeti színeket lobogtató és konzervatív körökben, amelyekben a forradalom szótól idegenkednek, a *szabadságharc* elnevezés vert gyökeret, csaknem kizárólagossági érvénnyel és a gyanakvást sem leplező mellézközöngékkal azok felé, akik *forradalom*-ról beszéltek. A »nemzeti emigráció«-ban – régiben és újban egyaránt – a szabadságharcot nemesebb és fennköltebb dolognak tartják, mint a forradalmat vagy népfelkelést.” (1989, 417).

In Hungary the forthcoming first secretary of the party, Károly Grósz said in the interview round 1987–88 that if the party (we) could accept the interpretation of revolution, it means that "we" are the counter-revolutionaries (Lendvai 1988, 164). Thus the category was whether or not: following this line of thinking after the revolution of Imre Nagy the counter-revolution of Kádár would have followed. However during the Kádár-era the term was *consolidation*. Kádár and the Soviet troops "consolidated" the situation and seized the order in Budapest and in the countryside. According to the argumentation this consolidation "had to be done", because it prevented the open bourgeois restoration in Hungary.

The ethos and the pathos of the report

When the discussion of the past had begun, the central committee of the HSWP decided to publish the report of the Pozsgay committee in the meeting on 11-12th of February (*Társadalmi Szemle* 1989, 80). As already mentioned, the decision of the multiparty system was made at the same time. On this level both issues became of current interest *after* the declaration of Imre Pozsgay.

The report was published in a special issue of *Társadalmi Szemle* (Social review), which was the theoretical and political journal of the party, HSWP. There are neither book references nor footnotes in the journal. So it must be remembered that the report is not typical history writing neither in "the Western" nor "the Eastern" sense. The report is a draft for a party program. However also some historians wrote the program or at least they were present.

The leader of the special historical committee was the president of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences Iván T. Berend. The members were Gyula Horn, Mária Ormos, Ferenc Tőkei and the specialists Sándor Balogh, József Bayer, György Földes and Tibor Hajdú. The author seems to be a collective, all the members could have taken part to the writing work or at least accepted the work.

In the beginning Iván T. Berend estimates that the research work obviously will take several years in the files in Hungary and abroad. In spite of this they tried to look through the research works and read the most important unresearched documents of the files.

The special number of *Társadalmi Szemle* has 80 pages and it deals only with the report. There are four main chapters, usually with 3-5 sub-chapters. The last headline of the second one is "The

uprising of the October 1956” (*Az 1956. októberi népfelkelés*) (pages 31–34). There are some references to the events of 1956 in other chapters too, but this is the main chapter dealing with the conflict.

In general the style is difficult and abstract. The language seems to be inexact, which could reflect compromises among the writers. The style is more commentary on “why” than explanatory “what”. Rather than arguing against the different interpretations or asking questions the answers are given. The answers are given little like “*ex cathedra*”: the truth is decided indoors by a committee.

The writer(s) assumes the audience knowing quite a lot about the conflict. Even if the story is quite chronological, to a beginner the events remain a secret. The story tries mostly to answer more the question *why* something happened rather than *what* happened. For example there is a sentence: “*To the soviet leadership presumably the turn of the October 30. and its effects were the last point to the decision*”. The writer(s) mentions only “a turn”, so the audience is assumed to know what happened. Or better to say, something happened, which was later interpreted as a “turn”.

The language of the report is Hungarian – so it is already itself a totally secret code for most foreigners! Thus the audience is interior or the Hungarian speaking people. In the report the different audiences are mixed; it is too simply to argue that the paper was directed only to the members or supporters of the party. As a draft for a party program the text seems to be aimed to the members, to the supporters and to the potential supporters. In this sense the draft could be “a provocation”, in which the winning of the potential supporters by the new formula leads to a conflict among the old members and supporters.

The logos of the report

In the report there is a story available, told from 1944 to 1988. Next a part of it, the last sub-chapter of the second chapter, is going to be focused. In general the narrative is mostly chronological although there are some exceptions in the story. The big demonstration opens the focused chapter and briefly the plot advances to the second attack of the Soviet forces. It is worth to notice, how the chapter ends:

"November 1-jén Kádár János és Münnich Ferenc sem látott más megoldást, s a Nagy Imre-kormányból kiválva, a szovjet nagykövetségen folytatott tárgyalás után, Budapestet elhagyva létrehozta a Forradalmi Munkás-Paraszt Kormányt."

According to the writer(s) the leaving of Kádár and Münnich was the turning point in the plot, because after these sentences begin the third big chapter about the socialist reform experiments (*A szocializmus kompromisszumos megújítási kísérlete (1956-1973)*), which includes the consolidation and the punishments in the late 1950's.

"A kibontakozás spontán útkereső törekvései időközben messze túlhaladtak a pártvezetés tétova és ellentmondásos lépésein." This is the first sentence of the chapter. According to the new interpretation everything started spontaneously, this is the subject in the story. There is no one to be accused, not any kind of conspiracy or special groups using the situation or making pogroms etc. at this time. No one could be accused at this stage.

On the other side the next paragraph tells about the elements waiting for more fundamental changes, but in the beginning these small (*szűk*) intellectual groups remained quiet. However it is told that they stood forth, when the right time came. Somehow these intellectuals, which amount was already described small, were "bad", but the people, the first acting masses were rather bitter.

How did the demonstration turn into fighting and bloodshed? The first shootings were still in the same night near the Radio building. There is nothing about who gave the guns or who shot first, no special reason, which exploited the situation for example as the shootings on the Russian bloody Sunday in 1905.

"...majd aznap este »a kritika fegyvere« helyett már »fegyverek kritikájára«, ami a kormányzat, a fennálló államhatalom elleni népfelkelés kirobbanásához vezetett."

This turning point is described only by the metaphor: in the same evening instead of "critical weapon" "armed critic" lead into an uprising against the existing state power. The formula does not found or even does not try to found possible shooters or the question of guilty – this is a program for the party not for the prosecutor in the court. There is also nothing from the massacre, which took place on the Kossuth square in front of the Parliament on the 25th. During

the Kádár regime the amount of people got killed varied from 30 to 600 persons.

"A Gerő-Hegedűs-kormányzat tehetetlenségében azonnal a szovjet csapatok beavatkozását kérte, s ezzel a nemzeti érzelmeiben amúgy is erősen sértett tömegek számára a felkelés nemzeti függetlenségi küzdelemmé vált... Rákosi és Gerő sztálinista rendszere ellen az utcára vonuló egyetemistákhoz október utolsó hetében hatalmas munkástömegek csatlakoztak."

Because the Gerő-Hegedűs government itself was unable to handle the situation, they called the Soviet troops and this hurted the national feelings. As in the French Revolution the masses were first *united against something* – against the existing power. Usually it seems to be easier to fight against something than for. According to the draft the unity was against the stalinist system of Rákosi and Gerő. This united the workers to the students.

The rebellions did not have special program before the 4th of November (Kende 1991). Compared to many other conflicts the Hungarian Uprising was quite short, it lasted 12 days or some weeks – depending on the counter. So there are only speculations available, what have followed, if the Soviet troops did not intervene for the second time.

The report accepts the Stalinist model of socialism the most important factor and task for the uprising. The other targets and phenomena (new land reform, the denying of the geopolitical situation, pogroms etc.) – according to the draft – already divided the rebellions.

Beside the national and democratic aspirations many other tasks are listed and they were mixed. The socialist reformist tendency is however told to be in the definite role in the whole uprising. In addition to this the report does not tell which of the other tendencies was the strongest or the most important. The committee is content with saying that there were different elements and tasks. The used words between the groups are "on the other side", "beside these", "also or further", "played big role" etc. The tendencies are put on the same level.

The main groups in the report are the following:

- 1) Definitely into the end the democratic socialist aspiration, which demanded fundamental reforms.
- 2) Turning back to the years of "people's democracy" and its forms.
- 3) The restoration of the old system or modernising it.
- 4) The aspiration, which wanted to bring back the western parliamentary, bourgeois democratic forms.
- 5) Conservative-national and extreme anticommunistic or horthyist Christian-national extreme right.
- 6) In the factories and on the streets "the declassified lumpen elements" released from prisons and wanting revenge.

The extremes anti socialist groups were courage by the Western radio stations. Now the role of the Western powers is limited of encouraging, giving the moral support to the fighters. It is told that the groups believed Radio Free Europe or Voice of America guaranteeing the promised support of the Western troops. The crisis of Suez, the invasion of Great Britain and France and last the view-points of the United States are briefly mentioned in the report.

The Soviet troops rolled back to Budapest on the 4th November and the bitter battle began. According to the report the Soviet leaders made their decision on the basis of the turn on the 30th October – this turn is not explained but it means in practice the battle on the Republic Square (Köztársaság tér).¹⁰ The report does not tell, did the government of Nagy have any possibilities without this turn.

"Igaz, hogy a Magyarországra küldött Szuszlov és Mikojan kényszerűségből megállapodott Nagy Imrével a szovjet csapatok Budapestről történő kivonásában és a kormány és felkelők rövidlátó módon »katonai győzelmüket« ünnepezték, megindult a szovjet katonai erő átcsoportosítása és a hatalom második katonai beavatkozással történő helyreállításának előkészítése."

¹⁰ On October 30th the rebellions attacked the party house and killed and lynched altogether 24 people (1956 forradalom kronológiája... 1986/1990). International the day became also famous by the photographer John Sadovy of the *Life*-magazine, who suddenly was around and took outstanding pictures, which later were published in a special number.

Usually only the Soviet invasion and the results of it are focused on. This report emphasises however the variation of the views and the reached consensus among the other countries. For example Yugoslavia and China had supported the government of Imre Nagy in the beginning.

"Ezek alapján a szovjet vezetés hosszas testületi vitákon, az álláspontok többszöri változtatásával, de végül a katonai vezetés három napon belül hozta meg döntését a második beavatkozásra. Ezt egyeztette a kínai és jugoszáv pártvezetéssel, és teljes egyetetésüket nyerte el".

The prime minister Imre Nagy and his government are strongly criticised in the report – the draft was written probably on the second half of 1988 and Nagy was rehabilitated in July 1989. However according the report the situation was exceptionally difficult and complicated – the weakness of the Gerő-Hegedüs government was already mentioned.

Usually in the old versions it was emphasised that Nagy did not handle the situation. In the Pozsgay-report they say that Imre Nagy constantly gave up. According to the critic the government did not control the armed groups – it rather believed in them. The government did not develop any kind of secret police – or control organ – like the old complemented AVH was. Strong metaphors are used: the capitulation of Nagy *throw more oil into the fire* than satisfied the claims of the streets and if the crowd would *like to have fascism, it will be fascism*.

"Állandó engedményekkel, a követelések nyomán végrehajtott újabb visszavonulásokkal nem tudta kielégíteni az utca igényeit, sőt inkább oljat öntött a tűzre... Olyan kapituláns és ostoba nézetek is lábrakaptak, hogy »ha a tömeg fasizmust akar, akkor legyen fasizmus«".

As I have already written, in this situation János Kádár and Ferenc Münnich *"did not see any other solution"*, than to leave the government of Nagy and to found a new one. This interpretation is still quite *"kádarian"*: Kádár and Münnich are the subjects – not some kind of marionettes –, some kind of heroes, who noticed the dangers and somehow knew what to do. What happened is partly unknown, for example János Kádár himself did not give any clear answers for example in a rare portrait written by László Gyurkó.

Probably the most interesting point in the whole report is found in language. The writer(s) uses the word *uprising* (népfelkeles) to name the conflict, which was also the most important point in the new interpretation – like the declaration of Imre Pozsgay already showed. There is only one paragraph, which makes an exception.

”Az eseményekben rejlő fokozatos jobbratolóási tendenciák és november első napjainak felerősödő ellenforradalmi nyomása ellenére a keveredő korrektív forradalom és ellenforradalom szétválására és a folyamat jellegének az egyik vagy másik jegyében történő egyértelmű tisztázódására, »végleges« megszilárdulására azonban nem kerülhetett sor. Hozzá kell tenni: a korrektív forradalom – ellenforradalom ellentétpár annál is tisztázatlanabbul keveredhetett össze, mivel a megelőző időszak vitái sem tudták megteremteni a szükséges eszmei tisztázódást.”

The sentence above is complicated, because it tries to focus on many interpretations at the same time: As already mentioned the right-wing tendencies existed – hidden as the report says. So strengthened also the counter-revolutionary aspirations in the first days of November. However in this case the ”revolutionary” point was that it is not possible to distinguish the phenomena, which earlier was done under the concept counter-revolution. But if the analysed chapter is turned upside down: a correct revolution did not exist either. To a Western reader this could sound quite simple but in the given context the words had strong political connotations. In this sense also the simplifications about the revolution and the war of independence (*forradalom és szabadságharc*) consist also an ideological aspect – like already mentioned by Gyula Borbándi.

However during the 1990’s the worlds could little by little lose this political connotation. They could also act ”just like words”, because in every case some kind of name has to be taken. Thus the question could be about the dead metaphor (Perelman 1982), which is already becoming a part of the language. On the other hand many names could be accepted piece by piece to the same conflict.

The reception of the report

The public opinion poll showed soon after the reburial of the ex-prime minister Imre Nagy that 12 per cent considered '56 as a counter-revolution, 22 per cent as an uprising or nearly a counter-revolution and 28 per cent as an uprising. 24 per cent thought revolution took place and 14 per cent did not have an opinion on the matter (Magyarország politikai évkönyve 1990).

Near the same are the results in the polls published by Magyar Nemzet (9.11.1989), in which one thousand persons were asked, what happened in Hungary in 1956. The data was collected between May 8th and 30th (I), June 27th and July 3rd (II) and the last one between August 23rd and September the first (III). The following results are in the same order:

	I	II	III
<i>Revolution (forradalom)</i>	21%	24%	22%
<i>Uprising (felkelés, népfelkelés)</i>	20%	28%	29%
<i>First an uprising, turned to a counter-revolution</i>	32%	25%	25%
<i>Counter-revolution</i>	14%	12%	13%

Naturally doubts could be raised about the polls in general, because the answers could somehow depend on the questions etc, the supporters of some special view could return the papers more often than the others or even the waited opinion could be expressed. In spite of this the results showed anyhow the direction¹¹: the pluralism dominated about the interpretation of 1956 in 1989.

For the opposition, one of the main demands was to call the events uprising or revolution. It was the main unifying motive among the different opposition forces, including the former neo-Marxist groups (Litván 1993). To initiate memorials and commemorations the special Committee for Historical Justice (*Történelmi Igazságtétel Bizottság*) was found in May 1988.¹² According to the leading members of the committee the report of the Pozsgay com-

¹¹ The same orientation could be read in two other polls from February 1989 (Népszabadság 20.2. and 168 óra 13.6.).

¹² The first conference was already organised illegally at the thirtieth anniversary of the '56. In May 1988 Kádár was also superseded.

mittee tried for the first time seriously solve the complicated question (Magyar Nemzet 6.3.).

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After the declaration of Pozsgay some appeals were published by the opposition. The most important was signed altogether by 16 different organisations (Magyar Hírlap 7. 2.). The appeal supported Pozsgay, connected the new interpretation of 1956 and the aspiration of building a legal position for the opposition. In this extend the appeal was the biggest produced by the organisations of the opposition even if there were the demonstration and appeals on the 30th anniversary of the execution of Imre Nagy.

For the second time the opposition put these two questions together in the appeal, which was published on the 18th of February (Magyar Hírlap 18. 2.). The united opposition suggested already special round table negotiations to the democracy. This happened some days after the accepting the new interpretation of 1956 and the multiparty system in the Central Committee of the HSWP (10.–11.2.).¹³

There is no reliable information, how significant dangers there were to stop the reforms, if there were any. However many fears, possibilities and risks had to be taken into consideration, when the decisions were made. When Pozsgay made his move, there was the risk of reject the whole draft, because the new interpretation dealt with the legitimization of the socialist state.

If the whole party voted for, in theory it also would be a sign of the unreliabment: the past is an instrument, which could opportunisticly be changed by one party. From the rhetorical point of view only the contradictions in the ruling party were trustful to the audiences outside the party. In this sense Pozsgay made the clever move in putting the question before the public instead of the party audience (see also Bruszt 1990). The declaration tested the meaning of the word reformer.

The party which claimed to be a reformist itself had in principle three alternatives: At first it could stop the reforms. Secondly admitting that Pozsgay was right in the case it could strengthen his

¹³ In Poland the negotiations were started on the 6th of February.

position against the more conservative forces. Last the party could be more radical – to accept the principle of the multiparty system.¹⁴

The system of many parties itself did not mean everything – in principle there were many parties also in Northern Korea (see Bruszt 1990) – but it is supposed here that in the middle of the hesitation, in the contingent situation the revision of the past was the argument, which led to accept the unacceptable. Even if it is possible to argue that there are several possibilities – years and dates –, where the changes could begin¹⁵, at least the new interpretation helped to dissolve the system or scrapped the legitimate basis of the kádarian system (see also Bozóki 1993, Litván 1993).

Of course the fight for power in the HSWP did not end in February. The reformist circles organised themselves and started to demand changes to the new draft all along the summer. Finally in October the HSWP had the 14th congress, in which the party divided. The majority accepted the new name Hungarian Socialist Party – the old name without a worker. In the accepted program the whole historical part was abolished, no one was mentioned by the name.¹⁶ The new version begins *”In the end of the 1980’s the Hungarian society came into big crises...”*

¹⁴ According to Pozsgay at first it was suggested that he has to leave the party. Finally after the stormy discussion 100 voted for him and only two against him probably, because Károly Grósz persuaded in keeping the party together (Pozsgay 1993, 108–109).

¹⁵ For example Rudolf L. Tőkés mentions several examples and points of time between 1956 and October 1989 – like 1968, 1985, 1988, 1989 – from the transformation.

¹⁶ See for example Magyarország politikai évkönyve 1990 and Népszabadság 10.10.1989.

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