

Theses of PhD dissertation

**THE POLICY OF THE HUNGARIAN COMMUNIST PARTY IN
KOMÁROM-ESZTERGOM COUNTY BETWEEN 1945 AND 1948**

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I. The antecedents of the research

The subject of the dissertation is the writing up of the policy of the Hungarian Communist Party – the most influential party of the coalition era of 1944–1948 – in Komárom-Esztergom County. The specialized literature of the coalition era is really voluminous, but the writing up of the history of the communist party is still lacking in our historiography. Although, it is also indisputable that we have a relatively clear picture about the policy of the party – based on summaries, memoirs, and collections of documents. At the beginning of our work, we aimed at the detailed, in-depth analysis of the policy of the Hungarian Communist Party in Komárom-Esztergom County during the so-called coalition period – with the purpose in mind that our findings will also be utilized outside the sphere of local historiography, strictly speaking.

We have been researching the subject and publishing our findings since the spring of 2007.

II. Objects

In our research, we were taking a close and comprehensive look at the policy of the Hungarian Communist Party in Komárom-Esztergom County between 1945 and 1948. We are convinced that giving exhaustive answers to the main questions enumerated below has made the detailed description of the subject and the filling of earlier gaps possible.

- 1) During the Temporary National Assembly, at what a pace were the local communist primary party units formed, were there clashes of views between the so-called 1919-ers and the figures of the new communist generation, and what level of organization did the party achieve in local respect.
- 2) We considered the profound description of the national assembly elections held on 4th November 1945 particularly important, because the Hungarian Communist Party appeared legally in these elections for the first time.
- 3) The almost two-year-long period featured by jockeying for position among the communists after the national assembly elections is a very important section of our dissertation. Several essential events determining the party's course happened in these times – like the two county conferences, the settlings of people in the county (influencing the circumstances thoroughly), and the crushing of the Independent Smallholders' Party. Many people regard that latter event as the turning point of the era, that is why we have been concerned about its elaboration. Further basic problems that demanded analysis are the following: the revelation of how the communists were

gaining control over the mass organizations (trade unions, the MADISZ (Hungarian Democratic Youth Association), and the MNDSZ (Hungarian Women's Democratic Association)), the B-list for cleansing the public administration, and the analysis of the cadre situation and the possible fights among cliques inside the communist party.

- 4) The description of the parliamentary elections held on 31st August 1947 – the one mainly remembered by history for the “blue ballots” – might have been even more important than the elections of 4th November 1945. Its peculiarity lied in the fact that it took place in a totally different political setting, compared to the earlier elections. That made it important to describe the campaign as well as to demonstrate administrative abuses numerically and to publish the results of the elections by districts and communities within – for the first time in local historiography.
- 5) The events of an almost half-a-year-long period after the elections had to be discussed in both internal and international contexts. It is widely known that the merger of the two workers' party took place in 1948, but this event can be understood only if we analyze the process resulting in the merger deeply, and if questions coming to the surface in connection with that (like the organizing of the communist left inside the social democratic party, the filtering of membership etc.) are answered.
- 6) Whether there were turning-point-like events in the life of the county, and which/what kind of events determined the perceptible strengthening of the county's communist party.

III. Methods of study

In order to describe and analyze the subject, we aimed at working up relevant specialized literature, materials published in the local press, and all available sources of the archives. The latter (available in public archives, like the Historical Archives of Hungarian State Security, the National Archives of Hungary Fejér County Archives, the Hungarian National Archives Komárom-Esztergom County Archives, the Archives of Political History and Trade Unions) is invaluable – if critically read, of course. Among the most important types of documents from this era, we find the minutes of various meetings, secretarial reports, notes, and summaries. Although materials of the printed press from this period of time is rather fragmentary/sporadic, we still considered its working up very important, as some cardinal questions can be answered solely on the basis of crucial pieces of information gathered from this source. Another important basis of our investigation was the collections of memories: almost every leading personality of the party completed his/her own memoirs

(predominantly in the evening of their life); however, these sources have to be dealt with even more cautiously than sources of the archives.

IV. New scientific findings

The communist policy during the almost seven months of the Temporary National Assembly was primarily featured by the forming of the basic party organizations, organizing public administration, and implementing the land reform as soon as possible. After working up all of the available (but rather fragmentary) documentary materials, we can firmly state with certainty that – in accordance with the overall national tendencies – they got down to work very eagerly. The primary party units were formed almost everywhere very rapidly, and, in addition, they were producing impressive numbers concerning membership – up to the end of September 1945, they almost reached 13000. Nevertheless, this period was also full of difficulties, the most severe of which was the group of problems concerning the 19-ers. Besides, the newly formed party units also had internal troubles, the most problematic of which was the neglecting or postponing the execution of directives coming from higher party organizations. The forming of the police was closely connected to the organizing of the public administration – and we can claim that the communists played a prominent role in this respect, as well. It is already clear from the questionnaires of the primary party units that they had overwhelming majority in the bodies of almost all communities. And the 80% of the leading officials of the police had membership in the Hungarian Communist Party – and that is an astonishingly high proportion. During working up the history of the redistribution of land in the county, we have got proved that the party had influence not only on the execution thereof, but also on the personal composition of the land application committees.

In the era of our subject, two elections took place, the national assembly elections on 4th November 1945 and the parliamentary elections on 31st August 1947, both of which were scrutinized profoundly in the present study for the first time. The election of 1945 was special, because the Hungarian Communist Party debuted under legal circumstances at this voting. Despite that, they had been organizing a campaign covering practically every community, applying posters and leaflets in huge amounts. It was interesting to follow the process that took hardly two months and ended up in the frustration of the voting list common with the Social Democratic Party. Another surprising novelty was uncovering the fact that – although only on the basis of the data of one single community – the members of the census-taker committees (not being under their control yet) were omitting communist voters intentionally. Besides, the reception of József Mindszenty's pastoral letter in the county also implied a kind

of peculiarity, as – for example – the members of the clergy expressed their disagreement in front of prominent figures of the communist party in Komárom. The presenting of election results by districts and communities within has advanced several conclusions. One of the most important findings among them is that almost 55% of the total number of votes on the HCP were cast in six settlements of the county, mainly inhabited by miners and workers. All in all, we can state that the 29129 votes received in these elections under fair circumstances, although lagged behind their own preceding expectations, is a remarkable achievement by any measure. We cannot say the same concerning the parliamentary elections held on 31st August 1947, which entered history by the term “blue-ballot” elections. But abuses even more serious than that were committed by the Hungarian Communist Party: namely, inhibiting the voters of the opposition from getting to the ballot boxes by administrative means. That is, the census-taking committees – being under their control by this time – had omitted more than 17000 citizens from the enrollment in the county. The election campaign differed from the one of 1945 in the feature that they did not focus on rallies any more, individual agitation was put in the forefront instead – mass organizations of the county played a significant role in that. Beyond all things mentioned above, a considerable apparatus with satisfactory financial background was functioning for the success – with all these things in mind, getting 35449 votes (and so exceeding the number of votes got in the previous elections by hardly 6000) is not an achievement of great pride. The figures are – like in the case of the elections of 1945, and for the first time in local historiography – published by districts and communities. Similarly to the national assembly elections, we can show that 54.1% of the total number of votes on the Hungarian Communist Party were cast – including two additional settlements – in eight settlements of the county.

The first determining event of the period between November 1945 and August 1947 was the resignation of county secretary Ferenc Kóbor and the winding up of the Territorial Committees. The county conferences were important events of communist organizational activities – they served as a forum where current political happenings and future political goals were discussed by participants in large numbers, usually in the presence of the party’s leading personalities well-known even on the national level. During the study of the personal composition of the county party board elected on these occasions, we found only four persons (István Bottyán, Gyula Hadanich, József Korczyk, and Sándor Soós) who represented continuity in these bodies. István Hauer, József Németh, and József Rigó were elected three times, while most members got into the body only once or twice. Consequently, the central topics of the first county conference were the struggle against inflation, the redistribution of

land, and the reduction of staff numbers in the public administration apparatus, while the second conference held in the beginning of March 1947 focused on the conspiracy against the Republic, but it also dealt with the three-year plan in detail.

As a consequence of the special situation of the county – beyond the Hungarian population, there were communities where people of German and Slovakian nationality lived in significant numbers –, the issues of settlement and resettlement were particularly emphatic. Concerning the latter one, we can affirm that the members of the communist apparatus of the county – adjusting themselves to the national trend – can be counted among those who were urging resettlement, definitely. We think that the main reason for their taking that standpoint was that the majority of the population of German nationality tended to sympathize with the Social Democratic Party, and not with them. Although they favoured executing the resettlement as soon as possible, its delays were very advantageous to them in the course of the parliamentary elections, as people of German nationality waiting for resettlement were not entered on the rolls of voters.

In the struggle for the control over public administration, it was an important task to exclude current employees of the state machinery by means of the B-list. After working up the available sources of the party archives, we have quantified the reduction of staff numbers in the public administration apparatus of Komárom-Esztergom County. The appropriate “stock” of cadres may have been even more important than the staff reduction in the public administration. It is obvious that only with the help of well-trained and loyal, “party-interest-minded” cadres were the local party units able to make the formerly (until 1945) illegal communist party accepted in every stratum of society. In the course of the period, the party had problems with the cadres constantly, despite that they took several measures – like organizing training courses – in order to improve their work. The working up of the activity of the Teofil Sándor faction, gaining momentum in the county between 1945 and 1946, is a novelty by any standard, and that enables us to establish several important findings. To begin with, the leaders of the faction managed – even if only for a really short period of time – to divide the county leadership into two camps. We think it has proved to be a valid idea that we inserted it in the “gleichschaltung” [uniforming] process within the communist party, and attempted to draw a parallel between the extreme right and the radical communists.

In the struggle for power, gaining control over mass organizations was also a crucial part of the policy of the party. From among the organizations studied by us, that process was the most problematic in the case of trade unions, as in this respect, there was a strong rivalry between them and the Social Democratic Party. With the change in their working methods and

the infiltration of the best communist cadres, by 1947, they had managed to show remarkable achievements in this respect as well. The MADISZ and the MNDSZ had to fight with gradual disintegration up to the second half of 1947 – which is interesting, also because they had had suitable communist background from the very beginning. By the first quarter of 1948, they had finally achieved that the MADISZ, after several organizational changes, had turned into the only youth organization – called MINSZ –, while the MNDSZ – although without getting a new name – had also become hegemonic by April 1948.

The consolidation of the party can be dated to the early summer of 1947, as the effects of the so-called conspiracy against the Republic, which aimed at destroying the smallholders' party, became also perceptible in Komárom-Esztergom County in that period. All this was crowned by the cases of Béla Kovács and Ferenc Nagy, after which the membership of the Hungarian Communist Party increased by almost 1000 in the District of Gesztes – a former stronghold of the smallholders – in almost less than two months. After that, the organizations of the Independent Smallholders' Party in the county began to disintegrate, and with this in mind, the communists could go for the parliamentary elections, the outcome of which – knowing the organizational status of the other parties – was not uncertain.

The membership of the party was growing impressively between 1945 and 1947 – that is, the number of members increased from the initial 13000 to 25000 by the eve of the elections. In order to succeed, they were organizing agitation days in nearly every single communities of the county – despite the fact that it was rather difficult, owing to the constant lack of vehicles that characterized the era. We have also managed to present a detailed report about the social composition of the members, as well as about their willingness to pay the membership fee. The irregular nature of the latter was inducing constant dissatisfaction among the county leadership of the party.

After the elections on 31st August 1947, the Hungarian Communist Party incorporated the Social Democratic Party also in Komárom-Esztergom County without any special efforts. That had been completed along a well-designed plan in the case of this county, as well. The main stages of the process were constituted by the forming of the left wing in the county organizations of the Social Democratic Party and the exclusion of politically unreliable individuals by the unification committees. According to our documentary sources, in the course of the latter procedure, 430 people were excluded from the party, which cannot be evaluated as too many if we take the party's approximately 10000-person membership into account. That can be explained by the police general feeling reports, which came to light at the last moments of our research – these reports have made us conclude that members of

several primary party units expecting predictable exclusion had left the party before the procedures, by themselves. According to an exactly determined schedule, the merger of the lower-level organizational units of the two workers' party only took place after that, and then their county organizations also united on 17th May 1948.

In our view, the example of Komárom-Esztergom County also supports the idea that the transition to Stalinism has to be seen as a long process, the end of which can be put at the formation of the Popular Front for Independence, the first choiceless list elections and the adoption of the new Constitution – that is, it can be dated to 1949. However, the start of the turn in the county can be dated to about May and June 1947 (the crushing of the smallholders' party and the forced resignation of Ferenc Nagy), which was preceded by a well-prepared two-year-long process of jockeying for position after the elections of 1945, in many cases featured by illegal acts committed by the communists. Notwithstanding, until the beginning of 1947, political rivalry was taking place in the framework of parliamentary democracy. The immediate Sovietization – in the given international setting – resulted from – among others – the lack of appropriate social background behind the Hungarian Communist Party and the deficiencies in quality of the party's "stock" of cadres, one of the main cause of which was that they had functioned illegally until 1944.

The merger with the Social Democratic Party on 17th May 1947 had two important implications. First of all, it was a landmark in the history of the workers' movement, as the Party of Hungarian Workers, which was formed later, can be seen as a party organization under communist control in every respect. It is an interesting extra piece of knowledge that party documents of the following era frequently use the term "coalition parties" up to 1949 – although if we take into account the resolution of the conference mentioned earlier, it is not that surprising any more, as it contains an important point about working on a very close cooperation with the Independent Smallholders' Party and the National Peasant Party, with the vision of the Popular Front in mind. Second, from this point on, the process of Sovietization was really accelerating, which was followed first by the forming of the Popular Front for Independence on the national level, then later in Komárom-Esztergom County on 18 March 1949.

V. Publication list

Studies

1.) Az 1947-es országgyűlési választások Komárom-Esztergom vármegyében. *Limes*. Tudományos szemle, Tatabánya, 2007. 3. sz. 129–140. o.

- 2.) Az MKP és az 1945-ös nemzetgyűlési választások Komárom-Esztergom vármegyében. In Csombor Erzsébet–L. Balogh Béni (szerk.): Évkönyv 2010. A Komárom-Esztergom Megyei Önkormányzat Levéltára évkönyve. Esztergom, 2010. 172–194. o.
- 3.) Az MKP tömegszervezetekkel kapcsolatos politikája Komárom-Esztergom vármegyében 1945-1948 között. Levéltári Szemle, 2013. 3. sz. 69–77. o.
- 4.) A két munkáspárt egyesülése Komárom-Esztergom vármegyében – különös tekintettel az MKP tevékenységére (1947–1948). Megjelenés előtt. (Közli a Kuny Domokos Múzeum Közleményei)
- 5.) Adalékok az MKP 1947-es választási győzelméhez Komárom-Esztergom vármegyében. Megjelenés előtt. (Közli a Levéltári Szemle 2014/3. száma)
- 6.) Az MKP Komárom-Esztergom vármegyei politikája az Ideiglenes Nemzetgyűlés időszakában. Megjelenés előtt.

Conferences presentations

- 7.) Tudományos műhelyek Komárom-Esztergom megyében. A Kuny Domokos Megyei Múzeum által 2011. október 12-én szervezett konferencia.
Az előadás címe: Az 1945. és 1947. évi választások Komárom-Esztergom vármegyében.
- 8.) A helytörténetírás rögzös útjai. Tudományos műhelyek Komárom-Esztergom megyében II. A Kuny Domokos Megyei Múzeum által 2013. november 7-én szervezett konferencia.
Az előadás címe: A két munkáspárt egyesülése Komárom-Esztergom vármegyében 1948-ban.
- 9.) Az Eszterházy Károly Főiskola első éves PhD-hallgatóinak III. konferenciája 2014. május 16-án.
Az előadás címe: Az MKP Komárom-Esztergom vármegyei politikája az Ideiglenes Nemzetgyűlés időszakában.
- 10.) Tudományos műhelyek Komárom-Esztergom megyében III. A Kuny Domokos Múzeum által 2014. november 3-án szervezett konferencia.
Az előadás címe: Az MKP Komárom-Esztergom vármegyei politikája 1945–1948 között.