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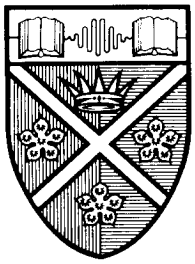

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN HUNGARY

by

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POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN HUNGARY

For about two years there have been ever-quickening events and developments in Hungary which have formed the foundation of a new political, social and economic system. As a result, the first free elections after 45 years were held in March, 1990. What can be said about the general conditions of the country in the meantime? The political sphere has been shaken, the majority of the old political institutions are in ruins or are on the way to it. At the same time, the deep social and economic crisis which has been a reality for at least a decade has not yet come to the surface, has not yet shown its real face. The national debt is more than $20 billion, the highest in the region. The quickening inflation (above 20 per cent) endangers the reconstruction of the economy, while 30 per cent of the population lives under the accepted minimum living standard. There is a real danger that while building a new political democracy, the economy will collapse, which would block the political developments. This side of the situation is not covered in this paper but we must draw attention to the fact that behind the promising political developments there are risks and instabilities outside the political sphere as well as within it.

This is a time when political scientists and theoreticians feel the challenge. Something definitely new is going on, so we can attempt to give meaning to the often spontaneous events, find the points which have relevance to the future and try to conceptualise the main positive tendencies. Theories and opinions may emerge, of course, that will be proved incorrect in the future. But there is the other possibility too: in a period of such radical changes history and politics show themselves more openly. If we know the previous

processes, and if we have a wider view on the similar events elsewhere, it seems easier to grasp the essence and to draw conclusions.

In this paper I will describe a theoretical framework for the changing reality of political participation in Hungary and at the same time give some concrete details which can help the foreign on-looker to find some stable points in this changing reality. Where the present developments are concerned I am going to examine the current level of support for the regime, as this support indicates the chances and possible developments of participation in the near future.

A *double participatory revolution* has been taking place in Hungary. The radical change from an authoritarian one-party regime towards a democratic multi-party system must unquestionably be called a 'revolution'. The term 'participatory revolution' has been used already for the denomination of different developments in political science. Lately it has been applied to describe new social movements which draw people to action outside the conventional forms of political institutions and which, on the basis of direct democracy, have made a challenge to traditional politics in the Western world.

The notion of double participatory revolution in Hungary on the one hand means the rebuilding of the institutions of political democracy (from individual rights to free elections) which make the conventional forms of political participation possible, representing a

kind of modernising effort. On the other hand, it must include the rebuilding of society, a development when people get involved in the newly-forming institutions and, if possible, also try to adopt new types of participatory forms. This separation and the supposition of a double context may seem artificial initially, but when we look at the events taking place in Hungary, it soon turns out that this distinction must be made as the institutionalisation takes place much quicker than the second process. This second context implies the involvement of the people, partly giving stability to the newly formed traditional institutions, partly showing other possible ways of participation.

There was much complaint and debate about the low level of 'participatory inclination' of the Hungarian public during this transitory period. Although occasionally overemphasised, it was a real problem. The turnout in the first ballot of the first free national election reflected the election results of the ancient, solid, slightly dull bourgeois democracies with its 63 per cent, while the second ballot turnout did not even reach 50 per cent at the national level. We should seek some explanation of why the second context of participatory revolution has contained so many ambivalencies.

It is natural that greater emphasis is given to the first context: it is difficult to pull down the institutions of the party-state. New parties, new party-leaderships, parliamentary and general political debates attract more attention than the quieter movements in the depth of the society. The latter are also formed more slowly, especially after four decades of dictatorship when all societal links had been abolished. But both are equally important. The

institutionalisation of political democracy in high politics, and the formation of new societal links among the people, cannot be separated from each other.

Before going into details a short summary of the different participatory phases in Hungary after 1945 is appropriate. This will help us to understand the new situation and give an opportunity to raise some basic questions. From the point of participatory forms five periods can be distinguished: 1945–1947; 1947–1956; from the October 1956 revolution to Spring, 1957; 1957–1987; from 1988 to date. These periods do not have the same importance, of course. Each is distinct and has some peculiarities.

1945–1947

After the end of the war, for a short period, Hungarian society was able to prove that the lack of democratic traditions, which is often thought about this region, is only a half truth. In the depth of society there are valuable stocks of democracy and when restrictions disappear – because of institutional limits imposed by either a conservative ruling-class or an external oppressor – the positive traditions come to the surface. Spontaneously and autonomously a committee system emerged. Popular committees took over local government, control of industry and the distribution of big landed estates. Society was reborn in thousands of new institutions based on *self-government*, which formed the background for the flourishing *multi-party system*. 1945 was the first year when the general secret ballot was introduced. As a result of the list voting

system five parties got into the parliament at that time. When the Communist party got into power after 1947 without the consent of the people, but with the Soviet army at its back, not only the multi-party system but all the forms of committees and associations in society were abolished.

1947-1956

Much has already been said about the "classical" forms of Stalinism which was founded in Hungary in the late forties, nevertheless we should raise some points concerning participation.

All the forms of real participation vanished, so that we can agree with the opinion that the participatory forms of Stalinism are '*unreal*'[1], as the "audience" is not able to influence the positional decisions. In spite of this I suggest that for the description of the participatory forms in Hungary after 1947 the formula of *demonstrative participation* is more expressive. With this phrase we can grasp exactly why a dictatorship relies so heavily on the "participation" of the people: the enthusiastic party and other meetings, marches and mobilisation should be the proof that the system is legitimate and is accepted by the populace. At the same time, everything is considered to be political, from giving birth to a baby to arriving punctually at the office. If we really wanted to take this conclusion to the extreme, with a seemingly strange but not unfounded *bon-mot*, we could say that where everything is political nothing is political, so in such systems political participation in the original and real sense does not exist at all. As this would exclude

everything from research, it is better to find a compromise to designate the participatory forms of communist dictatorships.

The 1956 revolution to Spring 1957

The intermezzo of the 1956 revolution showed that the organism of society could not be changed (and destroyed) so quickly as some politicians would have liked. Within a few days a very similar structure to that of the pre-1947 period was born: old parties, workers' councils in factories, civil and military organisations were formed to take over the place of the past regime. Even for some months after the Soviet invasion there was a hope that the new political leadership would make some concessions to some *limited participation*: that the workers' councils and some left-wing parties could exist, that trade-unions and the movement of the Patriotic People's Front (including for example non-party organisations, the churches) could have some independence from the party. By the Spring of 1957, however, all the hopes had melted away. The hopes for limited participation can be understood but their failure is theoretically clear. In reality the hopes would never be realised as they would be contradictory to the essence of the communist political system, with its monolithic one-party structure.

1957-87

The longest phase (1957-1987) though far from being homogeneous, has some basic characteristics. The force of demonstrative participation gradually disappeared but the basic structures of the system remained unchanged and therefore unreal

participatory forms were retained. Thus it is useful to distinguish the dominant participatory forms of Stalinism and post-Stalinism in Hungary as respectively 'demonstrative' and 'unreal'. It was not compulsory – although it was advantageous – to join in the participatory institutions. The party membership stabilised around the level of 8.5 per cent of the whole population, trade union membership of industrial workers was almost complete, the single children's and youth organisation gathered the sweeping majority of the given age groups. The ever-present party-state ensured that autonomous organisations could not survive, but it also allowed the *freedom of non-participation*, which for many people was real liberation after the previous regime. The boundaries of politics were still far-reaching but a gradually increasing part of the "private sphere" was left untroubled by politics. As we come closer to the present this freedom of non-participation has become stronger. When some economic reforms (however limited) were introduced, new layers of Hungarian society were able to gain fresh territories for non-participation. This did not mean independence, of course, as the always changing economic rules and orders were a sandy soil for the economic improvement of the individual and thus for non-participation as well.

Participation taken as a value has a long tradition in political science. While I agree with those who think that taking part in politics educates the individual and strengthens the political system, the specific example of the Kádár period in Hungary would rather suggest that there can be political systems and eras when "cultivating our gardens" gives more freedom, self-respect and self-

improvement than entering into the political arena. These are the moments when the political scene seems structurally resistant to changes, when political involvement – although it may have been based originally on good-will and open-mindedness – ends up at best as lip-service and at worst spoils and destroys individuals, making them guilty as they give their name to political decisions they otherwise wouldn't undertake, and legitimise aspects of a system they probably wanted to change.

But is it not foolish not to try to do something even if we cannot do everything? This was one of the basic questions during this participation-free phase for many people in Hungary.[2] The positive answer is justified now as Hungary could not have advanced on the way towards democracy so thoroughly and relatively smoothly if there had not been really reform-minded members in the different institutions. Their role was important but not significant, even though for the individual this role was full of conflicts and risks. If a "participator" went too far or became too popular he could have found himself excluded from the party as happened even in the Spring of 1988 when the four most prominent inner-party critics were expelled. This provided the opening scene for the party conference and for the spreading of rebellion within and outside the party. For the individual, it could have been a self-conscious and conflictual participation, but for the system as a whole it was absolutely superfluous: real, structural changes cannot be achieved in this way. A participant could start from within the system but having to remain within the frames of the system killed real participation and made consequent changes impossible. This was

proved both in a positive and negative way in 1989. On the one hand, the so called 'reform communists' had to get rid of the basic structures of the regime, to abolish the things that actually meant the essence of communism. On the other hand, people became alienated from the general idea of socialism and communism. For a while, reform-communist politicians were able to keep their popularity despite the growing unpopularity of their party, but at the elections their role as 'participators and reformers' was not honoured at all. The two most prominent figures of the communist reform movement, Mr. Horn the ex-foreign minister, and Mr. Pozsgay the ex-state minister, were defeated in their constituencies.

Particularly from the second half of the 1970s Hungarian society has tried to rebuild itself. Of course only a minority was able to do that: the economically 'independent', some professionals and the young, mostly university students. Professional and cultural associations and youth movements were born both in big cities and in small countryside communities. Most of them clung to the problems and traditions of a smaller community and were local in character. They were able to survive the suspicion of the authorities. But the fate of the groups that were more direct, politically-minded and had nation-wide aims (such as independent peace-movements, ecological movements, organisation to help the poor, independent youth movements) was sooner or later to be oppressed.

Non-participatory values - staying apart, listening and gathering experiences, keeping a distance - became important elements of political socialisation. The official slogans, of course,

advertised active and critical involvement in politics but the institutions and the working of the system alienated the citizen from it. We have no space here to write in detail about this 'double socialisation' which was one of the sources of the formation of double lives, double morals and a general moral crisis in the public sphere. The majority of the population surrendered to the private sphere: nowhere else in the world can there be, I suppose, so many people who strive for self-realisation in activities outside the everyday world. "Inner immigration" has been widespread not only among the intelligentsia but in the wider population. We often say that the Hungarian people have one sin and one virtue, but they are the same: the ability to survive.

The political regime since the 1960s has relied quite consciously on this non-participatory tradition. This was part of the compromise between the leadership and the majority of the population. The official and institutionalised forms of political participation represented mainly unreal (though not demonstrative) forms, and free association was tolerated only if it declared itself not to undertake political aims. It has been a dangerous and irresponsible compromise. Surely, a society without efficient and accepted forms of political participation is very vulnerable, particularly in crisis situations, as these forms can be the umbrella against historical thunderstorms. The slow reaction of the people, the relative weakness of the second context of the double participatory revolution mentioned above, can be partly explained by these previous developments.

Post-1988

The latest stage, since 1988, has brought the historical thunderstorm with it. The institutions of the party-state couldn't cope with the economic, social and political crises. The burden of a $20 billion debt, obsolete industrial structures, inefficient agriculture, growing unemployment, 25 per cent of the population under the socially accepted living-standard, 20 per cent inflation – these represent only the tip of the ice-berg.

The political elite of the communist party lost its self-confidence and in the first moment of uncertainty different opposition groups came to the surface. The struggle about every position in the sphere of politics has been going on for about two years and it is really a difficult task to summarise the most important developments.

As a consequence of the new law of assembly and association accepted by the parliament in January 1989, followed by the political decision of the Communist Party central committee in February, party formation started on a large scale. By that time, the strongest opposition groups already worked as parties: the Hungarian Democratic Forum from September, 1987; the Association of Young Democrats from March, 1988; the Association of Free Democrats and the Independent Smallholders' Party both from November 1988. No wonder that they are all in the new parliament with only the Christian Democratic People's Party and the Hungarian Socialist Party being added to this list. This shows

what a significance the time-factor had in the institutionalisation process and consequently in electoral success of the different groups. 1989 brought the mushrooming of parties. By the end of January 1990 42 parties announced their intention to participate in the elections. This sudden outburst must be considered natural after the long period of oppression, and we can witness the same phenomenon in the other central East European countries as well.

Regarding non-party political organisations, alternative one-issue movements, interest groups (trade unions and workers' councils alike) we can state that these were not in the forefront of politics, at least not in the first half of the transitory period. This is understandable if we consider the general circumstances. The role of the new parties, mainly represented by political elites that previously worked in opposition, was given. But how could the everyday people join into the process? First the people had to fight their own small battles against the institutional imprisonment from which they were suffering. This fight was built up of a million small rebellions and revolts that cannot be scientifically treated but can be seen in the everyday experience, where they appeared and gave a basis for the other side of the participatory revolution.

Let us mention three characteristic developments from this area. The League of Independent Trade Unions has served as the organisational form of the grass-roots movements. Although its first organisation was formed in Spring 1988, its popularity began to grow only after the Autumn of 1989, when it successfully blocked the efforts of the official trade unions to save their monopoly of power and capital. In the election campaign the League did much

to clarify the rules and inform the people about their rights. In the newly elected parliament there are 37 League MPs (though not elected directly in the colours of the League). There are 30 organisations belonging to it and another 58 are in the process of joining. Secondly, the workers' council movement was also reborn. Their tasks, however, are not easy to formulate. One wing wants to return to the 1956 tradition, uniting both ownership and trade union rights; the other wants to undertake only trade union functions concentrating on interest representation. We cannot foretell what will happen to them, but these organisations were formed spontaneously and from below, they are promising developments of the participatory revolution. Thirdly we must mention that citizens' initiatives concerning local issues have spread into the countryside. From the second half of 1989 this was no longer a privilege of Budapest and some other big towns.

Two kinds of activities were particularly characteristic of small settlements. Protests concerning environmental issues emerged, as villages and small towns used to be the targets for nuclear waste. Some national park areas suffered different kinds of pollution. Economic protests – mainly strikes – in small town plants can be explained easily if we know that these plants had been at the mercy of big Budapest firms, which wanted to put the burden of the economic crisis on them.

In order to be able to understand how difficult it has been to begin a new participatory period it is necessary to describe political attitudes and some public opinion data. When we evaluate the

processes we must be aware of the fact that before 1988 no opinion which was different from the official was allowed to be expressed in the mass media, and that the overwhelming majority of people did not know about opposition groups. Of course we must also take into account the fact that people were afraid to tell publicly what they thought.

This can be illustrated by a survey conducted in May 1988, when a very high proportion of the population did not know (or did not admit knowing) about any groups in opposition to the communist party and the government. The question asked in the survey was: Are there groups which oppose the politics of the communist party and the government? Only about one-third of the population had any knowledge about these groups. There were, of course big differences by residence and location.[3]

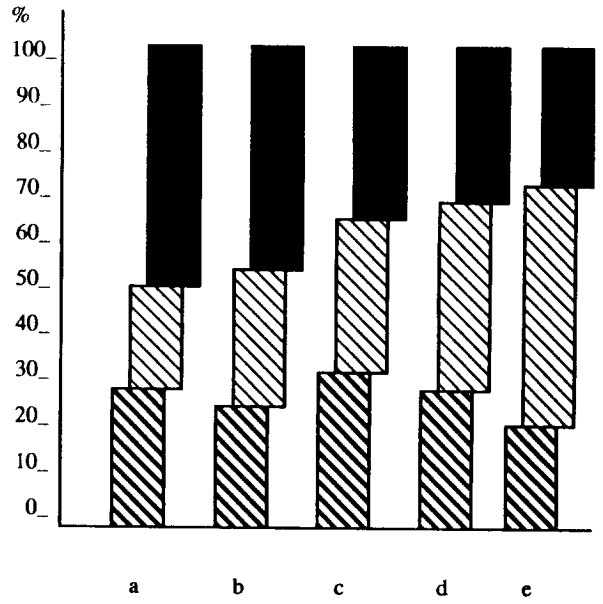
It is not surprising that the data show that people in the villages and the less skilled are the least informed about the opposition parties. We must remember the low level of information when looking at the party strength later. Lack of information does not help participation.

In the second half of 1988 a "political information boom" began, the limitations on the mass media gradually disappeared and critical opinions received publicity. Very soon a critical evaluation of the existing political institutions began to form and the possibilities of structural modifications (e.g. multi-party system with free elections, constitutional changes, the possibility of referendums) got onto the agenda.

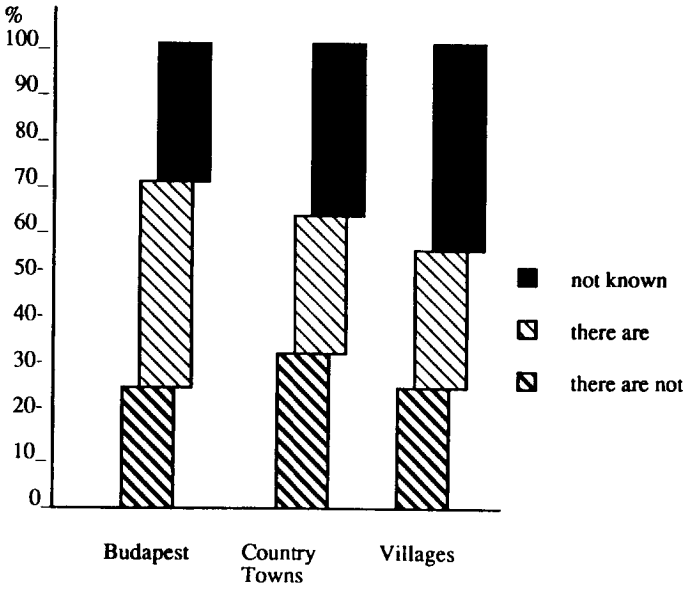
Figure 1

Vocational differences

a = unskilled workers
b = semi-skilled workers
c = skilled workers
d = white collar workers
e = professionals, managers



Territorial differences

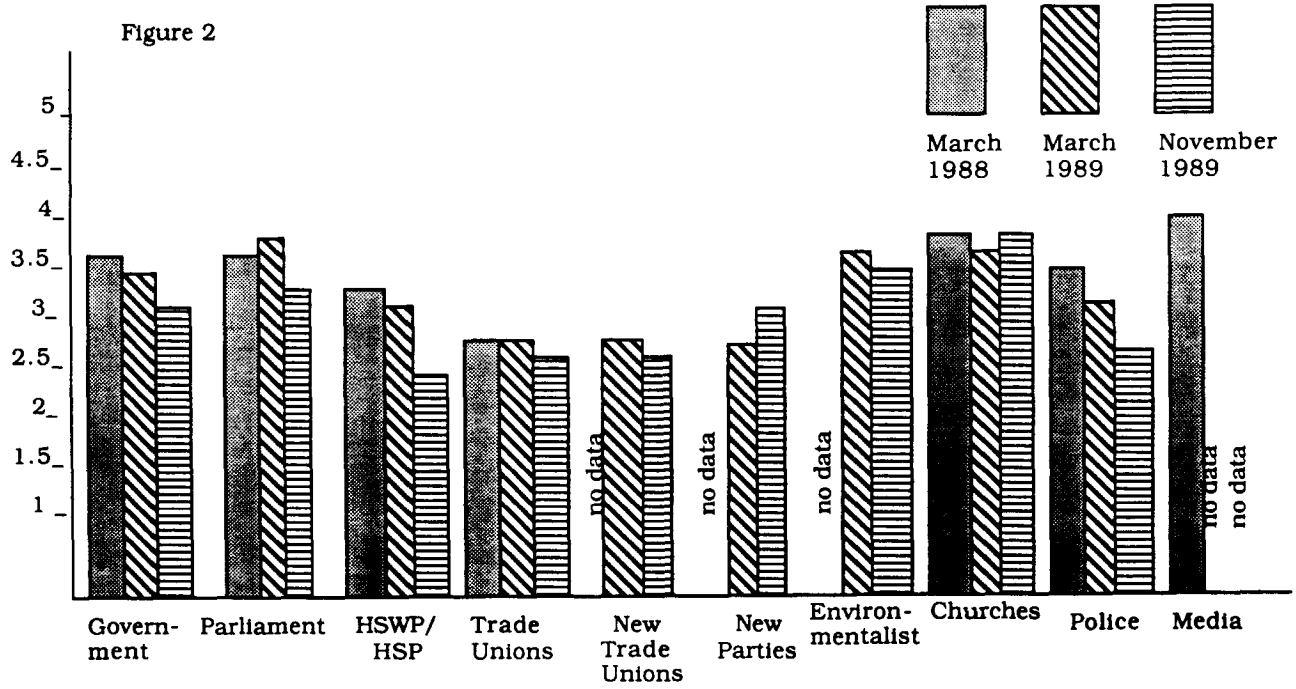


The following question was asked in surveys in March 1988, in March 1989 and November 1989: In your opinion how much do the following institutions serve the good of the people? People were to answer in a 5-point scale (the same system that is used in school in Hungary), with 1 being the worst, 5 the best. As we can see, 5 was absolutely remote and none of the institutions achieved even an average of 4 (See Fig. 2)[4].

Particularly striking is the low mark the official trade-unions and the communist party received. Support for the latter was falling even after the October party congress which announced the abandoning of communist traditions and declared social democratic values. At the time of the survey the new, independent trade unions were not yet discernable enough. With the exception of the new parties there was a general 'disappointment process' concerning the basic institutions. But the new parties did not enjoy high popularity either. The churches were able to keep their high popularity.

In July 1989 people were asked by the Gallup Poll about their confidence in Hungarian institutions.[5] There are interesting resemblances between this confidence index (see Table 1) and Figure 2. The Media are the 'winners' in both cases. The reform-mindedness of many media personalities must be an important determinant of this. The army's position declined by July 1989 and later got into a deep crisis after the corrupt affairs of the military leadership received publicity in a best-seller book written by a high rank officer. The ex-defence minister was stripped of his rank. Similarly, the position of the police worsened after the so

Figure 2


March 1988
March 1989
November 1989
5
4.5
4
3.5
3
2.5
2
1.5
1
no data
no data
no data
no data
no data
Govern-ment
Parliament
HSWP/ HSP
Trade Unions
New Trade Unions
New Parties
Environ-mentalist
Churches
Police
Media

called Danube-gate scandal, when it turned out that even in January 1990 some secret service forces gathered information about 'opposition' parties.

Table 1 Confidence Index

INSTITUTION	% BEING CONFIDENT
Media	72
Church	67
Government	62
Army	58
Police	48
Warsaw Treaty	39
Communist Party	35
New Parties	35
Trade Unions	24

In both lists the churches and the government follow the media. For the government, especially after this turbulent period, this finding is remarkable. What is more, the ex-prime minister was the first person (and there were only five altogether from among the 176 individual constituencies) who got elected on the first ballot to the new parliament as an independent MP. That demagogery itself is not enough is shown by the last place of the trade unions with the lowest sympathy of 24 per cent.

The very low confidence index of the parties – not only of the communist party but the other parties as well – is a point to which we have to pay more attention.

The one-party structure of the political regime has been unquestionable for a long time. Even at the end of 1988, when the

formation of political parties was on the agenda, people were uncertain in their answers: 63 per cent of them thought the formation of parties acceptable and 43 per cent thought it necessary. The young, the more educated, men and Budapest residents held the more pluralistic views. But even those who thought it necessary, supposed that it could be the result only of a long process: the respondents suggested that on average it would take nearly four years.[6] In a more limited survey taken at about the same time[7], 8 per cent of the Budapest sample answered that only the communist party should present candidates at the elections, while 56 per cent answered that the opposition organisations should have this right as well. In Szigetvár (a country town in the south) these numbers were 12 per cent and 48 per cent respectively.

The communist party central committee decided at its 10-11th February 1989 meeting to accept multi-partyism. After this a further survey was conducted in which Budapest residents were asked if a multi-party system was necessary. The findings are shown in Figure 3.[8] We can see that the number of those who think a multi-party system necessary has greatly increased. By autumn 1989 75 per cent of the population accepted the free formation of parties (it was 63 per cent one year previously) and 87 per cent agreed that no single party should control state institutions and organisations.

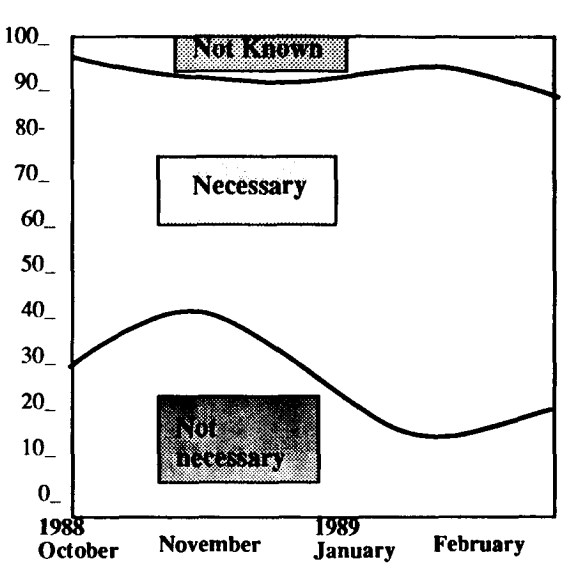
Although the parties are thought necessary, they do not attract a huge number of people as members and as we have seen there is not much confidence in them. Membership data are not always reliable but we can not be far from the truth when stating that less than 200,000 people are party members. This is only 2.5 per cent

of the 7.8 million eligible to vote. The picture is even more unique if we discount the 50,000 members of the Hungarian Socialist Workers Party. The latter not only in its name but also in its politics wants to follow its party-state predecessor. It is truly remarkable that this 'huge' membership was not enough for the HSWP to send one MP to parliament in the 1990 elections.

Notwithstanding the two parties which continued organisationally the line of the ex-communist party, the biggest force is the Hungarian Democratic Forum with a mere 22,000 members (data from December 1989). It remains to be seen how membership will change in face of the party's success in the 1990 elections. This party got the highest number of votes and seats in the new parliament. In this low membership level we can discern the uncertainties of the past (the role of political culture and traditions as mentioned in the first part of this paper), but some present events also seem to strengthen the people's lack of faith in these parties. The opposition parties, for example, made a mistake when they agreed that talks between them and the communist party (the opposition "round table") should be secret. People felt that the old and the new political elites were going to make a deal above their heads.

These round table talks, which continued from June to September 1989, formed the basis of peaceful transition. Their significance can not be overemphasised when we realise that at that time the whole central-European region seemed intact from changes. The conditions in which the round table worked, and its

Figure 3


%
100_
90_
80-
70_
60_
50_
40_
30_
20_
10_
0_
Not Known
Necessary
Not necessary
1988
October
November
1989
January
February

acceptance by the public, showed the basic problems resulting partly from the previous eras: lack of confidence in political institutions, lack of information, the aura of secrecy. Let us quote some typical evaluations from a survey concerning the round table talks (% refers to those who agreed with the given statements):[10]

The HSWP (communists) want to use the talks to keep their leading role	56%
The opposition can only criticise but cannot tell what to do	43%
The HSWP wants to turn the opposition groups againstone another	21%
The HSWP and the opposition wants to make a deal excluding the citizens	20%
The opposition represents only the interest of the intelligentsia	18%

At the same time only one-third of the people could name any of the participants in the Opposition Round Table (the collective name of the opposition forces). Even after the basic agreements were drawn up on 18 September, 40 per cent of the people had not heard of the round table, but the negative prejudices were still lively among them.

The scepticism about parties was proved in the Summer of 1989 when four by-elections were held. This was the first time that opposition candidates were involved. In three places the majority of the voters abstained and no candidate received the necessary majority in the first ballot. In the second ballot in three of the four the opposition parties' representatives won, but the fourth district was not able to send a member to parliament at this stage either

(the election being valid only if the turnout exceeds 50 per cent in the first ballot or 25 per cent in the second ballot.) There were two further by-elections in the Autumn, 1989. In one of these, in perhaps the most prominent constituency of the capital, only 40 per cent of the citizens went to vote and the ballot had to be repeated.

We must emphasise here again that the essence of the present period of democratisation is the transition from the "freedom of non-participation" to an era where a great variety of forms of real participation will be established. But from the point of view of the future it is not superfluous to state the main things that formed the basis of the "compromise" of non-participation between the political leadership and the population. At the same time they would explain some of the differences between Hungary and other central-European countries while showing the ambivalence of the people towards greater participation in the present developments. One basis of the compromise was the experience of the 1956 uprising: it has shown that demonstrative participation and openly forced unreal participation in general are alien to the Hungarian people. The other main basis was the role of the economy. Since the mid-1960s the political leadership used the phraseology of economic reforms, and at the end of the 1960s and in the 1970s for the bigger part of the population there were indeed rising living standards. The privileged, skilled-workforce was mainly satisfied, and did not strive for a Solidarity-type organisation as in Poland.

The elements that seemed advantageous after 1956 – that is (i) a relatively free way of life in comparison to the other central-European countries; (ii) the freedom of non-participation; and (iii)

the efforts towards economic reforms – helped the country to be in the forefront of political reform-movements. But these same things currently seem to weaken, if only temporarily, the forces of change within society, particularly from the point of participation. For the "silent majority" the direction of changes is not clear and the evaluation of the Kádár regime is uncertain. For many the Kádár period was more attractive than the present situation (at least in the terms of the economy) when the serious consequences of the previous decades are being felt. They cannot realise that the relative prosperity of the regime was based partly on extensive exploitation of the resources of the country and partly on foreign credit.

All this is illustrated by a recent survey with a nationally representative sample.[11] It is not surprising that 81 per cent of the people agreed with the statement that in the Kádár–period "all the Hungarian people used to live better than today, although some got richer than the others"; 68 per cent agreed that Hungary developed economically and 63 per cent agreed that there was social development as well, though it was not enough. For the statement that "no problems were solved at all" only 30 per cent answered with a "yes". The clear-cut majorities concerning the positive attitudes towards the Kádár period begin to disappear in the survey when questions refer to more refined, political topics. While 57 per cent say that liberty was missing in the past regime, only 37 per cent say that there was oppression. And it is not by chance. The self-limitation of political power – as a consequence of 1956 – made the strong forms of oppression unnecessary, although

limitation of freedoms was widespread.

For the average citizen the identification with the new parties or political trends, and participation in politics, does not spring from the radical negation of the past regime, as in some other states of central-Europe. The expectations about the new developments were quite high and they were not fulfilled. These expectations are very difficult to summarise. It can be stated, however, that most people wanted to 'live better'. The comparison with Western countries, mainly with Austria strengthened the lack of confidence in the economic performance of the regime. The other set of expectations was in connection with the political-ideological issues. People simply wanted to put an end to lies; they wanted to say what they thought about 1956 or about the national minority problem of ethnic Hungarians in the surrounding states. We know that the economic situation has worsened ever since, while democratisation and liberalisation were also full of tensions. For most people the events of the last two years were full of conflicts and were less successful than they hoped for. Only 9 per cent think that things are proceeding as they had expected since May 1988 (the date of the communist party conference that marked the end of the Kádár-period), 44 per cent think that things are proceeding in some ways better but in other ways worse, 14 per cent think things are better while 27 per cent think that their expectations have not been realised at all. These data may give some explanations about the unwillingness of the people to participate.

Referendum

Following our discussion of the parties we should turn to a more direct form of political participation, the referendum. The referendum is a completely new political institution in Hungary. It can be combined with people's initiatives: if 100,000 people make a request, a referendum must be held about a given problem. One petition for a referendum against building the environmentally catastrophic dam on the Danube had already been successful at the end of 1988. In the event the referendum was not held as the government itself withdrew the plan.

The second petition demanding a referendum was signed within a few days by more than 200,000 people in October 1989, before the free elections. The Association of Young Democrats initiated a referendum at this stage and was joined by the Association of the Free Democrats, the Social Democratic Party and the Independent Smallholders Party. These four parties were afraid that a quick presidential election would bring to that post a communist, who could ensure the retention of some institutions of the party-state. Three other questions were added to the referendum: Should the communist party leave the work places? Should the communist party give an account of its financial affairs (its capital)?; Should the communist party's Armed Guard be abolished?

By the time of the referendum the last three issues were already accepted as laws by parliament, but the gesture of reinforcing them by the people cannot be neglected. (We must note

that at the time of writing this article, August, 1990, the ex-communist party has not yet properly fulfilled the obligation to have its financial affairs audited). The overwhelming majority (about 95 per cent) voted "yes" to the last three questions, supporting a democratic future. As for the first question, only a bare 50 per cent majority voted for the postponement of the presidential election, with a mere 6,000 persons making the difference. But it was a success, even though very many among those who said "no" to the first question voted for the possibility of direct presidential election sometime in the future. It was a success, as the parties that initiated the referendum had hardly any means of propaganda. At the same time, not only the ex-communist party but the largest opposition force as well (the Hungarian Democratic Forum) suggested that people should not participate in the referendum. This caused some confusion within the ranks of the Forum as the people could not see what was happening behind the scenes. They thought the suggestion was an attempt at reconciliation, rather than an out-dated pact between the two political leaderships which is what it actually was. The success of the referendum showed that in spite of scepticism and a deeply-rooted pessimism about politics the people want to transform the society in basic respects.

The comparison of the referendum results with those of the last non-free elections in 1985 leads to some interesting conclusions and draws attention to the relative character of participation in non-democratic political systems.[12] It can be justly assumed that in 1989 non-participation (non-voting) and/or invalid voting expressed a kind of protest against the one-party regime.

Similarly it can be reasonably assumed that those voting 'yes' to the first question at the referendum expressed support for the anti-communist sentiments of the four opposition parties. Comparing some regional statistics, a clear relationship can be discerned between turnout and invalid voting in 1985 and yes voting in the referendum.

	Election turnout 1985	**Invalid votes 1985**	**Yes votes at the referendum first question**
Budapest	88.4%	8.4%	59.2%
Szekszard	84.8%	6.1%	56.6%
Szolnok county	97.9%	3.1%	46.7%
Zalaegerszeg	98.4%	4.4%	41.8%

We can discern a reciprocal correlation between election turnout and invalid votes in 1985 on the one hand, and yes votes at the referendum on the other hand. At one extreme is Budapest with the lowest election turnout (88.4 per cent) and the highest yes votes (59.2 per cent), at the other extreme is Zalaegerszeg, a country town with the highest turnout and the lowest percentage of yes votes. In 1985 Zalaegerszeg was one of the strongholds of communist power, and similarly Szolnok county with its rural, backward character, gave a firm basis for party rule.

What general conclusions can be drawn if we want to evaluate the ongoing events concerning the double participatory revolution? Political developments in Hungary very often proved to the people that they should not trust politicians and should not get involved in politics. Since the end of the last century (after the reconciliation

between the Hungarian ruling class and the Hapsburg monarchy) the general experience was that *non-participation was an acceptable alternative.* This was also strengthened by the development of exclusive political institutions. People were alienated from 'high politics' by authoritative institutions, elitism, and an international climate where democratic upheavals brought national catastrophe with them (as with the 1918 democratic revolution and the breaking up of 'historical' Hungary). These experiences and attitudes were reinforced during the communist period. Confidence in political institutions is mainly still missing.

The new political institutions must prove that they deserve the confidence of the people. Here the local level is important, as people have to experience locally, in their everyday life, that things are really changing and can be changed. Ideally, participation – during the transition at least – should reach a higher level than the average of the western democracies. The participation of the "crowds" would be the best guarantee that the developments cannot and must not stop. The traditional Hungarian scepticism about political institutions and representative participation now works in favour of the old regime. Hungarian people should now behave differently from the way they did during the past 100 years. People have lost confidence in things that seemed to be sacrosanct, and it is very difficult for them to find their new identities and their place as 'participators' within the new conditions. Their whole life has changed, both in absolute and relative terms. For the majority of the people most things have changed their meaning. Communist propaganda had a monopoly for more than four decades, but a recent opinion poll has shown that the concept of communism is a negative

notion for 75 per cent of Hungarian respondents (while only 66 per cent of the British regard it negatively).[13]

Another opinion poll measuring economic expectations showed similar disappointment. The following answers were given to the question: If you lived in a western country would you be better off, the same, less well off?[14]

	Better	Same	Less	No Response
	%	%	%	%
1985	22.5	25.7	26.7	25.2
1989 March	45.9	30.0	7.2	16.9
1989 November	60.8	25.5	3.1	10.6

The economic tensions should be overcome very soon, as "...freedom and economic conditions are related. Freedom, it is said, begins at breakfast; and someone suffering from hunger may well call bread 'liberty'...."[15]

We could also quote another typical comparative survey to demonstrate the relative pessimism of Hungarians about their democracy. The question was " How satisfied are you with democracy in your country?[16]

	Completely and very much	not very much	Not at all	No response	No
	%	%	%	%	%
Hungary	18.1	57.3	18.9	5.8	2.02
Great Britain	58.0	24.0	6.0	6.0	2.57
West Germany	69.0	22.0	5.0	5.0	2.78
Denmark	72.0	17.0	7.0	7.0	2.98
Greece	51.0	26.0	7.0	7.0	2.58
Italy	28.0	43.0	3.0	3.0	2.05

These data are difficult to evaluate. Partly they express disillusionment and alienation from the past regime, but the picture is not dark. During the past year we could witness that people got rid of their illusions. On most questions they are better informed and they can behave like free individuals. Although the first elections did not produce a high turnout, the results were promising. The extreme parties were voted out, as well as those which under new masks represented interests of the old regime. Not only the old communist party (HSWP), but the Agrarian Party of the 'green barons' (managers of state farms) or the Patriotic People's Front, which used to be the headquarters of party cadres, were voted out. The people could not be deceived. Real and lively political cleavages came to the surface. We cannot agree with some interpreters who want to see the victory of the centre-right in this. It is too early to draw conclusions, but we can question the justification of the description 'centre-right' about parties which advocate a social security network and equality, freedom and democracy. What kind of leftism is expected by some onlookers? There is a small sign that political scientists tend to forget when analysing data: the number of people who do not respond. This number has continuously decreased in Hungary during the given period in all basic surveys. People are getting their opinions back. In the already quoted international survey published by the Independent it was the Hungarian public which tended to answer in the greatest numbers. We can hope that the fewer non-respondents, in the long run the fewer the non-participants too.

Footnotes

1. Geraint Parry: "The idea of political participation" in G. Parry (ed.)*Participation in Politics*, Manchester University Press, 1972.

2. This dilemma was wittily introduced by Cs. Gombár: *Political thought and the alternatives of Political* Reform, lecture held on Conference (Political Thought in Hungary during the Twentieth Century) in Bloomington, Indiana, October 1987.

3. Figure 1. Survey conducted between 5-23 May by the Hungarian Public Opinion Research Institute (HPORI), nationally representative sample of 1,000 in 102 locations.

4. Figure 2. Compiled by the author from surveys conducted in March, 1988 in March, 1989 and in November, 1989 by HPORI, data as above.

5. Conducted in July 1989 by the Hungarian Institute for Market Research; nationally representative sample of 950 in more than 100 locations; Gallup Poll. Index Report No. 348. (Aug. 1989).

6. Survey conducted by HPORI 9-23 November, nationally representative sample of 1,000 in 102 locations.

7. Survey conducted between October 31 - 3 November by HPORI in Budapest (300) and Szigetvár (300).

8. Figure 3. see footnote 5.

9. Survey conducted on a national sample by HPORI between 26 October - 2 November 1989.

10. Survey conducted on a national sample by HPORI between 16-23 June 1989.

11. Bruszt, László–Simon, János: Az erök centrum felé hùznak. Magyar Nemzet, December 1989.

12. Kovács, R. - Tóka, G.: Választási térkép. Beszélő 24 March 1990.

13. *The Independent* 19 February 1990. British data by MORI, Hungarian data by Median Ltd., survey coordinated by CSA of Paris.

14. Bruszt–Simon: Posztpaternalista politikai orientációk Magyarországon. *In Political Yearbook of Hungary*, 1990. Budapest pp. 472–473.

15. G. Sartori: *The Theory of Democracy Revisited*, Part Two 1987 Chatham House, p. 361.

16. See footnote 14.

Data in footnotes 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 14, 16 were published in: Magyarország politikai évkönyve (Political Yearbook of Hungary) 1988 and 1989 edition. Edited by Kurtán–Sándor–Vass 1989. Debrecen and 1990. Budapest respectively.