

“EVERYDAYS” IN SOCIALISM AND POST-SOCIALISM

GYÖRGY MAJTÉNYI

A Stain on the Blue Couch

*Lifestyles of the Dominant Elite in Hungary during
the 1950's and 1960's*

“**T**he villa was illuminated with Chinese lanterns decorated with coloured tissue papers. Before the entrance on the right hunters were standing in dress uniform, and on the left were the party-youth wearing blue shirts and red neckties. The celebrated was not only a party member but, of course, a hunter as well. Parked in the lot were a few American automobiles, two Soviet military cars and a few coaches. A police car was also there...”¹ – in his memoir Fülöp Merán – a descendant of Hungarian nobility – informs us of an emblematic event of 1946, a birthday-party for the party secretary of Csákberény. – “On a long table were baked pig, caviar and turkey, along with boar meat, roasted pheasant and stuffed goose. The heavy „Merán” wines from our confiscated vineyards were poured from lead-glass jugs into our glasses. Women were also present, some pretty and dressed according to the new fashion. The lady of the house was very elegant and beautiful.” In this description the author also mentions the host: “The party leader turned forty on this day. He was in high spirits and quite nice.”²

This idyllically represented snapshot shows that there were interactions between the old and new elites. This Meeting (co-incidence) of lifestyles must be viewed through the lens of social and cultural change:

¹ Fülöp Merán: *A vadászat megmaradt*. Budapest: Nimród Alapítvány, 2000. 53.

² Merán, 54.

new elements hit against the old, shaping, changing, incorporating and dissolving old behavioural patterns. It can be supposed that not only did certain customs of some individuals continue with the change of power and the building of the state-socialist regime, but so did the lifestyles of social groups. Lifestyles changed only slowly, the habits and mentality of people could not be transformed overnight. For example, a descendant of the Zsolnay-family (a Hungarian bourgeois family) wrote in his memoir that although he was a condom-maker for the Nagytétény Rubberfactory he would never have even thought of setting the cooking pot on the dining table.³ While representatives of old social groups preserved their traditions, new individuals and groups adopted old consumer customs and lifestyles.

In this study I investigate the differences and similarities between the lifestyles of the new elite that appeared on the scene after 1945 and those of the traditional elite groups, focusing on both the continuity and transformation of habits. I apply the term dominant elite to refer to a distinct group within society which, on the basis of its dominant positions, can be characterized according to a lifestyle that was unattainable to other groups.⁴ A position in the hierarchy of the new regime meant a particular, distinguished way of life. Privileges bound the new elite together. The law of the delegation of the nomenclatura gave control over the determination of the most important political positions to the dominant elite: they could appoint individuals to the highest positions. The number of influential positions with power, the number of which we can deduce from the order of former appointments, totalled about

³ Kata Jávör: *Életmód és életmód-stratégiák a pécsi Zsolnay család történetében*. Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 2000. 272.

⁴ I adopt the term of elite for a relatively small dominant group, which enjoys a privileged status and a specific lifestyle following from this. I use the term of dominant elite instead of power elite on the basis of the way in which Max Weber defined power and dominance. According to Weber's distinction power is the chance that an individual can achieve his or her own will against the resistance of others, in spite of this Weber defines domination "as the probability that certain specific commands (or all commands) will be obeyed by a given group of persons", and he notes: „every genuine form of domination implies a minimum of voluntary compliance, that is, an interest (based on ulterior motives or genuine acceptance) in obedience.” Weber, Max: *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*. New York: Bedminster Press, 1968. 212.

2700–3000 in 1950.⁵ Analyses show that only the exclusive party leadership (which amounted to only a few persons) and their confidants could get into this circle. A narrow informal group existed within the former nomenclatura which controlled and directed the appointments (i.e. the order of admission into the new elite). A similar circle of 20–40 persons made up a group who possessed certain privileges such as villa-allocations or the attainment of free hunting licenses.

*“members of the highest party leadership would also come here to swim”
– The “Cadrefield”*

The cadres received significant allowances⁶ beside their high salary,⁷ so it became also a financial compulsion for them to keep their positions and advance their career.⁸ Of course these allowances differed according to the status of the functionaries. The primary allowance was the villa-allocation. While in fin-de-siècle Hungary the symbol of luxury was Andrásy Avenue and its neighbourhood, from the 1930’s on Buda (more specifically Rózsadomb and Pasarét) counted as the most desirable location for villa builders and buyers.⁹ The elite, as well as the middle class, wanted to create its own comfortable and luxurious environment, public image was only of secondary importance: there was thus an impetus to build in Rózsadomb and Pasarét. This tradition continued after World War II, when the dominant elite moved to the Buda hills. On the spacious plots in Buda, far from traffic, in the shade of

⁵ György T. Varga – István Szakadát: Íme, a nomenklatúrák! Az MDP és a volt MSZMP hatásköri listái. *Társadalmi Szemle*, 1992. Nr. 3. 73–95.; György T. Varga: Adalékok és szempontok a Magyar Dolgozók Pártja hatalmi helyzetéhez. *Múltunk*, 1998. Nr. 2. 175–182.

⁶ ÁBTL (Állambiztonsági Szolgálatok Történeti Levéltára – Historical Archives of the Hungarian State Security) 2. (Section 2 – State security documents that do not belong to any organisational entity) 1. V-150028/3. VI/1-b. A Legfelsőbb Bíróság ítélete (1–47.) p. 19–20. MOL (Magyar Országos Levéltár – National Archives of Hungary) M (Section “M” – Records of the Hungarian Working People’s Party and the Hungarian Socialist Workers’ Party)–KS 276. f. 53. cs. 131. ő.e. (őrzési egység – archive unit)

⁷ MOL M-KS 276. f. 53/43 ő.e.; MOL M-KS 276. f. 53/180. ő.e.

⁸ András Hegedűs: *A történelem és a hatalom igézetében*. Budapest: Kossuth, 1988. 169, 188.

⁹ Eszter Gábor: *Budapesti villák a kiegyezéstől a második világháborúig*. Budapest: Fővárosi Önkormányzat, Főpolgármesteri Hivatal, 1997. 38.

huge old trees, the lifestyle of the new elite could blossom. Rózsadomb and Pasarét were referred to as the “Cadre-field” in these years. The party and state leaders could exchange their former apartments for luxury villas that were abandoned or confiscated from the pre-war elite and middle class. In the beginning these houses were handled by the Commissioner of Abandoned Properties, later the State Security Authority (Államvédelmi Hatóság) confiscated and distributed them.¹⁰

Given the ideology of the system, a tradition of villa-building could not be created in the 1950's. However, one can look at which houses were chosen by party leaders¹¹ among the wide range of nationalized villas. It is interesting that after the war the more historical styles preserved their popularity against the functionalist and the modern. These buildings – with porticos resting on Doric, Ionic and Corinthian columns, with turrets or wooden pediments – seemed to be more elegant, “nicer” for the party leaders who were not keen on modern art.¹² Some functionaries did choose modern buildings. For example, Zoltán Vas, the president of the National Planning Office, lived in the early 1950s in the Havas Villa on Hankóczy street which was planned by the modernist Lajos Kozma.¹³ At the same time, Vas cannot be said to have been an adherent to modern architecture as he banned the review *New Architecture* (Új Építészet), established by Lajos Kozma and others, when the editors published a Kozma memorial issue. In 1949, Imre Nagy's family moved to a Kozma villa on Orsó street 43. According to our sources the Nagy family complemented the original modern furniture of the house with antiques.¹⁴

Customs and values associated with position and performance, despite all the structural and personal changes, preserved the sharpness of the distinctions between the elite and other groups of society. Even on the level of “consumer” cultures and lifestyles this distinction was well recognised, transmitted via the social, semiotic function of housing, clothing styles,

¹⁰ ÁBTL 3. (Section 3 – Network, operative and investigation files) 1.9. V-150238. VI/6. Tibor Érsek.; ÁBTL 2.1. V-150028/1. V/1-a.

¹¹ ÁBTL 2.1. V-150028/1 VI/1-a.

¹² Éva Gál: A Hegyvidék betelepülése a török kiűzésétől a XIX. század közepéig. In Ferenc Noéh (ed.): *Hegytörténet. Hegytörténeti konferencia*. Budapest: XII.k.-i Önkormányzat – Tarsoly Kiadó, 2001. 26–27.

¹³ György Parmer: *Magyar építészet a két világháború között*. (2nd ed.) Budapest: Terc, 2001. 30–31.

¹⁴ Éva Horányi: Kozma Lajos modern villái. In Éva Horányi (ed.): *Kozma Lajos modern épületei*. Budapest: Terc, 2006. 112.

patterns of taste, and forms of interaction, which could be combined into the signifiers “we” and “they,” and which we can combine into the signifier and category “dominant elite.” This signifier remained bound up in social space with traditional separation and borders.

Officers of the State Security Authority while not strictly part of the dominant elite, shared in several privileges, for example allocated for themselves villas or upper middle-class apartments on Andrásy Avenue and its surrounding neighbourhood close to their workplace. They thus indirectly turned back towards the housing ideal of the turn of the century. The details taken of the confiscation of furniture of Andor Csapó – a head of the department of the State Security Authority – show a neo-baroque interior without any modern characteristics. There were, to give one example, 22 Persian carpets in four rooms.¹⁵ His deputy, János Komendó, solved the problem of furnishing his apartment very simply by moving into the furnished apartment of a famous furniture-dealer on Dohány street.¹⁶

Villas in the 1950's were rebuilt according to the pretensions of the new leaders. The head of the department of the State Security Authority confessed – in the action against the leaders of the State Security Authority –, how he had built a swimming pool for his chief (Gábor Péter, the then head of the state security), as follows: “The pool was already dug and the iron frames were prepared for the concrete work. Then the commander of the party guard objected that it could be seen from outside. I realized then that members of the highest party leadership would also come here to swim. We gave the command to locate the pool in such a way that, taking into consideration the rising ground, it would not to be seen from outside. Then Comrade Péter gave an instruction to turn the pool. Thus the whole iron frame and the dug-up hole had to be adjusted, and the pool was built this way at the end.” According to Gábor Péter's confession, János Kádár was envious of his pool, and ordered himself one, but as he formulated: “János Kádár was always less materialistic than me, but of course he also liked nice and good things.” The apartments of the new elite were defended by armed guards – as in every period. The father of Lajos Kónya (poet and president of the Hungarian Writer's Association) visited his son living in the neighbourhood of Mátyás Rákosi when the

¹⁵ ÁBTL 3.1.9. V-150262 VI/28. Andorné Csapó.

¹⁶ ÁBTL 3.1.9. V-150244 VI/9. János Komendó.

guards, following strict orders, shot the old man's leg because, being hard of hearing, he did not stop when they called.¹⁷

The party leaders were permitted to buy foods considered as short-ages, e.g. tropical fruits, salami, and veal, in shops maintained for them.¹⁸ Their apartments were equipped with refrigerators which passed for a modern luxury good in that period. If a direct urban telephone-line was in somebody's office, that already was counted as a privilege. Beside this, the more superior leaders' offices and apartments were supplied with a telephone line called the K-line, through which the county party heads, council- and company-leaders as well as the police could be contacted. The chief party-state leaders could communicate with each other through the ministerial line ('M' line) while the international telephone line gave them direct access to the leaders of allied states.¹⁹ Despite the harsh circumstances of the time, the Kút völgyi Hospital provided the best health provisions for the elite members.²⁰

In the beginning, summer cottages were allocated to the party leaders for private use mostly in Balatonaliga, while members of the government (ministerial council) could use the common holiday home in Balatonöszöd, which represented a slightly smaller rank in the period. The party and state leaders could go on a free-of-charge foreign trip during their paid vacations, but in the beginning they could only travel to holiday resorts in the allied countries, e.g. to Zakopane or Karlovy Vary. The first member of the dominant elite who did not place his trust in the eternal power of socialism and wished to insure his family's future by means of private property was József Darvas. He referred to the curative effect of the mountain air when responding to critics who complained that he had built a private summer villa instead of receiving a furnished house for his family in Aliga.²¹

The ambition to acquire property continually grew among other party leaders as well. They also took part in the growing wealth using their privileges, their networks, and their symbolic capital. Beside the financial savings the primary forms of wealth were tied to property accumulation, apartment- and cottage shopping, and the acquisition of high

¹⁷ MOL M-KS-276. f. 65. cs. 379. ő.e

¹⁸ Hegedűs, 167–168.

¹⁹ ÁBTL 3.1.9. V-150244 VI/9. János Komendó.

²⁰ Hegedűs, 167–168.

²¹ Hegedűs, 169.

priced property. The institution of the so-called personal land ownership was created in 1967; limitations concerning private property did not relate to these “economic” territories, and as a result, many farms with swimming pools were built.²² The government tried to put a stop to the new landowners’ expansion in 1971, when it determined that a family (actually a person) can own only a flat/housing site and a holiday resort. For the state and party leaders these restrictions proved to be easily evaded. So too was the limitation on the possession of precious metals that lasted until 1974 (a private person was permitted to possess at most 500 grams of gold).²³ It quickly turned out that one’s position of power not only translated as transitional benefits, but also led to the growth of the family’s coffers.²⁴

The isolated world of the 1950’s proved to be a fleeting moment in the Buda hills narrative as well. From the middle of the 1960’s houses which were said to be elegant according to the period were resurrected in Buda again. The state and party bureaucracy could have likewise moved to the Buda hills, to the neighbourhood of the dominant elite, to new blocks of flats. Building of representative villas received new impetus from the 1980’s – with nostalgic, sometimes atavistic stylistic markers. At that time representatives of wealthy social groups, following the example and lifestyles of the dominant elite, launched an irresistible attack against the unbuilt areas of the Buda hills.

*“he was a very nice guy in his way”
– Chevies and the Kádár-Mercedes*

In addition to an elegant villa apartment with a luxurious interior, the automobile was another important symbol of power in the period. In Hungary the first car owners had already formed an exclusive society (mostly aristocrats and industrialists) and the prestige of car ownership continued into the communist era.²⁵ After the Second World War politicians promised that the automobile would no longer be considered

²² Act Nr. IV. of 1967, Act Nr. I. of 1987.

²³ Tibor Valuch: *Magyarország társadalomtörténete a XX. század második felében*. Budapest: Osiris, 2001. 289.

²⁴ János Brutyó: *A választott úton*. Budapest: Népszava, 1983. 199.

²⁵ György Majtényi: *Életstílus és szubkultúra. Az autózás története(1920–1960)*. Korall, 2000. Vol. I, Nr. 1. 101–109.

a luxury item affordable only to the rich, but would in fact become accessible to all in socialist Hungary. Despite these promises, car use remained the monopoly of a narrow circle of officials and partymen. The free market for cars ceased and private use and ownership of cars were restricted to officials of higher rank, or in some cases scholars, artists, and sportsmen.²⁶ (The development of an extended public transportation system pushed the automobile industry and consumer demand for automobiles into the background, and the use of personal cars became a luxury reserved mainly for members of the state and party elite. So much so that the then prevailing negative attitudes towards motorists reflected an antipathy for the political leadership.)

It is characteristic of the over-politicization of the automobile that the selection of the driver of Mátyás Rákosi was based solely on political reliability. Selected from the police's staff and without a driver's license, the first driver was a former partisan with a lung shot, until it became clear that his wartime injury had sapped his health.²⁷ Another episode likewise demonstrates the over-politicization of the ordinary world of the automobilists: Hugó Koch, a technical manager of the Meinl company was heading to the wedding of one of the company's employees when his car crashed into the automobile transporting Mátyás Rákosi. He was carried off from the site of the accident to Andrásy Avenue 60, the headquarters of the State Security, accused of being a recruited member of a group "allied for the perpetration of sabotage," and then interned in the prison camp at Recsk.²⁸

A delegate of the workers' councils who met Sándor Gáspár, secretary general of the National Council of Trade Unions (trade union of the party state) during the days of the 1956 revolution, recalled this about the trade union leader: "It was a well-known fact, that he kept for himself cars, anyway, I also saw those personally, in the court of the headquarters there were huge cars parked. He had glamorous beautiful secretaries, and it was also well-known that he liked the weaker sex very much. Well, he was a very nice guy in his way."²⁹

²⁶ Orders of Ministerial Council Nr. 65 of 1950 (III.2.), Nr. 66 of 1955 (XII.1.).

²⁷ PSZL (Poltikatörténeti és Szakszervezeti Levéltár – Archives of Political History and of Trade Unions) 274. f. 26/45. ó. e.

²⁸ ÁBTL 3.1.9. V-107373 Koch Hugó és társai.

²⁹ Interview of József Bácsi. 1956-os Intézet. (Institute of 1956) Oral History Archivum. (Oral History Archive) 214. 158.

Starting in the 1960's, however, the image of and demand for automobiles revived in Hungary as more cars became available to the public. In the 1950's the offices mostly used Skoda and Pobjeda cars, which because of their poor construction quickly deteriorated with ordinary use), while new western automobiles (Chevrolets and BMW's), which could be bought from the foreign exchange quota of the party and state organs, served the comfort of high-ranking officials.³⁰ As the mass ownership of cars increased, party leaders shifted their sights to even more luxurious automobiles to secure for themselves what became a socialist luxury that further distinguished them from other groups within society. In the Kádár-era Mercedes Benz cars gained cache in elite Hungarian circles. From the beginning of the 1970's the Mercedes 280 became the protocol car. Members of the elite used a car for approximately three years, then it was replaced.³¹

János Kádár has been considered by public opinion to have been a puritan man,³² according to the legend he spooned his favourite food, the semolina noodles, from his kitchen stool in his villa of Rózsadomb. According to the much quoted memories of his au-pair, the Kádár couple even kept hens in the yard of their house of Rózsadomb.³³ However, there was not only a henhouse, but also a swimming pool in the garden. We cannot see now what existed across the walls of the villa of Cserje street either, so we cannot know his everyday customs thoroughly. Nevertheless, it is ascertainable that the party secretary-general enjoyed the benefits following from his position, observed the elite customs, and the accompanying protocol. Although he was not an enthusiast about cars and travelled on the representative special train of the period (on the Silver Arrow) whenever he could, if he had to use a car, a bullet-proof S class Mercedes Benz would take him wherever he needed to go. The S class Mercedes Benz symbolizing the dominant elite of the former period has been aptly referred to as the Kádár-Mercedes in Hungary.³⁴

³⁰ MOL XIX (Main Group of Fonds XIX. – High Organs of the Public Administration after 1945)-H (Fond “H” – Transportation and Postal Administration)-12 1. d. (doboz – cartoon)

³¹ MOL XIX-H-11 1–40. d.

³² Tibor Huszár: *Kádár. A hatalom évei, 1956–1989*. Budapest: Corvina, 2006. 248–253.

³³ Huszár, 251.

³⁴ Tibor Kiss: Talált tárgyak országa, avagy az “Öreg kocsjja”. *Szoc.reál*, Nr. 8, 2006.

“altogether 1710 pheasants, consisting of both cocks and hens”
 – *The “worker-hunters”*

Sport hunting was considered traditionally an elite or middle-class custom in Hungary. During WWII it was a particular manifestation of the hunting passion of Miklós Horthy, regent of Hungary, that a bear hunting field was founded in Szin as a substitute for the Transylvanian bear hunting territories lost under the Treaty of Trianon.³⁵ In order to form the reserve, the population of a whole village (Derenk) was resettled.³⁶ (This arrangement during the war years did not cause a stir.) At first circus-bears were brought here, but that proved to be a very dangerous and ill-considered arrangement, because these bears attacked the local people many times.³⁷ After WWII, the principals of the village Szinpetri and the local organs of all the parties asked István Dobi, the minister of agriculture, to modify at least the borders of the hunting ground. The minister, also being a hunting addict, was not inclined to do so, and explained his decision from the viewpoint of game farming.³⁸ This story can also be interpreted as a symbolic event, demonstrating both the force of passion for hunting and that of the tradition and continuity of lifestyles of the elites which spanned the change of power and the political, social and economic changes.

In the 1950's the Ministry of Agriculture maintained so-called ministerial hunting reserves where state and party leaders could hunt free of charge. Our archival sources show that prominent leaders of the state party shared a passion for hunting; they included Mátyás Rákosi, János Kádár as well as Imre Nagy.³⁹ Their hunts were not restricted by anybody, but even they followed old traditions of hunting. Personal relationships and the confidence that ensues from hunting together has always

³⁵ MOL K (Section “K” – Archives of Government Organs between 1867 and 1945) 27 1940.05.24. (46.)

³⁶ MOL XIX-K (Fond “K” – Agricultural Administration)-1-y 342–343. d.; László Szűts: *A kormányzó úr medvéi*. Budapest: Kossuth, 1965.

³⁷ Gábor Pápai (ed.): *Gyökörek és lombok. Erdészportrék*. Budapest: Országos Erdészeti Egyesület, 2003. 263.

³⁸ MOL XIX-K-1-ii 4. d. 161.280/1946.; MOL-XIX-K-1-ii 8. d. 125.725/1947.; Dr. Sándor Tóth: *Nyitány a hírnévhez. Vadászat és vadgazdálkodás Magyarországon, 1945–1951*. Budapest: Nimród, 2007. 182., 191–192.

³⁹ Tóth, 138.; MOL XX (Main Group of Fonds XX. – High Organs of Jurisdiction after 1945)-5-h 12. d. 1. k.

formed a good part of the hunting experience. Endre Nagy (Schwend), a former gendarme captain and a husband of a baroness, organised the hunts of Mátyás Rákosi in the 1950's, and he wrote in his diary: "It is incomprehensible, that Mátyás Rákosi, János Kádár, Márton Horváth [...] Ferenc Donáth, Mihály Farkas, László Rajk consider me – the former gendarme captain, husband of a Hatvany baroness – their crony."⁴⁰ It was due to them that he was able to escape from the State Security to foreign lands.⁴¹

In 1963 János Kádár, who was a passionate hunter, decided to make hunting more organised and regulated. He instructed the corresponding head of the Ministry of Agriculture to work out the hunting protocol for the state and party leaders. The hunting club of the party leaders was called Concord (Egyetértés), and it was founded on the basis of that protocol. So-called primary game-preserve territories were formed for the members of the Concord. There were originally eighteen founding members, and by 1974, sixty members could enjoy the privileges provided by the Concord Hunting Club. A closing dinner – usually in the officers' club in Budapest – was held each year at which time the members of the club received new issues of the satirical journal (Fácán Matyi) prepared exclusively for them by caricaturists of the popular satirical journal of the period (Ludas Matyi), which treated events in the life of the club. During these dinners comedians and actors were also



Picture 1. Frontpage of Fácán Matyi (The inscription: You are also in this!)

⁴⁰ Katalin Beretz: *Puskák, pajzsok, fohászok*. Budapest: Zeus, 2001. 27.

⁴¹ Beretz, 33.

ALAPÍTÓ TAGOK: — 1964



Apró Antal



Balassa Gyula



Benkei András



Biskó Béla



Cseterki Lajos



Csinege Lajos



Fehér Lajos



Fock Jenő



Földes László



Gáspár Sándor



Kádár János



Losonczy Pál



Nevzöl Ferenc



Németh Károly



Pap János



Szabó Zoltán



Szücs Ferenc



Tömpe István

invited to enliven the club members: they recited patriotic poems and performed parodies and variety shows.

The function of this exclusive club can be interpreted as the hunting-professionalization of the new elite. During each period, the hunt provided a possibility for competitive marksmanship in a ceremonial framework.⁴² One member of the Concord later recalled the hunting trips of the trade union leader Sándor Gáspár as follows: “I surely can say that he was the best bird hunter in the country...his individual record can be mentioned with the known and registered ... records..., on December 21, 1986 when he shot altogether 1710 pheasants, consisting of both cocks and hens.”⁴³ Competition among the hunters also existed regarding who bagged the most valuable trophy, which depended mostly on the circumstances. In the trophy catalogues we can find well-known names. Among the gold and silver medallist trophy recipients are many party leaders.⁴⁴ For example in a trophy exhibition at the Agricultural Museum of 1969 the trophy game shot by János Kádár received

Picture 2. Funding Members of the „Concord” Hunting Club

⁴² György Kövér – Gábor Gyáni: *Magyarország társadalomtörténete a reformkortól a második világháborúig*. Budapest: Osiris, 1998. 200.

⁴³ Dr. János Zoltán: *Legenda és valóság*. Budapest: Dénes Natúr Műhely, 1996. 46.

⁴⁴ *Vadászati kiállítások és trófeabemutatók*. Budapest, MÉM Vadászati és Vadgazdálkodási Főosztály, 1970. MOL XIX-K-9-aj 44. d.

first and third place.⁴⁵ In the international hunting exhibition of 1971 the names of the hunting clubs were read instead of the names of the hunters under the trophies, because the prominent politicians of the period did not want their names to appear together either with names of the representatives of the Horthy era, or with Rudolf Hess. This stifled their hunting pride. However, the issue published for the exhibition also raised a monument to their memory: “Hungary was always well-known for its stags, fallow-deer, roebucks and robust boars. The planned economy of the last 26 years has resulted in particularly nice trophies.”⁴⁶

According to the memories of Concord’s members, cheerful but undisciplined hunts disturbed János Kádár. As a consequence, new hunting clubs were organised for the children and for the women. The Young Nimrod Hunting Troupe (Nimrod is a mythical figure within Hungarian national mythology) was formed and the leadership of the Concord organised separate hunts for “nimrodladies” as well. Later a new club was founded for the pensioners removed from the Concord, which was called euphemistically Friendship, though Concord members mentioned it as a “home for incurables.” If somebody lost his position, he was exiled there from the Concord. Within the elite membership in the Concord could be the symbol of admission to the highest ranks of the party leadership (according to our notions of the dominant elite) and losing that position was a symbol of real loss of power and influence.

Party leader attitudes to trends of the prewar dominant elite partly depended on the new elite’s relationship to the public. For example equestrian sports had less popularity in this circle – maybe due to the wider publicity of equestrian competitions, which also began as an elite (aristocratic) entertainment, but later in fin de siècle Hungary started to become a general popular pastime. From the 1950’s members of the former so called “high ten thousand” and common people crowded in on the competitions.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ *Trófea kiállítás. A hazai vadászok 1969–1970. évi arany és ezüstérmes trófeái.* 1970. VI. 20–30. Mezőgazdasági Múzeum.; Vadászati kiállítások és trófeabemutatók. Bp., MÉM Vadászati és Vadgazdálkodási Főosztály, 1970. p. 62., p. 132. MOL XIX-K-9-aj 44. d.

⁴⁶ *A Vadászati Világkiállítás.* Budapest, 1971. Tájékoztató. MÉM Kiállítási Iroda. p. 11. MOL XIX-K-9-aj 40. d.

⁴⁷ László Gál: “*Csak a szépre...*” *Budapesti életképek az 1950–60-as évekből.* Budapest: Fekete Sas, 2005. 194.; Miklós Zeidler: A modern sport a nemzet szolgálatában a 19. századi Magyarországon. *Századvég*, Nr. 4, 2006. 76–83.

AZ EGYETÉRTÉS



Picture 3. The “Concord” Hunting Club from 1974

TAGSÁGA 1974



Biszku Béla



Bodnár Ferenc



Borbándi János



Cseterki Lajos



Csémi Károly



Czinege Lajos



Gergely István



Hollai Imre



Horn Dezső



Horváth István



Kozarecki Kálmán



Kádár János



Madas András



Marjai József



Maróthy Lószló



Marton Tibor dr.



Molnár Frigyes



Nevzál Ferenc



Papp Lajos



Potaki Lószló



Somi Benjámín



Szabó István



Szabópál Antal



Székér Gyula



Tóth Sándor



Tömpe István



Vallus Pál



Várkonyi Péter



Veres József



Zoltán János dr.

GRATULÁLUNK



– Szép ez a rekord bika. Ebbe jól beugrattak...

Picture 4. János Kádár, party secretary general with one of his record trophies

*“Minister Mihály Farkas dealt a lot with the team”
– Party leaders and football*

Football-mania among the party leaders can be considered a manifestation of the worker-ethos. It is a fact that leaders of the system acted as midwife beside the cradle of the so called Hungarian “goldteam”; for example the close relationship of the legendary football-player Ferenc Puskás and the party chief Mihály Farkas is mythical in Hungary. A symbiosis between the party leaders and football players characterized the contemporary elite’s relation to the masses (more specifically to

– Asszonytársak,
megmentettem a
nök becsületét.
Jó, ha a vezetőség
tudja, ránk
lehet számítani...

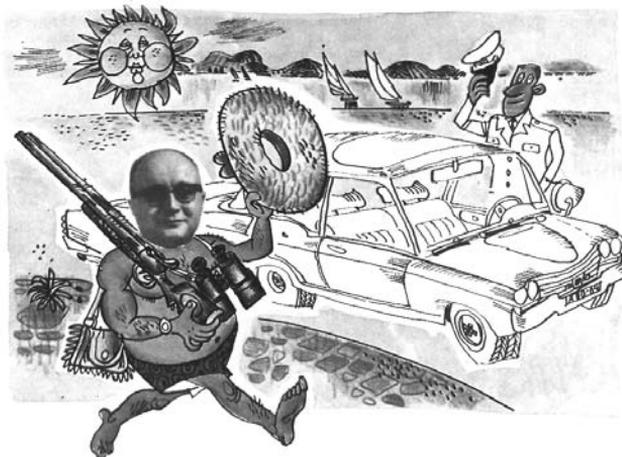


Picture 5. “Nimrod ladies”

the public sphere and to its own social role). Of course, “the masses” is not an appropriate description of society, but researchers investigating elites show a preference for this dichotomy referring to the masses as the adversary of the prevailing elites. It is characteristic that members of the contemporary dominant elite in certain cases tried to step over and generally make invisible the borders separating them from other groups within society to prove their social position. In this period the working class, the industrial workers – who never existed in the form imagined by the ideologists of the system – shaped the virtual mass to which the representatives of the system had to relate incessantly in the interest of legitimatizing their dominance. Sport successes had a legitimizing role, legitimating the “workers’ power”, and the system. Party leaders liked to show themselves together with the justly popular football-players. In 1949, as a reward for winning results (triumphs against the Austrians, the Bulgarians and the Swedes), eleven players from the Hungarian national team were allowed to go first across the rebuilt Chain Bridge of Budapest following Minister Ernő Gerő.⁴⁸

The new system tried to shape and rewrite the meanings and social identities related to the sport clubs. In the period teams from different crafts and trade unions (e.g. miners and railway employees) and teams

⁴⁸ Sebes Gusztáv: *Örömök és csalódások. Egy sportvezető emlékei*. Budapest: Gondolat, 1981. 132.



DERŰS NAPOK

– A Balaton-
hoz megyek ak-
tív pihenésre.

Picture 6. Andor László, state secretary, president of the Hungarian National Bank going on a holiday

from the martial organs (e.g. the police, State Security Authority) fought on the football field.⁴⁹ And it was mainly the latter which won the championship. In this symbolic field the “working class” was projected as the main actor of society, and the power of the state representing it as strong. From 1949 party leaders became members or presidents of the leadership of the renamed clubs, which led to endless lobbying; the Political Committee of the party withdrew party leaders from this sphere of the public life in 1950.⁵⁰ However, they kept their eyes on the football-players and the clubs. (The social identity of party leaders can also be characterized by who sided with which team.) Ferenc Münnich being the leader of FTC, the most popular football club in Hungary with traditionally right-wing fans, stated in his presidential inaugural speech: “The FTC is a real national institution in Hungary. We have to look after it. We have to lead and build it correctly so that it could actually become a strong pillar of sport of the Hungarian people’s democracy.”⁵¹

⁴⁹ MOL M-KS 276. f. 54/116 ó.e.

⁵⁰ MOL M-KS 276. f. 54/85. ó. e.; MOL M-KS 276. f. 54/85 ó.e.

⁵¹ Béla Nagy: *Ki kicsoda a Ferencvárosi Torna Club történetében?* Budapest: FTC, 1987. 54.

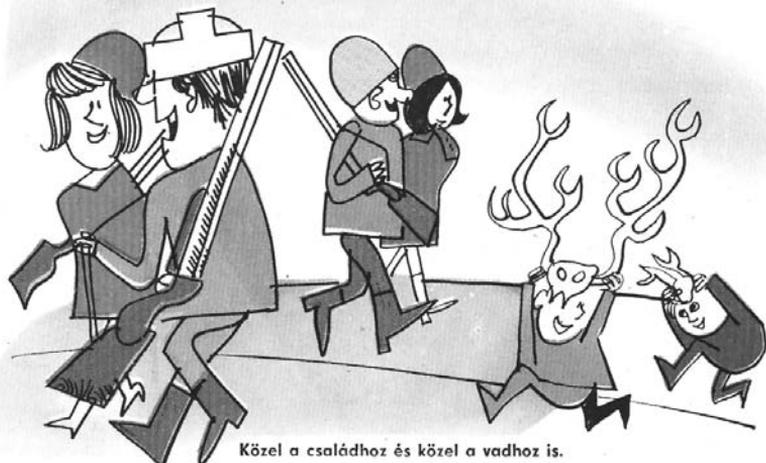
Újsághír: Két hazai vadász rekordot lőtt dám-bikából



Picture 7. “Fácán Matyi” revealing the secret of the two unknown hunters about whose records the newspapers wrote: Lajos Fehér, deputy prime minister and Béla Biszku, secretary of Central Committee of the party

It is unquestionable that football offered major chances for mobility in the period. Men of the people could become celebrated stars, and football players, as folk-figures, represented through their own example the democratic character of the system. Members of the dominant elite held this attitude; as in the Hungarian folktale when the king says to the poor man – if he passes the test – he can win the queen’s hand and half of the kingdom at the end of the tale. This tale seemed to become reality on many occasions. When in 1953 Ferenc Puskás celebrated that he was selected for the fiftieth time for Hungary, – according to his memories – Mihály Farkas, Minister of Defence asked him: “Well, Puskás, what kind of gift do you want? I said I asked for others with pleasure, but I did not order for myself. He answered, well, leave that to me! I received from the Honvéd (club of the defence – Gy. M.) silver cutlery for twelve persons

A LEGJOBB MEGOLDÁS



Picture 8. Family and hunting (The inscription: Close to the game and to the family)

and a Persian carpet.”⁵² After emigrating Puskás recalled the Minister of Defence with kindness: “Minister Mihály Farkas dealt a lot with the team. Why shall I scold him now, if he helped?”⁵³

Competitive sport offered a possibility for individuals to break out from their ordinary environment, and successes in sport could make the “masses” forget their everyday difficulties – or so the party leaders believed. Thus the large amount of support which competitive sports received in the period is understandable.

It is telling of the social legitimising role of football that the first significant street actions against the government broke out in the evening of the day when Hungary’s team lost the final of the football championship against the German team in Bern. On July 4, 1954 the people’s indignation led to demonstrations.⁵⁴ First, the demonstrators lashed

⁵² Hámori Tibor: *Puskás. Legenda és valóság.* (2nd ed.) Budapest: Sportpropaganda, 1982. 149.

⁵³ Hámori, 148.

⁵⁴ Mária Ember: A kis magyar “focialista forradalom”. *Eső*, Nr. 1, 2001. 40–45.

out against the coach and the players but later the system and the representatives of that system. It was incomprehensible how the brilliant players of the “goldteam” could lose against the west-German team bringing out grey but hard-working craftsmen. The defeat was so horrifying that ordinary people thought: the players or the sport- or party leadership had sold the match to the Germans. It was said that party leaders had received fifty Mercedes for the match, according to others that the Germans had given new peacombines to the Hungarian state. While fans demonstrated on the streets, the team took part in a protocol dinner with members of the government. Riots were soon spent, and life went on as before. “But they did not forget one thing. The demonstration.” – as we can read in Tamás Aczél and Tibor Méray’s book investigating the reasons for the 1956 revolution.⁵⁵

The question of reform and the redemption of Hungarian football remained a permanent topic of discussion at



– Vadászháznak ezek kicsik!

Picture 9. Károly Németh, member of Political Committee of the party finding the skyscrapers too small for a hunting lodge

⁵⁵ Tamás Aczél – Tibor Méray: *Tisztító vihar*. München: Griff, 1982. 216.



Picture 10. Mátyás Timár, state secretary, president of the Hungarian National Bank and in the background the old and the new hunting lodges

meetings of the different party and state organs. János Kádár never concealed that he stayed true to his roots and supported a traditional worker team (Vasas, the team of the ironworkers). It was a symbolic gesture from the Kádár regime that some old clubs, as for example FTC, could receive back its old name, and when in 1963 the club won the Hungarian championship again, according to football-legend its fans chanted the name of the party-secretary general: “FTC are the champs / János Kádár is a swell chap.”⁵⁶ (“Bajnok lett a Ferencváros / Faszgyerek Kádár János”)

⁵⁶ Literary translation by the author.



Picture 11. Ferenc Szűcs, lieutenant general hurrying home from Saigon to avoid missing the actual hunt

Social gatekeepers. Lifestyles and identity

Of course, members of the new elite were united by strong informal ties. Informal meetings and friendly family gatherings were often held in the beginning. Mátyás Rákosi endeavoured to act in the role of head of the family inside the elite company. He invited the children for cacao and liked to show them his collection of relics. (The fashion of collecting relics set by Rákosi can itself be considered a relic of a petit-bourgeois biedermeier custom.)⁵⁷ Though the party secretary-general's role as father (following from the monolithic nature of power in the regime) remained inside the narrow elite-community to the very last, cliques evolved between the politicians of the system with very different social and cultural backgrounds. In general it can be ascertained that neither party ideology, nor communist identity, was responsible for strengthening the feeling of belonging to a closed community with a privileged

⁵⁷ Schiffné Szakasits Klára: *Fent és lent, 1945–1950*. Budapest: Magvető, 1985. 228.

status for the party leaders. The ideology of the system and the circumstance, that they were the representatives of the so called workers' power, could create some kind of worker self-consciousness and identity in the top functionaries but it was a reference ground rather than a real cementing force.⁵⁸ Furthermore, gaps among the elite seem to have been delineated along conflicts between old, traditional identities. For example, the martyr prime minister, Imre Nagy in his notes written in the captivity of Snagov distinguished himself from other Hungarian communist leaders on the basis of his relationship to the national question by mentioning the Jewish origins of his enemies.⁵⁹ His argument is a typical example of the way in which traditional elements of one's individual identities remained salient within the communist identity.

The lifestyle, the community of customs, was the force, which could even unite representatives of different groups within the party with different backgrounds. Certain attitudes and behavioral patterns were equally characteristic of the lifestyle of Mátyás Rákosi or János Kádár, as well as that of Imre Nagy. We can interpret the sameness of customs as a conceptually inarticulate identity (as a non-confessed but evidently existing identity-consciousness), that helped them to identify themselves with their new social role and status and take part in the community of the dominant elite. For example, it is significant that in 1957 a fundamental question raised in the discussions on the fate of the so called Imre Nagy-group was board and lodging of the exiled politicians.⁶⁰ Beside showing the small-mindedness of the Kádár party-leadership it represents that permitted way of life for the Imre Nagy group's members symbolized their political, and power status in the eyes of the home party leadership.

One's belonging to or dissociation from a group depends on keeping or departing from certain behavioural patterns, customs. Behaviours

⁵⁸ See Sheila Fitzpatrick: Stalin and the Making of a New Elite. *Slavic Review*, September, Vol. 38, Nr. 3. 1979. 377–402.; Sheila Fitzpatrick: Ascribing Class: the Construction of Social Identity in Soviet Russia, 1934–1941. In Sheila Fitzpatrick (ed.): *Stalinism. New Directions*. London – New York: Routledge, 2000. 20–46.

⁵⁹ Imre Nagy: Gondolatok, Emlékezések. In István Vida (ed. in chief) László Szántó – István Vida (ed.): *Imre Nagy: Snagovi jegyzetek. Gondolatok, emlékezések, 1956–1957*. Budapest: Gondolat Kiadó–Nagy Imre Alapítvány, 2006. 93.

⁶⁰ István Vida: Bevezető. In Magdolna Baráth – Levente Sipos (eds.): *Snagovi jegyzetek, 14–15. A snagovi foglyok. Nagy Imre és társai Romániában. Iratok*. Budapest: Napvilág Kiadó – Magyar Országos Levéltár, 2006. 411.

determined by the society with changing meaning and force can characterize dominant groups, the elite of different periods. Some of these behaviours seem to be linked together independently of time and space. The perpetuated behavioural elements can be said to not only determine and cement groups, but they can recreate those in the course of history. From the viewpoint of these lifestyles, the dominant elite of the period played an intermediary role: as a dry sponge that absorbed all that it could from old traditions, thereby safeguarding and innovating the traditions of the Horthy-period. They functioned as social “gatekeepers” as those who distributed opportunities and positions and gave the patterns following from their dominant positions. All in all the contemporary dominant elite can be imagined as a group organised in a buffer zone lying between different and potentially hostile cultures and lifestyles, which by its sheer existence could prevent conflicts between them. (Later its customs and way of living were adopted by representatives of wealthy social groups following in their lead.) On the heritage – which it represented and mediated – the tempests of the history left their marks.

In his memoir Fülöp Merán described how in 1944 the frontline reached Csákberény. On one occasion coming home from the hunt with his brother, they entered the drawing room at home, anxious to show their success to their parents, and found three German officers sitting on the couch. Being a hunting addict himself one of them examined the kill with great excitement: “While blood dropped onto the blue couch, nobody noticed, and the blood which nobody washed off was soaked in the blue cloth leaving an imperishable stain on it. We only realized the blood stain, when on December 11, 1944. after our last lunch we were drinking our last coffee of Csákberény in the drawing room. On the afternoon of this day we left our native village for ever.”⁶¹ In the 1970’s, after a beat for a boar, an old hunting guest of the mansion of Csákberény glimpsed the blue couch in the corner of the dining room in a newly equipped hunter’s home. It was nicely cleaned except for an unremovable stain on blue cloth.⁶²

⁶¹ Fülöp Merán: *Az emlékek nem hazudnak*. Budapest: Nimród, 2006. 62.

⁶² Merán, *Az emlékek ...*, 65.