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FINAL REPORT

Topic: The complicated relationship between historiography and propaganda.

Project „*Paradise at the Roots.*" *Internal political and social history of the Communist Party in Slovakia in 1948–1956 (1960),*

My stay during April and May 2011 in the Open Society Archives became a part of wider research focused at the official discourses of internal conflicts at lower levels of the Communist party bodies in the 50s. My preliminary knowledge was based mainly on the archival collection of minutes of the Regional conferences of the Communist Party of Slovakia.[1]

At the OSA I have read primarily collections of reports on interviews with Czechoslovak refugees in the 1950s-1960s, HU OSA 300-1-2, further selected boxes of 300-30-6 and 300-30-8 notes and cuttings from contemporary Czechoslovak press and broadcast regarding selected internal political campaigns, as well as limited range of documents from the CD collection from Comintern archives.

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My main interest was in the phenomenon of *conflict*, which in relation to Communists is still in the local historiography mostly looked for and described in moments of their contact with the 'class enemy'/'victim of the regime', thus actually conserving that kind of contemporary self-presentation of the party where the unity and might figured as synonyms. According to the propagandist constant of unanimous internal unity, from which their party derived its social authority, any public acknowledgement of present internal conflict or of a

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[1] Results of these preliminary sonds were published in Zavacká, Marína: *Identity v konflikte. Komunistický aktivista v lokálnom prostredí, 1949-1956.* [Identities in Conflict. A Communist Activist in the Local Environment] In: My a tí druhí v modernej spoločnosti : konštrukcie a transformácie kolektívnych identít. (eds.) Gabriela Kiliánová – Eva Kowalská – Eva Krekovičová. Bratislava: Veda 2009, 542-554.
Zavacká, Marína: *Die Geschlechter- und Familienthematik auf den Kreiskonferenzen der Kommunistischen Partei der Slowakei 1949–1958.* In: Kraft, Claudia (ed.): Geschlechterbeziehungen in Ostmitteleuropa nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg. München, 2008, 125–136.

conflict between 'the party' and 'the masses' brought the risk of weakening this political position in the public. Subject to strict censorship such information was presented to public only in selected occasions, mostly in ritualised forms of accepted 'critique' and conscious 'self-critique'. However, the accessible documents offer a much wider scale of different internal conflicts, varying in intensity (from violent attacks to ambivalent emotions), in number or engaged persons, in level of articulation, in ways of solution, in subject of the conflict (enforced authority, unacceptable dogma, unfulfilled promise…) etc.[2] These findings now can be supplemented and compared with the OSA funds, containing reports on situation on the local level as seen by contemporary adversaries of the regime. Both kinds of sources provide for more diversified picture of who was perceived as 'ours' and 'theirs', safe and dangerous, conscious and unconscious, near and alien. The internal minutes from regional meetings witness an environment where the local activists still felt 'among themselves' and voiced openly such cases they would not mention both among their neighbours and among their higher posted representatives. Similarly, the reports made by the emigrants show e.g. their need to elaborate a wider range of categories to describe the 'party-run' world they came from. The label for an enemy (a 'Communist') soon became supplemented in their reports by differentiating adjectives such as 'decent', 'bearable', 'active', 'conscious', 'dangerous', 'fierce', 'diehard' etc. reflecting the process of accommodation of the local communities through creating, maintaining and exploiting different personal links and developing variable living strategies in contact with 'the ruling party'.

At the beginning, the propagandist messages were loaded with the goal of re-education of masses in spirit of a new man for a new world, but gradually the priority switched to stabilising the gained power positions. Instead of idealization of revolutionary activities, propaganda hallowed a model of a strictly organized individual, not succumbing to independent uncontrolled activity. The rank and file communists, for decades defined by their fellow citizens and also by themselves as *rebels* lacking respect towards formal authorities, were thus losing the core part of their identity. Moreover, the local party activists were the first to be addressed and blamed by their dissatisfied neighbours. Soon, they also had to give up the 'rewards', such as tobacco-shops, pubs, larger gardens and fields, which they had received immediately after 1945 for their war-time merits[3]

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[2] Davies, Sarah: „Us against Them": Social Identity in Soviet Russia, 1934-1941. The Russian Review 56 (January 1997), 70-89.
[3] See e.g. the case of veteran K. Ivičič, OSA 300-1-2, reel 4, item 9096.

The specific group of disillusioned and thus potentially conflict party members and supporters were *women*, among whom the responsibility for survival of the family in the misery of lacking goods strengthened their orientation towards immediate reward as compensation for time and energy invested by them or members of their families to political activities. The reports occasionally mention details of cases when queues consisting of women turned into riots (with police, water guns etc. involved).[4]

The regime-organised re-educational campaign aimed at creating a new man escalated the permanently present *generational* conflict, since the simultaneously promoted images of a 'young man' as embodiment of a new age, educated and mainly not corrupted by the old regime and that of an old comrade, merited veteran, who brought personal sacrifices to the victory of the party, constantly clashed. The intra-party conflict of (unthankful) young and (obsolete) elder comrades is very visible on the background of compulsory party education. Fortunately, there is rich material to this matter in the OSA archives, too. Linked to this dichotomy is also transfer of old stereotypes of '*intelligentsia* torn off the nation/people.' The specific conflicts were also linked to attempted *building of symbolic national and international unity,* presentation of international relations, international experience from organised travel, foreign delegates, etc., to *disciplinisation and deterrence,* to introduction of *changing communist dogmas* ex cathedra and attempts for their explanations and interpretations, as well as to *Contesting Party histories.*[5]

The reports confirm that the *black market* can be also considered a specific form of resistance. From housewives needing needles to kolkhoz heads unable to make the broken tractor run again, all in the small communities suffered of lack of commodities of daily use. Everybody was dependent on client networks of fellow countrymen, able to get, lend, repair, organise, advise, mediate, equip, accommodate, transport... Including the local party representatives, who were thus often forced to prioritise the needs of their community and not of superior political bodies.

The hierarchic system of the political organisation, strictly limited independence in decision making and centrally planned activities have strengthened the conflict moods and their manifestations in relation towards the 'town', the 'master', the '*centre*', and tested the

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[4] E.g. the report on hunger riot in Prešov , OSA 300- 1-2-, reel 43, item 7942 .

[5] During the observed period the Party underwent at least three major reinterpretations of its own history (internal cleansing of agents of imperialism and bourgeois nationalists, reaction to soviet condemnation of the cult of personality). As one of them stated after a heated debate in1957, "Comrades, to write the history is much more difficult, than to make it". P. Molnár at the RC in Rožňava, 1957, in: Zavacká, M.: On the Human Dimension of Propaganda (Case study Slovakia 1956-1962. In: Zub, Alexandru – Solomon, Flavius (Eds.) Sovietization in Romania and Czechoslovakia. History, analogies, consequences. Iasi: Polirom 2003, 18.

limits of required comradely solidarity. In opposition to relations to the 'own' political power, various traditional local ties and client networks prevailed regularly: the family, neighbourhood, church, the region. The wave of show-processes gave the local communities chance to turn the regime rhetoric for defence of their status quo, claiming that all directives 'from above' have to be properly checked first, since they could be coming from the enemy within. Modernising trends could also be refused from conservative positions by labelling them as 'inappropriate copying of the West', kowtowing to imperialists, withdrawal of traditions and values of the people, etc.

The classification of 'the other' in internal conflict among the local members of the Communist party was thus very variable. Their identity used to be primarily localised to particular party organisation and in their speeches they crossed the border between 'we the Communists from and 'we dwellers of' without hesitation, while 'they' opposed to 'us good Communists here among ourselves' could be found in a factory, in the other village, in the Village soviet staffed by appointed aliens, in the National Front organizations, or even in the Central party committee itself.