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## THE INTELLIGENTSIA AND THE CHANGE OF POLITICAL POWER (1945–1946)<sup>1</sup>

Analysis of policy decisions concerning the intelligentsia in the period reveal that the coalition parties were well aware of the fact that no democratisation and modernisation of the country were possible without the active participation of the intelligentsia. When specifying the role of the intelligentsia in a democratic Hungary, the political parties could not disregard the role this layer played between the two world wars or its relationship to those in power. At the same time, the intelligentsia also had to realize that its function had significantly altered on account of the change of political power.

Yet, common interests were not recognized and agreed at first, partly because most intellectuals who had lost their way and perspective did not find their place in the new Hungary, partly because some representatives of the parties concerned did not intend to give them a suitable role in the process of rebirth either. This gave rise to some debate among the parties too. The debate focused on whether its role in the past made the intelligentsia suitable for taking part in the process of reconstruction at all and if yes which groups of it could be involved in creating a new Hungary. Of the wide range of divergent and often extreme opinions at the turn of 1944–1945, it was the stand taken by the HCP (= Hungarian Communist Party) that expressed best the interests of the country and most of the intelligentsia: the intelligentsia should have a future in a democratic Hungary.

In the interests of successfully accomplishing the reconstruction, the HCP made efforts to eliminate the causes that had hitherto hindered the activation of various groups within the intelligentsia. Of the various professional groups of the intelligentsia, the party attributed primary importance to winning over the technical intelligentsia. Among its coalition partners, the SDP (= Social Democratic Party) also regarded the role of the technical intelligentsia as crucial. As the reconstruction did not figure as a major political goal in the policies of the other parties, they took less interest in this group. Right from the outset, the individual parties, the Communists in particular, paid special attention to

the academic elite and wished to win it over, in view of its influence on the masses of the intelligentsia and prospective modernisation. Because of its peculiar position, an assessment of the elite in general and of the academic elite in particular, differs from that of other professional groups in several respects, though it is part and parcel of the policy of the parties on the intelligentsia.

The decisive political forces of the country judged the democratisation and modernisation of higher education in ways which were nearly identical and they did not have any significant differences in their plans to transform academic life. The parties only had minor differences in judging the past role of pedagogues who played an important part in shaping the system of national education and helped to form political public opinion. Most of the parties criticised their past, their relationship to the former ruling class in the spring of 1945. The NPP (= National Peasant Party) was the only political organisation to emphasize only the connections pedagogues had with the people when they assessed their historical role. However, irrespective of their role in the past, each party wanted to gain their support. Most of the parties were unanimous in stressing the need to remedy the increasing problems teachers faced causing discontent among their ranks, though the SDP jumped to incorrect conclusions, judging teachers in a negative light.

From the summer of 1945, however, it was the smallholders that were the chief supporters of teachers. The smallest interest was taken in doctors, who did not constitute a numerous group and who did not appear to be playing a major part in reconstruction and the political struggle. The SDP, however, recognised the social and political significance of doctors at a fairly early stage. After the political struggle had sharpened, the ISP (= Independent Smallholders Party) also acknowledged that the group was important not only in the field of health care but also on the political scene. Apart from a few initiatives, neither the HCP, nor the NPP recognized the true social and political weight of doctors.

The political parties attached great importance to the intelligentsia of public administration because of its influence on politics and power. Initially, all

<sup>1</sup> The paper is a summary of a ten-year long research.

the participants of the coalition gave a negative assessment of the role it played in the Horthy regime and wanted to create a new and democratic type of public administration instead. From the summer of 1945, the ISP reappraised the past role of the intelligentsia of public administration in a way that, in contrast to the political element in judging the group, it emphasized the importance of its professional function and it was through the latter that members of the civil service were to find their place in the new democracy.

The parties had a similar attitude to the intelligentsia in a number of fields, owing to their shared vested interests in creating a democratic Hungary. However, the struggle for winning over individual groups of the intelligentsia partially differentiated the stand of the various parties. Yet no actual situation of conflict arose among the participants of the coalition until the struggle had acquired a political character. The appearance of political considerations resulted in clear-cut demarcations a more varied political spectrum.

The integration of the intelligentsia into the political life was a complex task – both for the parties and the intelligentsia. In the beginning, most intellectuals were unable to find their bearings in the new circumstances and could not assess which were the forces accumulated in the HNIF (Hungarian National Independence Front) that stood nearest to their own political interests. The position of most of the parties was not easier either as it was difficult to accommodate the role the intelligentsia played in the past anti the political views of its majority to the new political ideas and concept of democracy. Thus, at the time political life was reconstructed, both parties faced a dilemma. Of the coalition parties, it was the HCP, the first to become a major force that had to face the above problems at an early stage.

It was an unexpected development in the political life of 1945 that some of the intelligentsia wished to join the HCP. The party leadership, however, was unprepared for this. It was also a challenge for the party that some of their coalition partners had been able to dissolve the tension between the past function and political views of the intelligentsia and the democratic political establishment. The SDP, for example, welcomed intellectuals with open arms right from the start. The NPP set out to recruit intellectuals who were sympathetic to the peasantry and who were prepared to ‘serve the interests of the peasantry’. The ISP had a small group

of progressive intellectuals of a European cast of mind but it did not have a large following among the intelligentsia.

After the political struggle had intensified anti the class character of the individual parties had become established, it was mainly the ISP and the SDP that started recruiting the intelligentsia in order to extend their base and to increase their political influence. For the participants of the coalition were not indifferent to what stand the intelligentsia, which played an important part in shaping public opinion, would take in the political struggle. Following the realization of the political significance of the intelligentsia, the parties started to judge this layer along lines other than just its professional function and began to reckon with its political weight, too. After the political roles corresponding to the new situation had been specified, the parties pledged to stand up for the interests of the intelligentsia. This ‘meeting’ of the parties and the intelligentsia depended on whether it would be possible to dissolve the conflict between its old function and the role it was to play in a democracy, as outlined above, and whether the parties would be able to represent the interests of the intelligentsia in an acceptable way. The number of intellectuals, joining the individual parties cannot be used to infer unambiguously the impact made on the whole layer, as most of the intelligentsia did not join the parties and were engaged in non-party politics.

In order to create a firm basis and to strengthen its positions in the political struggle, the ISP dissolved the earlier tension anti embarked on a campaign to win over an increasingly greater number of intellectuals. Through circumspect and thorough propaganda it took upon itself to represent the interests of various groups and came to influence an increasing number of intellectual groups too. Most leaders of the NPP did not wish to open up the party for a massive influx of intellectuals even at the time of the political struggle in order to preserve the leftist character of the party. An increase of the influence of the coalition partners on the intelligentsia made it increasingly urgent for the HCP to step up its efforts to extend its intellectual base. However, the party was to subordinate, in any significant way, its principled consideration concerning the intelligentsia to tactical interests only at the time of the election battles. In late August, 1945, the HCP also switched over to recruiting. During the autumn election campaign the parties set out to win over various groups of the intelligentsia. It

was the HCP and the ISP that showed the greatest activity in this. The majority of the intelligentsia regarded the ISP as the party to realize, in perspective, bourgeois democracy, its own political model, and that is why they voted for this party at the elections. Those groups of the intelligentsia, whose political ideas were incompatible with the notion of a collective party, aligned themselves with the SDP or the NPP rather than the HCP. Thus, only a small proportion of the intelligentsia supported the HCP.

After the parliamentary elections, the greatest political activity concerning the intelligentsia could be observed in the ranks of those parties that failed to make a significant impression on this particular layer. Following an analysis of the situation and having drawn the necessary conclusions, the HCP attempted to improve its position among the intelligentsia by means of a policy concerning the intelligentsia revised in several respects. The SDP, whose policy concerning the intelligentsia contained contradictions too, also tried to increase the influence of the party on this layer. The NPP continued its policy of broadening its base among intellectuals serving the interests of the people. The ISP considered the majority of the intelligentsia to be its political supporter that is why it did not think it was of primary importance to devote especial attention to this layer. Most intellectuals, however, adopted a position of political passivity, indifference or an attitude of ‘wait and see’ in the fight between the bourgeois and left-wing forces.

The goals of reconstruction and economic recovery were the prerequisites of any other goals set and, for this reason the workers parties established the best relationships with the technical intelligentsia among the various professional groups of this layer. They endeavoured to strengthen their relationship with them through various measures. The ISP and NPP were also aware of the social importance of the technical intelligentsia but they were not partial to the group from either a professional or a political point of view because of their different kinds of interests. As the sphere of activity of the technical intelligentsia had less to do with ideology, no political conflicts involving the group emerged. After the 1945 elections the HCP continued to seek the possibilities and forms to enable it to exchange views with the ‘elite’ of the intelligentsia. It continued to endow the ‘elite’ with a role mainly to win over the masses of the intelligentsia. Even when the elite was given preferential treatment, it became clear that

any room for the activities of the privileged elite, which was more acknowledged than average intellectuals was guaranteed only in the cultural sphere in a Communist interpretation. The HCP declared unequivocally that intellectual excellence did not entitle anyone to a leading role in politics.

The policy concerning the intelligentsia in the political struggle after the elections did not play a central role that is why conflicts rarely arose in this field. In the situation concerning teachers, however, an issue that was a political one concerning the intelligentsia was transformed into a whole political case. The debates focusing on the unsolved problems relating to this group brought to the surface the political questions of Hungarian democracy. In addition to the unsolved problems pedagogues had to face, this issue became a source of conflict because in this field of activity the ideological-political element was decisive. In times of political and power relations in the balance, this group may temporarily become a decisive factor for politics. In the policy of the HCP concerning the intelligentsia, pedagogues – especially primary school teachers – were given a special role. In various public forums, the party addressed itself to the problems of the group and campaigned for their solution. The NPP continued to attach great importance to teachers. The ISP and the SDP paid hardly any attention to the situation of teachers’ right until the spring of 1946.

In the spring of 1946, pedagogues gave voice to their discontent in a form exceeding all previous ones, which elicited different reactions from the parties. The HCP did not agree with teachers voicing their opinion in the way they did in the Sports Hall. It disapproved of strikes or other spectacular forms of defending one’s interests. The SDP was also disparaging in its assessment of the situation. The ISP, however, supported the rally in the Sports Hall and undertook to represent the interests of teachers. Despite the fact that they condemned the action of teachers, the workers parties went on to stress their intention to win them over. The stand taken by the left had an impact on the political views of teachers.

After the parliamentary elections, the majority of the parties continued to ignore doctors. From a political point of view, however, the HCP considered it important to win over doctors and took some initiatives in several fields to increase its influence. The interest of the ISP towards doctors became more pronounced at the time the Communists put forward their so-called B-list. The reason

for this was that at the time of B-listing the standard to be reached was raised higher for this group of the intelligentsia than for other groups and the ISP did not agree with that. In their opinion, the measure did not only jeopardise doctors' living but health care too. In the opinion of the ISP, it should be possible to disregard the measure in the case of a group which could go about its daily professional business without getting involved in politics.

Even back at the time of the political battles of 1945, it became clear that some parties highlighted professional, whereas others political considerations when judging civil servants. It was obvious that the parties tried to represent their interests again in terms of either political or professional considerations.

It was evident for the parties of the left that they would be able to increase their influence only if they laid emphasis on the political element. The forces intending to realize bourgeois democracy were also aware that they could hold their positions only if they emphasized the professional element. It was the left that put forward the initiative to clarify the problem around the administrative intelligentsia. The HCP attached great importance to the transformation of public administration that is why it stressed political considerations in addition to the financial ones. In the beginning, the stand taken by the SDP was very similar to the position of the Communists. The NPP also supported the idea of reforming public administration that is why in the first half of 1946 it demanded the introduction of B-listing aimed at purging the ranks of public administration. The ISP, which emphasized the primacy of professional competence, was unable to withstand this political pressure.

After a meeting of the Leftist Block and the ISP, people whose continued activity in office proved to be harmful to the democratic reconstruction of the country or who lacked the required level of competence were dismissed from their jobs in public administration. From the start, the ISP made efforts to limit the application of B-listing to the narrowest possible field. In the summer of 1946, however, the SDP and the NPP already had serious objections to B-listing and often openly opposed the consistent implementation of B-listing. The leaders of the HCP saw themselves that committees in charge of B-listing overshot the mark in a number of places and therefore agreed to subject the B-list to partial revision. The party did manage, however, to make the B-list achieve its fundamental goals.

It was in the autumn of 1946 that a radical change took place in the attitude of politics to the intelligentsia. At the 3rd Congress of the HCP, the Communists, who openly broke with the concept of political pluralism, radically changed their attitude to the intelligentsia too. The party also changed its stand on groups that they were to integrate in 1945/6 in several respects. Of the various professional groups, it continued to attribute great importance to technical people playing a central part in reconstruction and in socialism in perspective as well as the academic elite. At the same time, the Communist Party expected a different attitude or mentality from the elite, which virtually meant giving up autonomy. Even in the post-pluralist period (autumn of 1946–1948), the party linked support with the demand to make Communist polities legitimate. They started marginalising outstanding conservative academics unwilling to support the claim of Communists to legitimacy at that time and they finished the process of ousting them from higher education and academic life in the year of 'decisive change' and by means of the 'university reform'.

The preferential treatment of the technical intelligentsia continued because of the modernisation of industry, which, besides the material and moral appreciation given to this group, also manifested itself in consciously increasing their number. Even this continued preferential treatment of the technical intelligentsia, however, went hand in hand with constant discrimination against those politically unreliable, including persecution.

In the post-pluralist period the support pledged for certain groups of the intelligentsia, e.g. teachers, at an earlier stage decreased. The situation concerning doctors changed in a similar way. It was a characteristic feature of the intelligentsia policy of the left that the various groups of the intelligentsia that were supposed to be won over had lost their importance. The intelligentsia policy of the Communists put the emphasis on creating a new intelligentsia instead. The Communist policy of creating a new, organic kind of intelligentsia manifested itself in a lack of confidence in the old intelligentsia.

The new intelligentsia, which owed its existence to the HCP, was in a dependent position. The totalitarian regime, however, put all groups of the intelligentsia at the mercy of those in power and expected them to serve their tactics. The new intelligentsia of working class and peasant origin which at first identified itself with Communist values

came to realize that it was only an instrument in the hands of power after the Stalinist regime had been fully implemented. In addition to the old intelligentsia ignored, at times even persecuted, by the Communists, the new intelligentsia also felt disillusioned. It viewed the great crisis of Stalinism with shock and disillusionment and some of its groups even went to the length of denying the Rakosi regime. These groups played a decisive part in the reform experiment of Imre Nagy. After the restoration of Stalinism the gap between them and the party bureaucrats standing on the platform of totalitarianism became even deeper and impossible to bridge. It was not by chance that the intelligentsia was again to play a decisive role in the intellectual-political reform following the 20th Congress of the CPSU as well as in the 1956 revolution.

## Notes

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