



PREPARING FOR THE REVOLUTION HUNGARIAN DISSIDENT INTELLECTUALS BEFORE 1989

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On the basis of scholarship on the role of intellectuals in society, one can distinguish three classic approaches to what this role should be. The first approach, proposed by the French writer, Julien Benda, suggested that intellectuals need to keep a distance to social and political affairs. In his interpretation, intellectuals should serve eternal values, and not society, so they do their work at a remove from social challenges, in an ivory tower. For Benda, social involvement is a betrayal of the original mission of the intellectual.

The second theory, elaborated by the Italian social theorist Antonio Gramsci, proposed precisely the opposite: full engagement of intellectuals in a social and political cause involving the support of a particular class. For Gramsci, the traditional intellectual must be replaced by what he called the organic intellectual, one who is ready to fight for the interests of his/her own social class.

Finally, the third theory, elaborated by the Hungarian-born sociologist Karl Mannheim, claimed that only “free-floating” intellectuals, i.e., those who are not attached to any of the social classes, are able to synthesize all impulses of society. Since all forms of knowledge are dependent on the social position of those who possess the knowledge, only “free-floating” intellectuals, those who are not tied to any particular social group, are able to represent a general, all-encompassing, independent, and objective view of society.

Therefore, for Mannheim, intellectuals had to stay within society (and not in an ivory tower), but they should be independent from all social classes (and not

be the spokesperson for any of them).

These classic theories on the role of the intellectual were originally formulated in the 1920s, as reactions to the challenge of the rise of increasingly aggressive political ideologies after World War I. But one can add at least two major and more recent theories to these three. First, the original theories were supplemented by New Class theories, which claimed that intellectuals have their own agenda in participating in social processes. The agenda involves coming to power as a “new class” of intellectuals, a class whose power is based on convertible, trans-contextual knowledge, competence in the language of persuasion, and the culture of critical discourse. Different forms of New Class theories, formulated by Milovan Djilas, Alvin Gouldner, George Konrád & Iván Szelényi and others, arose as reactions to the rise of new communication technologies, bureaucratic and technocratic rule, planning power, and consumerism in the post World War II era. Gouldner believed, for instance, that intellectuals could undermine the legitimacy of the system by using the culture of critical discourse effectively. As a result of this, a new knowledge class could take over and use key positions in society to represent the common interests of this new class.

And finally, different pluralist theories claimed that intellectuals in a capitalist democracy do not and cannot form a particular class in themselves. Instead, they end up losing their “free-floating” potential and become professionals, experts, i.e., not “universalistic intellectuals” but particularistic professionals who find

their place within the order of the capitalist distribution of labor as a dominated stratum of the dominant class.

In East Central Europe, the decade between 1982 and 1992 gives evidence of an unprecedented set of activities by those intellectuals who actively engaged in politics.

In Hungary, for instance, different forms of opposition activities could be detected before the regime change (1982–88), during the “negotiated revolution” (1989), and right after the political change in the new democracy (1990–92). This is a laboratory for testing the validity of some theories of revolutionary intellectuals. In this essay, I focus on the first epoch only, in order to study the role of dissident intellectuals. This was a time which we can retrospectively label the “preparation phase” for a revolution.

THE HUNGARIAN DEMOCRATIC OPPOSITION

Hungary’s democratic opposition arose from a fusion of intellectual groups of the generations of the 1956 revolution and of the 1968 economic reform.

Both groups of dissidents existed in loose networks of friendly groups in the capital and in smaller towns in the country, and in spite of the existence of some kinds of group identities, at least after 1978, the actual activities were bound to these informal communication channels. Despite the samizdat literature emerging in

the late 1970s, the primary form of dissident discourse remained basically the “talk”, the “chat”, and the “lecture” about philosophy, history, politics, arts, and so on. In reconstruct the everyday life of the dissident intellectuals, one necessarily encounters one of the most characteristic features of these discourses: the verbal nature of the Hungarian dissidence. Moreover, the efforts of self-documentation of the democratic opposition generated deep resentment in others who took themselves to be excluded from the conspiracy of the democratic opposition.

The older economists concerned with Western-style economic reforms worked within the institutional limitations of the Kádár-regime and its “national consent” under the “liberal spirit” of the 1960s, but the generation that started to come of age in the 1970s began to widen the borders of public speech during a period with a colder political climate. The later “reform economist” group within the political opposition of the 1980s, having lived in the lower levels of the scientific institutions, built up a quasi-autonomous mode of life outside direct political control (in the protective shadow of the institutional labyrinths) with more access to information than the “dissidents” ever had, but without any effective power, as in the 1970s.

Similarly, in popular culture, especially in pop music, one can see successive stages (the “jazz” of the late 1950s, the “beat” of the 1960s) of new groups that were “rebellious”, which were usually neutralized by socialist cultural policy, until the 1970s. The formative experience of the 1968 generation, the “beat” culture, proved actually to be a transient episode in the history of the cultural policy of state socialism, because the young rebels of the beat music in the 1960s were channeled into the financial and infrastructural frameworks of the traditional entertainment industry through publishing contracts and television shows. The great change took place in 1970, when radically “anomic” subcultures emerged like rock, punk, and the alternative music of the 1980s.

These changes went hand in hand with an extension of personal networks within the universities, especially the university colleges, and a quick retreat of the official youth organizations into the capital city. The essence of this change was a widening of the spaces and branches of social communication, and, in contrast to the more closed channels of the “political” dissent, the places and forms of these cultural discourses reached not some tens of people, but thousands of them. It was a typical form of dissent, being outside the spaces of the official discourses, and continuing the confrontation with cultural policies and repressive mechanisms, often without direct political counter-discourse. A cultural pattern of dissent existed in the 1980s, which was a resource for the political opposition.

The Hungarian context made possible a wider set of roles and behaviors to use when describing reality. In spite of the relatively small extent of the dissident subcultures (especially compared to Poland), there existed a dissident public sphere after the 1970s, and there were rather soft borders between the dissident “other” Hungary and the public sphere of the state socialism. The typical pattern of the dissident role was an oscillation between different public faces, as the practice of “double publishing” was more or less toler-

ated by the cultural policy of the Kádár regime. Due to the softness of the boundaries between these spheres, we can also observe many techniques for penetrating the officially accepted communication channels, certainly those existing in encoded forms. The practice of “double-speak”, the culture of allusions, irony, and a step-by-step widening of the fields of “speakable” things, is a characteristic feature of this “production of culture”.

The ironic use of socialist discourses was a way to turn the accepted categories inside out and demonstrate the mechanistic and empty nature of these discourses. During the state socialist period, the main way to speak about political problems was this indirect and encoded form of discourse. In the course of creating languages of its own, the final and very difficult approach was innovation.

In the 1980s, various democratic opposition groups increasingly sought an opportunity for dialogue with different circles of Hungarian intelligentsia by means of samizdat journals. Although it took a long time for their message to reach the general population, the message found immediate resonance with mainstream reform intellectuals. Four samizdat journals – *Beszélő*, *Hírmondó*, *Demokrata*, and *Égtájak között* – played an especially important role in this process. Radio Free Europe amplified and disseminated these ideas to the wider public. In the first part of this paper, I briefly describe these journals and their dissident contributors. Next, I turn to examining their strategic goals, their relationship to power and society, their declared policies on national and regional issues, and their views on religion, peace, environmental protection, and various cultural initiatives.

The most important samizdat journal, *Beszélő*, lasted from 1981 to 1989, as long as 27 issues. The editorial team was made up of the leading figures of the democratic opposition. The journal combined theoretical, strategic, practical, and investigative articles and reports. In the introduction to the first issue, the informal editor-in-chief, János Kis, described the goals of the journal as being more ambitious than simply publishing an opposition news summary. “To the best of our ability”, he wrote, “we wish to assist the quietly clamoring masses in painting a better picture of themselves in a period when two tiny minorities – the country’s leadership and the opposition – are loudly arguing with each other.”

In the first couple of issues, the majority of the articles reflected this desire. They mostly disseminated information about different social groups and different areas of life. The function of these articles was to find out who would react (“unanimously, under a pseudonym, or with their own names”), and what those responding had to say. The journal’s profile was shaped by the feedback it received and the political events that were underway in the first year of the journal’s existence. Indirectly, all of this shaped the identity of the editors and groups with close ties to *Beszélő*.

Kis’s introduction did not define a clear political program. It only aimed at sounding the alarm. Instead of offering a political program, *Beszélő* worked at disseminating information so that “the quietly clamoring masses” would be able to understand and disseminate it further in the future. It was truly the effort of intel-

lectuals whose trust was in the power and influence of words on social processes, and who wanted rumors to be replaced by facts. In reality, *Beszélő* did nothing other than perform the traditional function of the press by disseminating reliable information without advancing any political program. The journal reported on those social groups who disobeyed the rules, thus bringing practical examples – not theoretical ones – of challenging the rules of a dictatorial regime. It showed the areas of life where society expressed opposition to the regime. The hope was that by publicly acknowledging these isolated attempts, *Beszélő* would help people who were active in one area learn about and get in contact with other people working towards the same goal in other areas. In the long run, the editors believed, the feeling of isolation would be replaced by an increasingly unified opposition that had increased potential and effectiveness.

After the regime change of 1989, János Kis, looking back to the samizdat years, described the purpose of the journal in a three-volume publication of the collected issues of *Beszélő* in the following way:

Today, starting a newspaper is a financial enterprise. *Beszélő* was called into existence on moral grounds. We wanted to exercise our human rights to express and disseminate our ideas even though the contemporary laws called such rights into question. [...] It was liberating to speak up from behind the protective bastions of human rights even if morals were our only defense. We chose the name of the journal – *Beszélő* [the visiting area in prisons] – to reflect our situation: we were behind bars. We were the prisoners who in the visiting area could still freely speak to their loved ones. [...] We were neither reformers nor revolutionaries. We were aware that in contemporary Hungary ours is not a revolutionary grouping. Neither were we reformers in the sense in which “reformism” was understood at the time. The reformers of the 1980s accepted the rules promulgated from above and tried to push the power elite toward reforms. [...] We believed that progress was no longer possible under the existing conditions where the allowance made by the power elite could be revoked at any time. Progress necessitated the birth of social autonomy protected by rights. We also believed that rights behavior could not be given from above but should be won from below by fighting for it. Only legally minded behavior can guarantee legal protection. This was the most important message of the democratic opposition besides the communication of the fact that no longer could the regime close the flood gates of opposition entirely as it did in the previous decades and stop public protest conscious of legal matters. In other words, there was a political motivation behind our taking up the provocative exercise of our rights.

This was indeed the key strategy of the democratic opposition. The Communist Party created a kind of state of hypocrisy by adopting a seemingly “democratic” opposition in 1949, which also contained a powerful, widely and flexibly used sentence, stating that the leading force of the society was the Communist Party. In the light of this statement every other “democratic” point of the constitution was subject to the free interpretation by Party officials. Thus the whole text of the constitution was fully relativized. This incredible gap between constitutional norms and the reality of the communist power monopoly offered a strategy for the democratic opposition – “the provocative exercise” of human rights – which found justification in the formal text of the constitution.

We reckoned with retaliation by the police in the form of house searches, confiscations, and arrests. But we also counted on the effect of our persevering. It could help others expand the permitted boundaries of disobedience. In the first half of the 1980s the public did not believe that there was a third way between politically empty revolutionary rhetoric and joining in reforms directed from above. *Beszélő* called attention both to the existence of this third alternative and to the heavy price the country would pay if this chance were missed. In the face of the popular view, we advanced the idea that the military putsch in Warsaw on December 13, 1981 was not the end of a revolutionary period in the region as November 4, 1956 and August 21, 1968 had been. Rather, we believed, it gave rise to a comprehensive crisis in the Soviet order. For us the most vital question was how Hungary would prepare for the culmination of the crisis.

Judging by its content and its political prestige, *Beszélő* was the most important political journal of the Hungarian opposition. It published the best strategic analyses written by dissidents who would later become the leading figures of the transition elite.

DISSIDENT DILEMMAS: VOICE OR EXIT?

The relationship of the opposition to society was not free of contradictions. Occasionally the opposition expressed its dissatisfaction with the “silence of society”. Opposition members wanted to speak up or even mobilize against the atomization, pacification, and neutralization strategies of the Kádár regime. They were afraid that society would not identify with their goals and that it would not even understand them. So how did they understand their own value to society?

They took it upon themselves to be the torchbearers whose task was to pronounce value judgments: “The torch must be held up high even if it cannot be a perfect substitute for sunshine and the torchbearer cannot rush the sunrise. But the light of this torch must always be directed at real values and not at cheap imitations and scrap heaps.”

The dissidents returned to the metaphor of light frequently.

They saw themselves as role models. “If we allow the disintegration of our grouping – or community, if you like – that is ready to express and shape opinions and on occasion engage in demonstrations, then we not only dishonor our own goals but deprive others of our example and a chance....”

They believed that it was their responsibility to talk about the suppressed past. “The situation does not favor those who remember 1956. In this situation our best chance is not in visible and organized mass demonstrations but in remembering and making others remember [the past] as often and in as many places as possible. We must prefer the multitude of quick, secret and inventive action to public demonstrations that necessitate long preparation.”

These people did not speak from the position of an elite, but followed an inner call: both the moral and the practical were integral parts of their identity. The dissidents placed themselves in the public and not the private sphere. The broad and open – that is, broad and open in their minds – East-Central European spaces were rarely reduced to the innermost spaces of the private sphere. The risk that the families of opposition activists had to take was left unmentioned. To sum up, dissident intellectuals in Hungary wanted to give voice to demands for freedom, and also to those who had no chance to present themselves in the public sphere.

The second option was emigration. Once they realize they cannot change, cannot shake up society, they should think of the exit option. Many of the dissident intellectuals did not see it as one’s free choice, but as something one is pressured into by the power elite. In the case of the philosopher, Gáspár M. Tamás, the representatives of the power elite told him: “You are not going to get a passport but you may emigrate if you wish, which indeed would be desirable.”

The opposition categorically refused to back such a solution. “We view the situation differently. [...] To hell with such offers! The power elite may use this method again in ten years against those who could not be controlled by other means – job loss, ban on their employment, atrocities. In the end, the cultural police would simply force them out of the country. What else can be said upon seeing this bad omen but ‘Let the power elite leave. We’ll be fine without them.’”

Others expressed their acceptance of emigration. Emigration was thought of as something individuals had the right to choose. “‘No, I am disgusted so I’ll leave.’ This is what this couple said. I think I do not need a lot of empathy to understand, at least, their decision.”

It deserves mention that as much as they stressed the morality of deciding to stay in the country, they stressed the same with regard to emigration. This group of intellectuals did not judge emigration from the point of view of a collective responsibility for the fate of the nation. As they wrote, “this couple”, who were medical doctors, “did not go to Sweden because there was a shortage of doctors there. They went to face a very progressive system of taxation. If there is any country where they are guaranteed not to earn millions by practicing medicine, it is Sweden. Earning millions was not their purpose, anyway. They simply

wanted to be, and remain, honest individuals”.

Samizdat journals continued “holding the hands” of the emigrants by urging them to keep in contact with the opposition. From this they hoped to grow intellectually and that the emigrants could maintain their Hungarian identity. They welcomed the writings of the democrats who emigrated. They thought that this could be beneficial to both parties, since it would enrich the dissidents with new ideas and reasoning and also help the emigrants preserve their ties to the home country.

The democratic opposition in Hungary saw the political power of the emigrant intelligentsia as greater than their own. They often overestimated it: “Those of them coming home for a visit should not be ashamed of seeing the opposition and should explain the power elite’s disregard for the law in Western forums. They should not hesitate to demand for those living in Hungary the same rights that Hungarian emigrants who are ready to cooperate with the elite enjoy.”

CENSORSHIP AND FREEDOM

In its first issue, *Beszélő* reported on the book commemorating István Bibó, which was the first joint and comprehensive intellectual effort in Hungary since the Petöfi Circle, a famous discussion club before the revolution of 1956. In this memorial book, dozens of authors praised and analyzed the views of the social philosopher István Bibó, a minister of state in the Imre Nagy cabinet during the revolution. He had been imprisoned and then neglected by the Communist regime. Bibó appeared to have the potential to be a reference point for various opposition groups in the same way Jan Patočka was for the Czechs and Karol Wojtyła was for the Poles.

Beszélő also discussed, early on, the 1981 University-College Days, the movements of university students which were inspired by the self-limiting revolution of Solidarity and the protest against censorship. One of the editors, Ferenc Kőszeg, devoted a long article to book censorship practices.

He stressed the point that despite the official propaganda, censorship did exist in Hungary. Another well-known figure, Miklós Haraszti, analyzed in detail the judicial proceedings against a punk band in Szeged that displayed a critical attitude towards the regime.

In general, however, the opposition was not interested in the underground cultural scene and only mentioned it occasionally. Punk bands were mentioned sporadically and only as participants of music events that were problematic for the authorities, or as subjects of judicial proceedings because there had been a Radio Free Europe news item among the tapes of songs that were confiscated by the authorities.

As much as it could, the democratic opposition followed the problems that the editors of literary magazines faced. These were the attempts of certain general editors and magazines at uniformity. The Writers’ Association, which sharply criticized the cultural policies of the regime and the practice of informal censorship at their pentannual meetings, occupied a special place in the monolithic regime. At the 1981 Congress of the Writers’ Association, the well-known opposition writer, István Eörsi, suggested, with irony, to the representatives of power who were present, that

formal censorship should be introduced, because then at least writers would know what they could and could not write about. He reasoned that in Kádár's "soft dictatorship" the censorship rules were not clear, which leads to arbitrary editorial censorship as well as self-censorship. He believed that instead of the internalization of censorship, i.e., self-censorship, it would have been better to have had formal censorship, because in that case authors would have been more able to see clearly where power lay, and would be better able to preserve their integrity.

In the first part of the 1980s, the democratic opposition created its own ideology in the course of the debate that was carried out on the pages of samizdat journals, primarily those of *Beszélő*. In the center of their ideology stood Western-type liberal democracy, human rights, social market economy, and solidarity with the Hungarians outside Hungary and with other social and cultural minorities.

After the debate in *Beszélő* the balance shifted toward the creation of an action program. The programmatic article, "How to Find a Way Out of the Crisis?" appeared in the middle of the debate over identity in 1982.

It proposed solutions that gave the public a bigger and more active role than before. The role of the opposition was seen as shaping public opinion and exerting pressure through it. "The state will only act when public opinion keeps them under moral and intellectual pressure."

Proposals concerned the following issues: financial information, public debates on economic policy, the renewal of interest representation, the conditions of a well-functioning public sphere, legal conditions of interest representation, and the reform of book and magazine publishing. Publishing was used as an example of how a proposal can be put into practice gradually.

The oppositional identity and its problems were best summarized by Ferenc Köszeg in the 19th issue of *Beszélő*. "What is the democratic opposition? It certainly cannot be called a movement, because it is too small for a movement: it has no means or an organization that could link sympathizers together. It cannot even provide a form of communication for those (e.g., the young people) who demand it. Its members would, thank God, also refuse to be labeled a party. There are few things they are more averse to than the Bolshevik tradition of an elite party that is destined to lead the fight. The few dozen intellectuals could not call itself a mass party, either."

Köszeg analyzed some obvious signs of disintegration of the political system.

The democratic opposition in its present form is an opinion- and behavior-shaping group. It is more important to spread the behavioral attitude of the opposition than exert intellectual influence through publications. Today the issue is not only that independent groups publish samizdat journals and collect signatures the way the opposition had been doing it for eight years, but that prestigious social groups – almost entirely research institutes – also experiment with legal resistance or step over the

rules of the game that were arbitrarily defined by the power elite. The general assembly of the Writers' Association, which voted out the representatives of power of the association by fair voting procedures and thus forced the power elite to break its own rules, exemplifies the first; the fact that prestigious writers publish in samizdat journals and that all the employees of research institutes participate in meetings that are held in private apartments and could easily be called illegal exemplifies the latter. Once disobedience happens too often, the dividing line between the behavior of the opposition and the behavior of others is blurred, and the retribution of power needs to smite so many people that the means that were used to punish them in the past are inadequate. Hungarian society starts to re-discover the means of expressing its political will. Political debates are no longer the exclusive right of the functionaries of the nomenklatura.

For Ferenc Köszeg, the emerging social and political problems in Hungary determined the tasks of the democratic opposition. He believed that, despite the obvious weaknesses of the opposition, its moral authority would provide enough strength for it to achieve its goals:

Hungary entered the era of political debate again. Party leaders fighting for succession, company leaders, entrepreneurs, writers, the popular front, labor unions, and even the parliament on occasion take part in politics. As the economic situation continues to worsen, the workers worried about their jobs and the farmers who will not be able to sell their products at a good price will engage in politics too. In this increasingly politicized world, the opposition, whose gestures and genesis make it a political grouping, must engage in politics as well. [...] In order to debate, we must clearly state our own views [...] and we have to make our voice heard beyond the independent press – in clubs, public gatherings and in organized meetings. Not that we believe that we own the sorcerer's stone just because of our opposition status. But it is only the opposition that has criticized the actions of the government publicly and without concealment for seven years. This work gives us moral authority that, despite our weakness and isolation, provides us with the chance to be listened to when we speak, and not only within our own circles.

The June 1987 special issue of *Beszélő*, entitled "Social Contract: The Conditions of Political Progress", published the comprehensive program of the dissident intellectuals. The document made it clear that the consensus of the Kádár years was over and that "Kádár must go".

The authors said that a radical political turn was necessary, but without a social contract the nation would not rise. It is not enough to grumble: new policies must be actively sought. The power elite will only engage in dialogue if it understands that it has to negotiate with more than just the intelligentsia. The document also stressed the necessity of an economic stability package, which builds on political change. The goals of the 1956 revolution – multi-party system, self-government in the workplace and at settlements, national self-determination, neutrality in foreign policy – were still valid.

The program elaborated on the following demands: constitutional limitations on one-party rule, parliamentary sovereignty, a government responsible to parliament, freedom of press codified in law, legal protection to employees by giving them the right to assemble and to pursue their interests, as well as social security, fair social policies, and civil rights. The chapter entitled "The broader context" dealt with the relationship of Hungary to the Soviet Union, the problems of Hungarians living outside the borders of the country, and the heritage of 1956 in Hungarian politics.

The activities of the democratic opposition, as a group of dissident intellectuals, ended in 1988.

Between 1987 and 1989 the real issue was no longer their identity as a separate group, but the active and more organized role they played in the regime change. Besides the disagreement between the "népi" (popular/populist) intellectuals and the democratic opposition, these years were characterized by the appearance and growth of two distinct groups along the division between the Hungarian Democratic Forum (MDF) and the Alliance of Free Democrats (SZDSZ). The former dissidents became part of pluralistic politics as new politicians.

The changing political situation resulted in a change in the balance of power, which was best expressed by the publication of the Declaration against police brutality, which was signed by 300 intellectuals – not a small minority of intellectuals. The Declaration gave voice to decisive protest against brutal police actions. "There is a disquieting and appalling contradiction between how leading politicians stress their aspirations toward democracy and their willingness to engage in dialogue, and, on the other hand, organizations under their direction and following their orders openly display violence. We believe that after thirty years, the time has come for the Hungarian state to take the expression of the views of its citizens with civilized self-control. We demand that responsible political leadership prohibit police atrocities."

Finally, János Kis' article, published in 1989, entitled "What Does *Beszélő* Represent?" summarized *Beszélő*'s history and talked about the tasks awaiting the new liberal-democratic party, the SZDSZ.

In 1987, the program of 1983 is outdated. Today the democratic opposition is not alone in demanding unequivocal, codified, and institutionally protected rights. The views of the public go well beyond the compromise suggested by the opposition four years ago. In the meantime it also became clear that instead of initiating reforms, the

Kádár regime reacted with stubborn inflexibility to the pressure. As a result, the Social Contract went beyond its sketchy predecessor. The initial steps described in this text can be quite easily supplemented so as to lead to multi-party democracy. Legal limitations on the power of the party, and, on the other hand, freedom of assembly and of the press, and the creation of parliamentary fractions could lead to party pluralism. This was the basic idea of what could be achieved in the near future by Social Contract. Almost as much significance could be attached to its first two paragraphs, where it was expressed in no uncertain terms: “Kádár must go”. It had a much deeper message than a claim that the time of the party secretary had expired. Kádár personified the restoration of 1956–1957. His inevitable fall symbolized the end of an era.

The dissident intellectual circles first came to form a critical public sphere and, later on, the political opposition. People saw the remnants of a corrupt, non-democratic, post-totalitarian regime where the most needed political currency was trust. Only dissident intellectuals were in a position to convert their moral authority and moral capital into political capital. People wanted to be led by new, trustworthy leaders who had previously been outside the official system. This provided a historic opportunity for some philosophers, lawyers, historians, writers, and sociologists to speak on behalf of the people and to be spokespersons of democracy. As soon as the possibility of free elections arose, the democratic opposition stepped out of its role as critic of the regimes and became part of the new, democratic regime. From then on, its history can be followed in the daily press and the broadcast media.

EPILOGUE

The Hungarian dissident intellectuals did not foresee the future, so they could not prepare for the revolution. But they expected some sort of political change within the system, which could potentially lead to deeper, structural changes. They aimed to open up closed structures in society, combat censorship, and bring forbidden topics into the broader social discourse. They wanted to go beyond reformism, as we saw in the way they distanced themselves from the reformist communists, but they did not want to go as far as a violent revolution. They aimed to contribute to the creation of the conditions of a radical reform, which was to undermine the legitimacy of the system. Finally, they achieved more than that: the loose organizations of dissident intellectuals turned into the new political parties, and radical reform ended up in the negotiated exit from communism.

The dissident intellectuals followed the strategy of new evolutionism, proposed by the Polish dissident Adam Michnik, which was a strategy for uncompromising change to be achieved by the self-limiting behavior of the opposition, in a non-violent way.

They were soft on methods but firm on their goals. They spoke in the name of the oppressed society, and not on behalf of their own interests, so they behaved in a Mannheimian fashion to a certain extent. How-

ever, they did not just want to objectively mirror the social situation, as “free-floating” intellectuals would be able to do; they aimed to change it, by changing the discourse in various segments of the society. In this sense, this strategy, which was oriented towards civil society, might remind us of Gramsci’s proposition on hegemonic discourse, or Gouldner’s theory of the culture of critical discourse. In the meantime, the dissident intellectuals did not serve the interests of some other class, just as they refused to see themselves as a new class. Quite the contrary, they aimed to serve the interests of all oppressed people who wish to live in freedom, or, as Václav Havel put it, within the realm of truth.

They were universalistic in their approach but political realists in their action.

However, this is not to say that the intellectuals alone made the regime change in Hungary, or more broadly, in East Central Europe. They were the first who sensed the beginning of a seismic social transformation. As forerunners of change they wished to tell the truth – not only to the holders of power but primarily to civil society – to initiate resistance to the regime and political activism for democratic change. By 1989, these political intellectuals became increasingly involved in forming new political parties and participating in new institutional forms – such as the Opposition Roundtable – to negotiate democracy with the representatives of the Communist Party, and to enter Parliament as new MPs after the first free elections. From that point on, former dissidents had to face the painful task of transforming themselves as well: from “free-floating” intellectuals or “movement-intellectuals” into professional politicians. ❌



APPENDIX. CHARACTERISTIC ACTIVITIES OF THE HUNGARIAN DISSIDENT INTELLECTUALS DURING THE PREPARATORY PHASE AND THE REGIME CHANGE

TIME	1982–1988	1989–1990
CONTEXT	disintegration of dictatorship	regime change
ORGANIZATION	democratic opposition	roundtable opposition
ORGANIZATIONAL PRINCIPLE	loosely organized	formalized
GOAL	pluralism free speech human rights	free elections constitutionalism rule of law
STRATEGY	critical discourse	negotiations
ROLES	dissidents ideologues truth-tellers forerunners	professionals experts legislators founders
ENEMY	communist regime	old regime and its fellow-travelers
THEORY	Gramsci, Gouldner, Mannheim, Havel	Gouldner, Mannheim, Gagnow, Karabel
CONSEQUENCE	formation of civil society, political pluralization	non-violent, negotiated revolution

What would Gramsci and Havel have in common? Please note that Max Weber is absent.

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- ⁸ For a detailed analysis, see András Bozóki (ed.), *Intellectuals and Politics in Central Europe*, Budapest & New York, 1999.
- ⁹ Ervin Csizmadia, *A magyar demokratikus ellenzék* [The Hungarian Democratic Opposition], Budapest 1995.
- ¹⁰ Zoltán G. Szűcs, "The everyday life of socialism from the perspective of cultural discourse of the 'Other Europe'" (Manuscript), Budapest 2007.
- ¹¹ The Communist regime in Hungary between 1956 and 1989 – named after the ruler János Kádár, who came to the country on Soviet tanks, which oppressed the revolution, in November 1956, and died in July 1989.
- ¹² János Kis, "Beköszöntő" [Introduction], *Beszélő*, 1981, No. 1, p. 1. [Note: all translations by author.]
- ¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 2.
- ¹⁴ János Kis, "Előszó" [Preface] in Fanny Havas et al. (eds.), *Beszélő. Összkiadás 1981-1989* [Beszélő: Complete Edition 1981-1989], Vol. 1. Budapest 1992, pp. 5-6.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁶ Róbert Sasváry, "Ellenzék a hódoltságban" [Opposition in Oppression], *Demokrata*, 1986, No. 8. p. 19.
- ¹⁷ The reformer economists with close ties to power also used the metaphor of light, and later talked about themselves as light in the darkness.
- ¹⁸ *Demokrata*: "Néhány szó" [Some Words], *Demokrata* 1987, No. 11, p. 1.
- ¹⁹ Anonymous, "Bátran, öntevékenyen" [Courageously and Actively], *Demokrata* 1986, No. 7-8, p. 43. To facilitate an increased tempo, they even gave practical advice about, for instance, how to make rubber stamps, stencils, and fliers.
- ²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 44.
- ²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 24.
- ²² The sociologist Iván Szelényi was expelled from Hungary by these means in 1975.
- ²³ Gábor Demszky, "Menjenek el talán ők" [Perhaps They Should Leave], *Hírmondó*, 1984, No. 9 August, p. 24.
- ²⁴ Anonymous: *untitled*. *Demokrata* 1986, No. 1-2, p. 25.
- ²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 25.
- ²⁶ Szilárd Stark, "Valódi párbeszéd vagy manipuláció?" [Real dialogue or manipulation?], *Demokrata* 1986, No. 9, p. 8. – "In our judgment," it was written in 1988, "in the current critical situation of the country, informing the public openly and in large numbers through the Hungarian media abroad is a good thing. Their objective work can foster a democratic mentality, which must be part of the developing political culture of the country. See Hungarian Democratic Opposition (1988), *Demokrata* No. 4, p. 27.
- ²⁷ Miklós Szabó, "A Bibó-émlékkönyv" [The Bibó Memorial Book], *Beszélő* 1981, No. 1, pp. 48-49.
- ²⁸ Sándor Szilágyi, "Tétova zendülők" [Hesitant Rebels], *Beszélő*, 1981, No. 1, pp. 15-20.
- ²⁹ Ferenc Köszeg, "A könyvkiadói cenzúra Magyarországon" [Book censorship in Hungary], *Beszélő* 1982, Nos. 5-6, pp. 239-248.
- ³⁰ Miklós Haraszti, "A szegedi punkháború" [The Punk War in Szeged], *Beszélő*, 1982, Nos. 5-6, pp. 287-289.
- ³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 287-289.

- ³² János Kis, "Hogyan keressünk kiutat a válságból? A *Beszélő* javaslatai" [How to Find a Way Out of the Crisis? Suggestions by *Beszélő*], *Beszélő*, 1982, Nos. 5-6 (December), pp. 233-238.
- ³³ *Ibid.*, p. 247.
- ³⁴ Ferenc Köszeg, "Ne csak építkezz... Politizálj!" [Do Not Only Build... Make Politics!], *Beszélő*, 1987, No. 19, pp. 701-705.
- ³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 701-705.
- ³⁶ Miklós Haraszti et al., "Társadalmi Szerződés: A politikai kibontakozás feltételei" [Social Contract: The Conditions of Political Progress] *Beszélő* special issue, 1987.
- ³⁷ Although the samizdat *Beszélő* existed until mid-1989, its functions changed rapidly. It became one of the voices of the emerging political pluralism. Starting in late 1989,

Beszélő changed its form, editorial board, and frequency of publication. It became a political weekly that would respond to speedy political changes more adequately.

³⁸ "Tiltakozás" [Protest], *Beszélő*, 1988, No. 24, p. 449.

³⁹ János Kis, "Mit képvisel a *Beszélő*?" [What Does *Beszélő* Represent?], *Beszélő* 1989, No. 26, pp. 691-695.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 691-695.

⁴¹ Adam Michnik, "A New Evolutionism" in Michnik, *Letters from Prison and Other Essays*, Berkeley, 1987.

⁴² Václav Havel, *Living in Truth*, London 1987; Václav Havel, "Anti-Political Politics" in John Keane (ed.), *Civil Society and State*, London, 1988, pp. 381-398.

