

Party History in the Making

Dilemmas of Party Historiography in Hungary between 1956 and 1958

by

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Abstract

By 1956, in the communist party's deepening crisis of the prerevolutionary and post-revolutionary contexts of Hungary, the intraparty expertise of party historiography shows its substantial characteristics. The first context was generated by party historiography's reception of the 20th congress of the Soviet party. The initiatives of destalinisation elevated a liberated use of the documents of the party's past for the experts. This signified certain academic autonomy of research for party historiography in charge of reconstructing the party's authority. However, the context changed by October 1956, and the legitimacy-crisis of the Hungarian party excessively intensified. After November, when the recently disorganized communist party had to suit the reinstalled one-party system, even higher expectations were addressed to party historiography to facilitate the "recovery" of the party. At this politically demanding situation, the Institute of Party History was still experimenting with academic autonomy. By 1958, a conflict emerged between the Politburo and the Institute around the publication of the documents of the "counterrevolution". The tensions reflect from a cultural aspect the afterlife of October 1956 in the party's inner sphere, where ideological notions are created. The functional difficulties of this party institution points at the challenges of the party's mental reconstruction as continuous in the course of destalinisation, culminating by the genealogy of the Kádár regime.

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Introduction

In the socialist regimes¹ during times of political crisis the communist party could turn to the analysis of the party's past. In the political mechanism of a communist party, crisis means losing sight of the *party line*² to a chronic extent. A historical narrative, the *party history* was its fundamental motive, which clarified the party's ideological orientation. Even though the *party line* was rarely a given attribute of the party³, the phrase expresses the need of the party for an ideological framework to have a consistent political performance.

In the case of Hungary, the Institute for Party History by the party's Central Committee represented party history as a practice of historiography. The thesis aims to show

¹ The thesis adopts the term 'socialism' as a synonym of 'socialist regime' or what is called in other literature as communism. Socialism was the authentic labeling of the one-party system in the party jargon especially before 1962, when still only the *fundamentals of socialism* were announced to be laid down in Hungary.

"Az MSZMP VIII. kongresszusának határozata a szocializmus építésében elért eredményekről és a párt előtt álló feladatokról 1962. November 20-24." in Vass Henrik ed. *A Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt határozatai és dokumentumai 1956-1962*. [Resolutions and Documents of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party 1956-1962](Budapest: Kossuth, 1979.) 675.

² The thesis adopts the terminology of the historical jargon to keep the interpretation close to the authentic context, since an analysis on the field of ideology is dependent on the appropriate interpretation of the terms. The text highlights the adopted terms by cursive. As an exception, see here a post-socialist definition of the term party line: "The 'correct line' is simultaneously an analytic and empirical statement of the stages of national and international development, a set of policy guides, and an authoritatively compelling and exclusive ideological-political statement that must be adopted and adhered to." Ken Jowitt, *New World Disorder: the Leninist Extinction*. (Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1993.) 10.

³ As an example, see the resolutions of the HSWP's 7th congress, the first after the revolutionary events in October 1956. – "Az MSZMP VII. kongresszusának határozata a szocializmusért folyó harc történelmi tapasztalatairól és további feladatokról 1959. november 30 - december 5." *A Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt határozatai és dokumentumai 1956-1962*. [Resolutions and Documents of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party 1956-1962] (Budapest: Kossuth, 1979.) 458-472.

party history in the making during a period of destalinization, which could be seen as a crisis⁴ that generated extensive negotiation about the transformation of the regime.⁵

The thesis follows the challenges of party historiography in a self-analytical period of the communist party. After the 20th congress of the Soviet party in February 1956 until Imre Nagy's execution in the summer of 1958, the one-party system's cumulative crisis can be detected. No party congress took place to determine the *party-line* these years.⁶

The first turn into a crisis happened still in accordance with the changing climate in the entire Socialist Bloc by the 20th congress of the Soviet party, which signified a moment of public criticism of the Stalinist past. The congress brought an irreversible change toward destalinization, but led to a moral crisis also in the Hungarian party. In the prerevolutionary months of 1956, the crisis had an intense stimulating effect on political imagination within and around the party sphere, and could become an initiative factor in the emergence of the revolutionary events within a few months.

The second turn of crisis occurred in October 1956, when the parallel movements of the entire society pointed at the absence of social legitimacy of the one-party system. For the party, this meant a political crisis, which amounted to the institutional decomposition of the party in the last days of October. Even though the immediate reconfiguration under a new

⁴ Khrushchev's biographer, Roy Medvedev labels the consequences of the 20th congress of the Soviet party as a crisis, which is also adopted by the authors of the synthesis *Hungary Under Soviet Domination 1944-1989*. See Gyarmati György and Valuch Tibor, *Hungary Under Soviet Domination*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009.) 219.

As Medvedev declares, it was a worldwide crisis of the "communist movement". Roy Medvedev, *Hruscsov. Politikai életrajz* [Khrushchev. Political Biography] (Budapest: Laude kiadó, 1989.) 120.

⁵ See the model of negotiations adapted by scholars of current historiography, first of all, Polly Jones, "Introduction. The dilemmas of de-Stalinisation" 1-18.; Roger D. Markwick, "Thaws and freezes in Soviet historiography, 1953-1964". in Polly Jones ed., *The Dilemmas of De-Stalinisation. Negotiating Cultural and Social Change in the Khrushchev Era*. (London, New York: Routledge, 2006.) 173-193.

⁶ The last party congress was held in 1954 and the next was held only in 1959 under the name of the 7th congress of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party. In between, a party conference in June 1957 helped the party to get through the crisis.

name gave a chance for a non-totalitarian alternative of the communist party, the party's exclusive position was quickly reinstalled by the help of Soviet intervention.

However, the reestablishment of the party could not be only arbitrarily imposed under the circumstances of the double-crisis, which meant a serious deficit both in the social legitimacy of the HSWP and in the legitimacy of the new party leadership within the party's broader sphere. The conditions revitalized the party's repressive character, but a wide range of tasks preoccupied the party to rebuild its apparatus both in an institutional and in an ideological sense. The recovery depended much on the party's fundamental institutions such as the central institute devoted to the analysis of the party's past. However, it was a matter of uncertainty whether the party members especially on the field of *ideological work*, would be able to get over the *mental* effects and socio-cultural consequences of the party's double-crisis, and stand up for rebuilding the party's authority.

The *explanation* of the party in historical terms was one of the main criteria of the party's reorganization. At this point, party historiography turned up as a potential instrument for the party's recovery. However, the recent experiences of destalinization and the revolutionary events transformed party historians' competences and the party had to face one of its most fundamental institution's reluctance to replace a deliberated party history with a clear-cut narrative.

The research of party history in the making takes beyond a monolith understanding of the communist party as the symbol of power. The matter of the narrative's construction goes parallel with the party's reconstruction. The party from historical perspectives meant potential criticism against the party leadership, but the critical views could even become incorporated in the political mechanism for the party's benefit. Party history in such a discursive form illuminates the particular authority to those, who participate in the

construction of the narrative, and reflects the right to articulate the party in historical terms as one of the most fundamental attributes of power.

The analysis of the institutional matters of party historiography in the Hungarian context has not been systematically researched so far. My thesis reveals that the political functions of the party's central institution had been revised in the prerevolutionary months. However, the Institute's dissatisfying performance and consequent dysfunctionality in the eye of the post-revolutionary Politburo reflects an unconstituted party's cultural characteristics.

The deconstruction of party historiography points at a particular function, which I call the critical function in the party's political mechanism. Nancy Heer, who devoted a functional analysis to Soviet historiography, names a somewhat similar role as the "barometer of the political climate"⁷, one of the "informal functions" party historiography could take. As Heer describes it on the basis of observations in the 1960s, party historians simultaneously act as "recorders and foreshadowers of political events"⁸.

In the Hungarian case, the critical function I will introduce in the second chapter is similar to the "foreshadowing" aspect of the Soviet party historians' work in the 1960s. It was also based on a privilege of access to historical documents of the party and the potential revelation of hidden materials.⁹ In the Hungarian context of 1956, this potentiality was distinguished from the propaganda function by the practicing party historians themselves. The critical function was tried in the post-revolutionary context, and the "test" forms a case study in the third chapter.

⁷ Nancy W. Heer, *Politics and History in the Soviet Union*. (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: MIT Press, 1971.) 23.

⁸ Heer, *Politics and History*, 26.

⁹ Heer, *Politics and History*, 31.

I argue that the challenges of party historiography in the context of destalinisation and the revolutionary events as an inclusive element of this process, shows an unprecedented cumulative crisis of a communist party from an inner perspective. While the crisis amounted to the party's reestablishment, the party leadership had to instrumentalize both institutional and mental recovery of the party. For the latter, party historiography had already been exponent by the course of destalinisation. However, the progressive endeavor of party historiography to become a structural initiative of a collectivist transformation of the party, was turned down as a political danger. The boundaries of the intellectual work raised by the Politburo for the Institute of Party History illuminates the mental boundaries of the party leadership, who lived through the cumulative crisis. It attributes 1956 with a sense of trauma¹⁰ that made the party dogmatic about the *counterrevolution* up until its fall.

Conceptualizing party historiography. A literature review

Dilemma of conceptualizing party historiography: propaganda or academic institution?

The international literature on party historiography is fragmented. Because of these conditions of research today, it is relatively difficult to give a comprehensive overview on the

¹⁰ The concept of a historical event is a matter of postmodern historiography. Gábor Gyáni also raises the question concerning 1956, since there has been a changing trends of labeling the events not just as 'revolution', 'national' or 'popular uprising', but also as 'freedom fight', 'revolt', 'antitotalitarian movement' or 'civil war', and 'counterrevolution'. Gyáni Gábor, "Forradalom, felkelés, polgárháború. 1956 fogalmi dilemmáiról" *Buksz* 19. no.1. (2007) 41-49.

By 1972, János Kádár used a new term for 1956 instead of counterrevolution, he said „national tragedy”, which refers to, in my point of view, the tragedy of the party in October 1956 as a tragic event in national history. In this term, Kádár integrated the two fundamental perspectives on history, the gaze of the party and the national development. – See also Ripp Zoltán “1956 emlékezete és az MSZMP” [The Memory of 1956 and the HSWP] *Múltunk* 46. no.1. (2002) 151.

existing analyses of party historiography. The studies on the party historiography of the Soviet Union dominate the available literature according to the traditional interest of Sovietology from the 1970s the latest.

The literature provides two main viewpoints, from which historians look at party historiography. One takes it as an institution of propaganda in the socialist regime. This approach regards party historiography primarily from the perspective of public use and social reception. The other analyzes it as a historiographical practice, thus more focused on the context of production in relation to the historiography practiced in the traditional academic institutions. In the Anglo-Saxon literature, the first approach dominates, but in the Hungarian context, the latter.

There are two fundamental monographs which symbolize the two approach and which I will reflect in more detail. One of the works is David Brandenberger American historian's fundamental study titled *Propaganda State in Crisis. Soviet Ideology, Indoctrination, and Terror Under Stalin, 1927-1941*¹¹. The other book had come out 10 years before, by the Australian author Roger D. Markwick *Rewriting History in Soviet Russia. The Politics of Revisionist Historiography, 1956-1974*¹². Markwick discusses party historiography in the context including the time of the 20th congress of the Soviet party.

The reason for the differentiation of party historiography as propaganda or certain scholarship is not necessarily methodological, but it refers to a paradigmatic shift in party historiography by the time of destalinization. Historians, who are interested in Stalinism, revisit party historiography as a fundamental institution of state-propaganda. It is a consequence of a view on Stalinism, in which the intellectual activities are understood as

¹¹ David Brandenberger, *Propaganda State in Crisis. Soviet Ideology, Indoctrination, and Terror Under Stalin, 1927-1941*. (New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 2011.)

¹² Roger D. Markwick, *Rewriting History in Soviet Russia. The Politics of Revisionist Historiography, 1956-1974*. (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave, 2001.)

instrumental in the organization of the party-state. This means that party historiography had to adapt to the needs of the Stalinist party, and directly serve the legitimacy of the politics of Stalin. Party history gained an essential form in the *Short Course on the History of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks)*.

Others investigate the transformation of party historiography by destalinization in the Soviet Union, and reconsider this genre as part of Soviet historiography. These views are built upon the change in the ideological climate of the Socialist Bloc initiated on the field of historiography by the 20th party congress, which raised the importance of ideology into global perspectives. *Ideological work* incorporated scholarship of all kinds, which means that the field of propaganda integrated scholarly knowledge and institutional set up.

Consequently, the identification of party historiography is complicated even when we look at each author's understanding of 'propaganda' or 'scholarship'. David Brandenberger introduces a "propaganda-state" when he puts ideology to the center of historical analysis.¹³ His work based on a wide range of materials, deconstructs the production of party history as a mere top-down process. As he proves, propaganda and indoctrination was highly important for the Stalinist leadership and for Stalin himself, who personally participated in the creation. In this regard, Brandenberger changes the perspective: he does not take for granted that party history was instructed how to be written, but he is interested in the interpersonal and inter-institutional cooperation of different segments of the party in a highly important political task of party historiography.

Brandenberger's deconstruction of a monolith understanding of ideology suits to the current attempts in American scholarship of revisiting political history, such as the works of

¹³ Brandenberger, *Propaganda State*, 1.

Alexei Kojevnikov¹⁴ or even Alexei Yurchak¹⁵, who analyzes ideological production in late socialism. Regarding the recent trends of academic approach summarized by Sheila Fitzpatrick¹⁶, Brandenberger's work fits to the emerging interest in anthropological reinterpretation of the political sphere. He comes out with a "three dimensional analysis" incorporating "production, projection and popular reception"¹⁷ of ideological materials. In the analysis of the multi-layer ideological production, the actors on the scene "members of the ideological establishment, creative members of the intelligentsia, the press, and party activists" as well as the highest authorities of the party, who all seem also spontaneous actors in creating a "new world" by implementing new ideas of the *reality*.

As we see in Brandenberger's approach, he takes propaganda as an instrument to create mass culture and this way to instrumentalize the *revolutionary* transformation of the society. Especially during the purges against the "enemy within", party history appropriated a direct political function in the creation of the party as a political body. However, in *Propaganda State in Crisis*, party historians are not anonym activists or faceless institutions of the party. Yaroslavsky, Popov, Knorin and others contributed to the creation of the *Short Course*, and they all created previous textbooks in a certain scholarly manner. The analysis reveals that the experts had experienced more dynamic and less purposeful environment of history-writing in the 1920s.

Concerning the understanding of party historiography in the post-Stalin era, Polly Jones's recent works show some similarities to Brandenberger's and other trends of analysis,

¹⁴ Alexei Kojevnikov, "Rituals of Stalinist Culture at Work: Science and the Games of Intraparty Democracy circa 1948" *The Russian Review* 57, no. 1. (January 1998) 25-52.

¹⁵ Alexei Yurchak, "Soviet Hegemony of Form: Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More" *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 45, no. 3. (July 2003) 480-510.

¹⁶ Sheila Fitzpatrick, "Politics as Practice. Thoughts on a New Soviet Political History" *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 5, no. 1. (Winter, 2004) 27-54.

¹⁷ Brandenberger, *Propaganda State*, 2.

which aim to deconstruct the notion of ‘ideology’ in socialist regimes. Jones deals with the legacy of Stalinism in the Soviet Union in a specific layer of the social sphere, which she frequently calls “public memory”. Even though Jones does not like to use the word ‘propaganda’, she focuses on the public usage of the past, the handling of collective trauma and the “memory work”.¹⁸ In this regard, party history appears as a political instrument of formulating historical consciousness, even when it generates “countermemory”¹⁹, which situates itself in opposition to party history of the realm of propaganda.

In Polly Jones’ studies²⁰ the culturist approach to the Soviet society also concerns the institutional background of ideological production. Jones and Brandenberger do not stand far in this regard from the classical author, George Enteen, who published a pioneer work in the 1970s on Soviet historiography, a biography on Pokrovskii²¹, the Soviet historiographer of early Stalinism. In one of Enteen’s late studies, he also analyzed scholarly events, where a specific discipline was taking shape in party historiography. Enteen states first and foremost, that the historiography, which was engaged with following Stalin’s claims was searching for a different notion of scholarship. According to Enteen’s interpretation Stalin claimed “historians could gain knowledge of the deeds of men in some way other than through the study of sources”. According to Enteen, party historians work with historical *facts* in a conceptual framework. He importantly remarks that this framework is “not a specific interpretation of Party history”, but “it is a more abstract construct containing assertions about the nature of the Party in general and assumption about and evaluations of human nature”.²²

¹⁸ Polly Jones, *Myth, Memory, Trauma. Rethinking the Stalinist Past in the Soviet Union, 1953-70*. (New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 2013.)13.

¹⁹ Jones, *Myth, Memory*, 10.

²⁰ Jones, *Myth, Memory*, 57-128.

²¹ George Enteen, *The Soviet Scholar-Bureaucrat. M. N. Pokrovskii and the Society of Marxist Historians*. (London: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1978.)

²² George Enteen, “The Stalinist Conception of Communist Party History” *Soviet Studies in Soviet Thought* 37. (1989) 259.

Enteen does not make it explicit, but we could identify this framework as no other than Marxism-Leninism, the communist party's *theoretical fundament*.

Consequently, Enteen also looks at party historiography from the perspective of propaganda. However, Enteen's approach implies that party history should not be necessarily understood as a "mythology" of the communists, even if it happened to become as such by the "Stalinist conception", which made it essentially propagandistic genre.

From the current Hungarian literature the most important monograph is written by Péter Apor, published in 2012. The *Fabricating Authenticity in Soviet Hungary*²³ is an analysis on the historiography of the Hungarian Republic of Councils in 1919, and examines several kinds of representation and usage of the history of this event between 1945 and 1989. Moreover, the book reveals its changing interpretation in the center of the politics of history. The peak of this story was the 40th anniversary of a fabricated republic. Apor proves that the evocation of the image of the Hungarian Republic of Councils was one of the most important means to explain the notion of counterrevolution in the post-1956 propaganda.

While he refers to the prominent role of the Institute of Party History in creating the analogy, he does not clarify the functions of this institution and the expertise at hand. One could not answer, whether we could talk about a profession of the party historian, or what its main purpose would be. He does not aim to solve the literature's consequent problem, whether party historians work on the field of the party's propaganda (he refers to them sometimes as the "propaganda historians"), or it is a particular historiographical practice that is developed separately both from the Academy of Sciences and the Department of Agitation and Propaganda. Apor does not concern party historiography as an alternative to the

²³ Apor Péter, *Fabricating Authenticity in Soviet Hungary: The Afterlife of the First Hungarian Soviet Republic in the Age of State Socialism*. (London–New York–Delhi, Anthem Press, 2014.)

In Hungarian: Apor Péter, *Az elképzelt köztársaság. A Magyarországi Tanácsköztársaság utóélete 1945-1989*. (Budapest: MTA Bölcsészettudományi Kutatóközpont Történettudományi Intézet, 2014.)

historiographical expertise of the Academy, even though the Hungarian Republic of Councils was a theme where national historiography and party historiography intersected.

In the Soviet case, as the fundamental analyses suggest, party historiography is a Marxist-Leninist kind of *science* that could become integrated into Soviet historiography in general. Roger D. Markwick, the author of a monograph on post-Stalinist historiography, takes the effects of the *Short Course* paradigm²⁴ into the front of his analysis. According to him, Stalinism made Soviet history equal with party history, since the party was the most important protagonist of history. At the same time, party history's meaning was narrowed down to the *fight*s for the *party line* represented by Stalin, to which historiography in general adapted. As a consequence, when destalinisation was initiated by the party itself, party historiography had already been an instrument of the party, which was inseparable from the historiography of the academy. The rewriting of party history became the task of historiography in general.

Markwick's analysis of the Soviet equivalent provides useful considerations regarding the post-Stalinist period. Markwick integrates a view of political science in his work saying "the production of history in Soviet society, indeed in any society, had a political function over and above the individual historian's quest for historical truth"²⁵.

His approach shows similarities with the classical author, Nancy Heer, who explained Soviet historiography in functional relations to politics. While she emphasizes in her book published in 1971 that history is operated by the party as an "educational tool"²⁶ thus basically as an instrument of propaganda, she brings up the informal functions which demand a different quality of knowledge for different political purposes like "legitimation of the

²⁴ Markwick adapted Kuhn's theory of paradigms, see Markwick, *Rewriting History*, 11-13., 42-47.

²⁵ Markwick, *Rewriting History*, 3.

²⁶ Heer, *Politics and History*, 31.

system”, “rationalization of policies”, “barometer of the political climate”, “ideological and theoretical discussion”.²⁷

Unfortunately, this kind of functional differentiation of the historiography in socialism from the historiography of other times is missing from the recently published synthesis on the history of Hungarian historiography titled *Clio bővületében. Magyar történetírás a 19-20. században – nemzetközi kitekintéssel*.²⁸ This book written by Ignác Romsics is noted today as the canon of Hungarian historiographical traditions. Especially because of this, it would need approval, why the Institute of the Workers’ Movement and its post-1956 formulation as the Institute of Party History is present among the memorable traditions of the whole period of socialism. Since the synthesis does not analyze systematically the practices of historiography each time and in each segment of the institutional network, party historiography has a connotation that it developed as a specialization of academic historiography. There is no explanation concerning what kind of experiment of the communist party it was. It does not reveal that party historiography meant a nontraditional type of scholarship that could as well integrate academic practice at certain times and in certain fields of study.

As another type of approach to the historiography of the 1950s in Hungary, we should observe the prominent study of Árpád von Klimó *The Sovietization of Hungarian Historiography. Failures and Modifications in the Early 1950s*.²⁹ The short study is an engaging attempt to give a typology to historians of the era providing 5 categories. There are

²⁷ Heer, *Politics and History*, 1-10.

²⁸ Romsics Ignác, *Clio bővületében. Magyar történetírás a 19-20. században – nemzetközi kitekintéssel*, [Enchanted by Clio. Hungarian Historiography in the 19th and 20th Century with International Outlook] (Budapest: Osiris, 2011.)

²⁹ Árpád von Klimó, “The Sovietization of Hungarian Historiography. Failures and Modifications in the Early 1950s” in Balázs Apor, Péter Apor and E. A. Rees eds., *The Sovietization of Eastern Europe. New Perspectives on the Postwar Period*. (Washington DC: New Academia Publishing, 2008)

party theorists in the first category, which is basically József Révai, who provided “the first textbook in accordance with the party-line” by 1951 titled *Short Summary of the History of the Hungarian People*.³⁰ This was not the “Hungarian Short Course”, but because of the form of textbook, it could be seen as one of that kind with a communist narrative of national history. There were in the second category “party theorists who held academic positions at the time”, including Aladár Mód, Dezső Nemes and Erzsébet Andics, who were also tasked with writing on issues of national history that time. Thirdly, young communist historians, such as Gyula Mérei and Péter Hanák, who were integrated to the academic scene as communist newcomers, and gave services in shaping historiography into a Marxist-Leninist form. Beside them, by the early 1950s there had been still many “non-communist historians who were tolerated” and other “non-communists” who were “defamed for their ‘falsification’ of history”.³¹

We can conclude that the collective of the Institute of the Workers’ Movement is not included in the typology of Klimó but do not even fit to any categories. In addition, while the study is about the Sovietization of historiography, the new genre of party history or the history of the workers’ movement is not even mentioned. The total ignorance of party historiography by the more theoretical approach of Klimó stands in sharp opposition to the more positivist synthesis written by Romsics, which embraces it as a genre of academic historiography.

Tamás Kende, a Hungarian pioneer in the study of party historiography shows the genre in comparative perspectives. In *A szükségszerűség felismerése*³² points at the prosperity of party histories in times of crisis. His context of research is the time of the perestroika. By claiming to be fundamental connection between the regime’s crisis, the transition and the need

³⁰ Klimó, *The Sovietization*, 242.

³¹ Klimó, *The Sovietization*, 243.

³² Kende Tamás, “A szükségszerűség felismerése. Kísérletek a Kelet-európai kommunista pártok történelmének újraírására a nyolcvanas években” [Recognition of Necessity. Experiments to Rewrite the East European Communist Parties’s History in the ‘80s.] *Beszélő* 7. no. 12. (2002)

for a new party history, Kende also highlights party historiography's reappearing main goal in writing a central textbook. In his study, this is question for comparative examination in the region, and primarily a question of content analysis of party histories.

In other studies, Kende investigates polarized narratives on the history of communism in the global context of the Cold War.³³ He points at the political content and the topoi of the texts simultaneously produced in the Socialist Bloc and in Western Sovietology. Kende made also historiographical analysis of narratives, and detected different historiographical orientations such as positivism or *Geistesgeschichte*.³⁴ He does not go systematically for the interpreting the conditions of historiographical production.

The close view on the party historiographers' practice in a later period is represented in the study of Zsolt K. Horváth. While his prior, general interest is in the cultural milieu of the workers' movement in the interwar period, he also investigates the historiography of the movement produced in the Kádár-era.³⁵ By this time, from the late 1960s on, party historiography were developed more and more academically concerning topics, which could not be directly linked to 1956 or other sensitive issues in the party's past. However, there had still been a significant method of sorting out information on the past as K. Horváth emphasize, and the party historians' ignorance is striking about particular segments of the movement's past. The study shows that the academic scope of party historiography was limited even later,

³³ Kende Tamás, "A Nagy Terv, avagy kik azok a kommunisták?" *Beszélő* 8. no. 12. (2003) <http://beszelo.c3.hu/szerzok/kende-tamas> (Last download 29. May 2015.)

Kende Tamás, *Az intézményes forradalom. Adatok a kommunista párt kulturális és társadalmi történetéhez Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén megyében (1945-1956)*. [Institutional Revolution. Data on the Communist Party's Cultural and Social History in Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén County (1945-1956)] (MNL Miskolc-Budapest: Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén Megyei Levéltára, 2004.)

³⁴Kende Tamás, "The (anti-) Marxist *Geistesgeschichte* of Party Histories in Eastern Europe" *Storia della Storiografia* 62. no.2. (2012) 151-164.

³⁵ K. Horváth Zsolt, "A hiány. A két háború közötti munkáskultúra és a Kádár-korszak munkásmozgalmi kánonja" [The Shortage. Workers' Culture of the Interwar Period and the Canon of the Workers' Movement in the Kádár-era] in Erős Vilmos and Takács Ádám eds., *Tudomány és ideológia között. Tanulmányok az 1945 utáni magyar történetírásról*. [Between Scholarship and Ideology. Studies on the Hungarian Historiography after 1945] (Budapest: ELTE Eötvös kiadó, 2012.) 75-91.

and there were inherent political regulations to follow in the practice, which created a different sense of scholarship in the case of party history.

The closest to my thesis research in scope and methodology is a study from the simultaneous Czechoslovak context titled *The 'Club of Politically Engaged Conformists'? The Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, Popular Opinion and the Crisis of Communism, 1956*.³⁶ The study is available as a working paper of Kevin McDermott and Vitezslav Sommer. The “club of politically engaged communists” in the title refers also to the Institute of History of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, which is the equivalent of the Institute of the Hungarian Workers’ Movement. One essential part of the paper deals with the reaction of the Institute’s collective to the 20th congress of the Soviet party, this is the part which must have been written by Sommer, who also wrote a PHD dissertation on party historiography.³⁷

This fragment of a potential comparison with my research highlights the subversive effect of the Soviet congress “at the heart of the party”³⁸. The analysis observes minutes of institutional meetings, so the same type of material that my thesis stands on. The fragments of the minutes demonstrate a *liberated atmosphere* in the Institute’s collective. The study emphasizes that the debate on the party’s past regularly turned to the “highly personalized problems of the institute”. The speakers who are quoted, the institute’s colleagues declare that they had been silenced so far, moreover, they were accused for creating a fraction against the party unity.³⁹

³⁶ Kevin McDermott and Vitezslav Sommer, *The 'Club of Politically Engaged Conformists'? The Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, Popular Opinion and the Crisis of Communism, 1956*, CWIHP Working Paper No. 66, March 2013. <http://www.sciencespo.fr/futurepol/en/content/vitezslav-sommer> (Last download: 29th May 2015)

³⁷ The dissertation is written in Czech. Available online: Vitezslav Sommer, *Angažované dějepisectví: Stranická historiografie mezi stalinismem a reformním komunismem, 1950–1970*. [Engaged Historiography: Party Historiography between Stalinism and Reform Communism, 1950–1970] Nakladatelství Lidové noviny – FF UK, Prague 2011. (Last download: 29th May 2015)

³⁸ McDermott and Sommer, *The 'Club of Politically Engaged*, 23.

³⁹ McDermott and Sommer, *The 'Club of Politically Engaged*, 25.

Unfortunately, the study is too short to explain why the party historians' criticism of the KSC "did not lead to a revisionist confrontation with the party hierarchy".⁴⁰ As a conclusion, this part of the paper finishes with observation of documents from November that year, saying that the "critical potential was directed within the Institute and its departments"⁴¹, and did not push forward destalinisation.

This short case study reflected at least that the reception of the 20th congress among party historians activated their intellectual competences, which led to "turmoil" in the working collective, while the rank-and-file members of the party report about "chaos" in their head.⁴² The terms expressively describe the experience of destalinisation in the intraparty environment of the generally rigid Czechoslovak regime. As a parallel with Hungary, the experience of 1956 was not simultaneously, but retrospectively described with the same terminology of the party jargon. While Sommer highlights that party historians avoided "revisionist confrontation", in Hungary, the political claims were more direct and eventually a certain "revisionist" party historiography could turn up for a while.

Conclusions

Along some fragmentary patterns in literature, the thesis analyze party historiography as a political institution in between propaganda and science. The research of the communist party's and the regime's transformation has to take into account the parallel transformation of both spheres. In between, party historiography aspires for a role of a

⁴⁰ McDermott and Sommer, *The 'Club of Politically Engaged*, 27.

⁴¹ McDermott and Sommer, *The 'Club of Politically Engaged*, 26.

⁴² McDermott and Sommer, *The 'Club of Politically Engaged*, 18.

mediator: a practice which integrates political goals and academic claims as well. The thesis attempts to show the complexity of the contexts by the authentic discourses.

‘Party history’ is a term, which names a historiographical activity, but it is not present in today’s historical thinking. Going back to the authentic sources seems to be inevitable to identify party historiography in the Hungarian context. The challenge is to conceptualize the findings around the issue of party historiography. My approach intends to give the authentic meaning to the notions which were inherent attributions of the regime, of the people’s thinking that time.

I consider party history the central notion that is worth to rediscover to see the horizon of the people’s imagination in the past. The thesis performs a research conducted almost like a cultural anthropologist, who chooses the people’s key notions in order to describe their beliefs along which they organize their life. I intend to reconstruct the party historians’ cultural practices regarding their institutionalized activity in their own collectives let it be the Institute of Party History or the party from a broad perspective. While party historians seem to be a marginal group of experts in the party, their considerations imply structural characteristics of the regime regarding the role of ideology and the party as a cultural phenomenon. While the thesis is engaged with micro-analysis, it also reflects general conditions of living in a socialist regime.

1. Chapter: The Emergence of Hungarian Party Historiography's Critical Function After the 20th Congress of the Soviet Party

The 20th congress of the Soviet party had a long standing but controversial impact on party historiography's professional development in Hungary. The 20th congress held in February 1956 is well known as the initiative moment of destalinisation⁴³, when Nikita Khrushchev Soviet party leader shared a new vision of the history of the communist party in his *Secret Speech*, and also called for a new textbook of party history in front of the wider public of the congress. The announcement⁴⁴ symbolized a changing ideological context, where party historiography signified an instrument to overcome the moral crisis deriving from the Stalinist past. A new party history had to restore the party's authority by answering the question, how come the *cult of personality* happened to the “genuinely” *collective vanguard of the working class*.

⁴³ According to Polly Jones, the *Secret Speech* “caused an acute crisis in Soviet historiography, and above all, in party history. The cult of personality had had a more profound impact on party history than any other branch of the profession, but it was precisely this long process of Stalinisation that now hampered its de-Stalinisation.” See Polly Jones, *Myth, Memory*, 68-69.

In the following chapter I would like to show an opposite reaction to destalinization in the Hungarian context. Even if party historiography was an instrument in the creation of the *cult of personality*, probably this was precisely the reason, why some representatives of party historiography aspired for a new role as an instrument of destalinization.

⁴⁴ As Nikita Khrushchev announced in his speech in front of the congress's public audience:

“Our propaganda has been mainly the *Short Course* of Party History during the last 17 years. The glorious history of our party should be one of the most important instruments of the cadres' education. Therefore it is about to write party history's popular, Marxist textbook, which is based on historical facts and which scientifically generalizes the world historical experiences of the party's struggle, the struggle fought for communism, and which discusses party history up until today.”

“A Központi Bizottság beszámolója az SZKP XX. kongresszusának. N. SZ. Hruscsov elvtársnak, a Központi Bizottság első titkárának előadói beszéde.” [Communiqué of the Central Committee to the 20th Congress of the CPSU. The speech of comrade N. S. Khrushchev, the first secretary of the Central Committee] in *Az SZKP XX. kongresszusa (1956. február 14-25.)* [The 20th Congress of the CPSU 14-25, February 1956] (Budapest: Szikra, 1956.) 137. Appendix 1.

In the chapter no. 2. and 3. I will provide my own translations of the Hungarian quotations. See the Hungarian originals of the quotations in the Appendix of the thesis.

The sense of collectivism was not invented at the moment of the 20th congress but it was backed by a complex tradition in the history of communism. According to the fundamental ideas of communism, the party is meant to be the embodiment of a knowledge about the logic of history that prevails by the *collective leadership*. Within the party, the leaders represent the most knowledgeable of all. They are the ones who *adapt the theory of Marxism-Leninism* to the *social reality*.

Communist parties considered Marxism-Leninism the theoretical basis of their activity, which was about conducting the society's *revolutionary transformation*. According to the party-ideology, any party represents the interests of a particular social class or strata. The *revolutionary party of the working class* believed in the overthrow of capitalism and the establishment of a social system based on the *alliance of the working class and the peasantry*. By this turn in history that took place after the Second World War in Eastern Europe, the gradual realization of *socialism* and then a more advanced form of social relations in *communism* can be achieved, and the communist party is the leading force which always has to be aware of the next step. It incorporates the *vanguard*, who are also the most *theoretically minded*⁴⁵, which is essential in completing the mission. They relied on Lenin's teaching, who developed Marxism into an even higher quality of *science* than before and more scientific than any *bourgeois* theory. As the communists believed, this kind of *science* is more than the *discovery of the reality* because it is also a *worldview of the party*, which drives political deeds.⁴⁶

Lenin envisioned "a centralized and disciplined organization of professional revolutionaries" in the form of the party as he announced in a programmatic work titled *What*

⁴⁵ Vass Henrik ed. et al., *Munkásmozgalomtörténeti Lexikon*. [Lexicon of the History of the Workers' Movement] (Budapest: Kossuth, 1972.) 156., 453.

⁴⁶ Vass Henrik ed. et al., *Munkásmozgalomtörténeti*, 357-358.

is to be done? in 1902. The idea of the *vanguard* was a body of the most responsive minds “armed with the truth that will lead the proletariat to victory”.⁴⁷ While the norms of party discipline let the professional revolutionaries “engineer” the revolutionary transformation⁴⁸, Lenin, himself introduced the importance of the party-members’ “fantasy” and “the need for philosopher-revolutionaries to take chances, to speculate, to dream” as a recent image of Lenin emphasizes.⁴⁹

In the party the political imagination was rather not an individual matter of each party-member but a collective attribute, which required the party members’ well-coordinated mental development. If we look at the case of the Hungarian party, first, in the course of destalinisation, party members had to get rid of the *incorrect views and practices* of the *cult of personality*, and create a new common sense of the party. Furthermore, the mental conditioning of the party became even more important after the events in October 1956. The different perceptions of the events generated disagreement on the party’s purpose. Consequently, the protection of the *party unity* became a priority to be achieved also by *education*. In the practices of mental conditioning, party history was instrumental.

We learn from programmatic articles of the Institute of Party History published in the prerevolutionary months of 1956 that the new, post-Stalinist narrative on the party’s past has to be based on *facts*. These were to be developed by the help of academic practice, which meant discovery of correlating documents, source-criticism based research, and debates in academic public.

⁴⁷ Robert Service, “Lenin, Vladimir Il’ich” in Edward Craig ed. et al., *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Vol. 5. (London and New York: Routledge 1998.) 154.

⁴⁸ Service, “Lenin, Vladimir Il’ich”, 153.

⁴⁹ Quoted by David Bakhurst, “Marxist Philosophy, Russian and Soviet” Edward Craig, *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Vol. 6. (London and New York: Routledge, 1998.) 566.

The call for academic practice to make party historiography a *science*, was not only a challenge within the party. Party historiography's new understanding was introduced to historians in the parallel universe of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and in the most important university of Budapest, the Eötvös Loránd University. When destalinisation became the first point on the political agenda, academic historiography also rephrased its socio-political purpose. Hence party historiography entered a scholarship, which was also in transformation.

Since 1953, the reform-line of Imre Nagy and the democratic transformation of the socialist regime was hoped to integrate intellectuals into the political sphere on the basis of their expertise. By the change of the climate in the Socialist Bloc and as a specificity of the Hungarian situation with Imre Nagy, party historiography could even aspire for a political role in a democratic transformation of which the limits were still not anticipated.

1.1. A pre-history: the main aspects of party historiography's political use by the time of the cult of personality

In Hungary party historiography was institutionalized by the party in 1948, under the name of Institute of the Workers' Movement, which became by 1956 the Institute of Party History of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party's Central Committee. This was the highest level, where the party experimented with the professionalization of party historiography.

While this genre was practiced in an institution within the party apparatus, the contemporary historiographical memory places it within the academic sphere, even if only at its periphery. It is in accordance with the publications of the Kádár-era, when the Institute consistently represented itself as a part of social sciences and a part of academic historiography. But this inclusion in the academic sphere reflects only one characteristic of

party historiography, nevertheless an important one, namely that the academic practices were not only imitated, but quite effectively adapted in particular segments of it.

It seems to be necessary to establish a working hypothesis to the thesis, which explains, why my analysis seem to neglect the introduction of the academic sphere of the 1950s in details. I claim that party historiography was originally a political institution, so the political organs determined how close party historiography can get to national institutions of academic historiography or stay within the realm of Marxism-Leninism. The question is how the conditions of party historiography were designed by the party.

The debate of historians in the Petöfi-circle shows that the challenge to transform party historiography into an academic practice landed on a formulating platform of Marxist historiography. In 1956 Marxist historiography seemed to be arrived to a more solid status of institutionalization, while party history was still a component of a political realm, from which any sense of *bourgeois science* was excluded. The actual practice of party historiography was also separated from the institutional framework of academic scholarship. Until 1956 only the party legitimized this narrative of history, which also implied that the history of the party was not believed to be a national issue, but a matter of the party apparatus.⁵⁰

What were the specificities of the newly initiated party historiography in the times of the *cult of personality*? It was required to illuminate the party leader Mátyás Rákosi as an exclusive genius of the *party's struggles*. This approach generated a legend of Rákosi, in which some of his deeds were exaggerated, some were invented and others' activity was

⁵⁰ Even though the party believed to create party historiography as integral part of national historiography. See Révai's speech at the founding ceremony of the Institute of the Workers' Movement.

Révai József, "Harmincéves a Magyar Kommunista Mozgalom. Beszéd a Magyar Munkásmozgalmi Intézet megnyitásán, 1948. november 19." [The Hungarian Communist Movement is Thirty-year Old. Speech at the Opening Ceremony of the Institute for Hungarian Workers' Movement November 19th 1948] in *Élni tudunk a szabadsággal. Válogatott cikkek és beszédek (1945-1949)* [We Could Live with Liberty. Selection of Articles and Speeches 1945-1949] (Budapest: Szikra, 1949.) 495-496.

silenced or even blackened. In addition, there was little certainty about how the party had been operated during the times of illegality, and there was only fragmented evidence for the activity of each member of the historical workers' movement. As a result, the colleagues of the Institute of the Workers' Movement did not develop analytical narratives, but they were productive in editing sources for public use.⁵¹ The methods of edition followed the current political agenda in order to gain propaganda-materials out of historical documents.

The Institute's most advanced activity, the documentary publication also signifies the construction of the archive as a priority among all tasks.⁵² The first important publication of the time was a compilation made from sources related to the Rákosi-trial in 1925 and 1935.⁵³ Tibor Hajdu, who could have personally seen the preparation as an archivist of the Institute, pointed at the methods of manipulation executed on the sources by the prominent party historian Sándor Györffy.⁵⁴ Hajdu also highlights that even Györffy understood the practice of falsification as *correction* by sorting out information.⁵⁵

Party history had to be created also for party education. It is telling about the era of the *cult of personality* that textbooks were mainly prepared by the leading party functionaries

⁵¹ A significant one was a series of documentary compilation called *A Magyar Munkásmozgalom Történetének Válogatott Dokumentumai* [Selected Documents of the History of the Hungarian Workers' Movement] (until 1956, 4 volumes had been published.)

⁵² As the document which summarized the provisional tasks of the institute starts:

"The primary aim of the institute is to collect, organize and process systematically and accordingly to the plan material documents concerning the Hungarian workers' movement history and present, and simultaneously the publication of material documents, propagating the combative and heroic traditions of the Hungarian workers' movement, additionally, to promote the usage and application of the richly edifying lessons of Hungarian workers' movement's history in the present practice."

A Magyar Munkásmozgalmi Intézet célkitűzései, szervezete és feladatai. László Réti. 4th October 1948. MNL OL M-KS 276/53/11. 83. Appendix 2.

⁵³ *A Rákosi-per*. (Budapest: Szikra, 1950.)

⁵⁴ Hajdu Tibor, "A Rákosi-kultusz alapköve: a Rákosi-per" [The Foundation-stone of the Cult of Rákosi: the Rákosi-trial] in Gecsényi Lajos and Izsák Lajos eds., *Magyar történettudomány az ezredfordulón. Glatz Ferenc 70. születésnapjára* [Hungarian Scholarship of History by the Millenium. For the 70th Anniversary of Ferenc Glatz] (Budapest, ELTE Eötvös kiadó – MTA Társadalomkutató Központ, 2011.) 479-486.

See also Romsics, *Clio*, 389.

⁵⁵ Hajdu, "A Rákosi-kultusz", 481.

themselves. While the materials of party history were all concentrated on Rákosi's eminency, many lectures of party history taught in the Party College were written also by Rákosi himself.⁵⁶ Interestingly enough, the leading party historian, László Réti proved to be incompetent in writing the biography of Rákosi, because his work was not accepted by the leader on his birthday.⁵⁷ While the life story of Rákosi can be seen as an alteration of party history that time⁵⁸, Rákosi chose Béla Illés instead, a non-historian as the author of his biography.⁵⁹

The Institute provided means also for executing the party leadership's policy of the party. This meant a contribution to the state-organized purges against the members of the historical workers' movement between 1949 and 1953. The Institute of the Workers' Movement dealt with documents of the party's past, and could provide documents as *factual* evidence for the prosecutors.⁶⁰ Documents which had political use were also gathered by the Ministry of Interior⁶¹ from the post-war years on.

Political rivals represented challenging political narratives on issues of party history regarding the Hungarian Republic of Councils, the conspiracy during the decades of illegality

⁵⁶ Hajdu, "A Rákosi-kultusz", 485.

⁵⁷ Hajdu, "A Rákosi-kultusz", 485.

⁵⁸ See the case study of Apor Balázs, "Leader in the Making: The Role of Biographies in Constructing the Cult of Mátyás Rákosi" in Apor Balázs, Jan C. Behrends, Polly Jones and E. Afron Reeds eds., *The Leader Cult in Communist Dictatorships: Stalin and the Eastern Bloc* (Palgrave: Macmillan, 2004) 63-80.

⁵⁹ Hajdu, "A Rákosi-kultusz", 485.

⁶⁰In an interrogation in 1962, Mátyás Rákosi also refers to the involvement of the Institute of the Workers' Movement in the trial of Árpád Szakasits, the leader of the socialdemocrats in the post-war years. The institute processed the documentation of the political police of the interwar period, provided a report on Szakasits, which later proved to be a forgery. See Baráth Magdolna and Feitl István eds., *Lehallgatott kihallgatások. Rákosi és Gerő pártvizsgálatának titkos hangszallagjai* [Recorded Interrogations. Secret Records of the Party Examination of Rákosi and Gerő] (Budapest: Napvilág Kiadó – Állambiztonsági Szolgálatok Történeti Levéltára, 1962.) 41.

⁶¹ Hajdu mentions in his short memoir that when he got the job at the institute, he had to sort out archival materials for the ÁVO, the Department of State Security of the Ministry of Interior, for the party archive and the rest for the National Archive. - Hajdu Tibor, "Emlékeim az első évekből" [My Memories from the First Years] in Lett Miklós and Svéd László eds., *A Magyar Munkásmozgalmi Intézet történetéből 1948-1953. Alapítók visszaemlékezései, fotók, dokumentumok*. [From the History of the Institute of the Workers' Movement 1948-1953. Memoirs of the Founders, Photography, Documents.] (Budapest, 2009.) 6.

or the anti-fascist resistance. The documents made the narrative of accusation uncontestable, and made them chapters of party history which determined the party's social structure. As the head of the Institute of Party History, László Réti admitted in the debate of the Petőfi-circle: "... we have committed a great many of mistakes in processing the history of the party by who we showed and how in history".⁶²

The Institute's contribution to the purges comes up in the prerevolutionary period of 1956 only one time in the debates. In the Petőfi circle, the audience turns to Réti with questions, and he cannot avoid to give an answer:

"...experiences after the Liberation had been directed back to the party history of the times before the Liberation. (*General indignation, intervening*: Incredible! What kind of experiences?) The experience that documents were provided according to which these leaders were traitors (*intervening*: What kind of documents? – Who created these?) At that time these documents were provided. I prepared none of them. (*Exhilaration.*) (*Intervening*: If tomorrow they forge, what will happen?) Maybe the comrade has an infallible method to recognize immediately every forgery, for us and for all of us this is not provided. It was an incorrect thing in the research of party history that we could only read the documents which were provided, and no one realized from these what nonsenses exist."⁶³

From Réti's retrospective speech it seems as if not personalities or institutions but the documents of party history guided the communist movement by the time of the *cult of personality*. The documents as *facts* generated historical narratives, which could legitimize the persecutions. According to Réti's defensive argument, the *mystification* of certain documents made the party historians incompetent to create any narratives other than what the political authorities wanted.

Consequently, Réti refuses the party historiographers' responsibility in the purges. He emphasizes they did not have access to sources to perform source-criticism of single

⁶² "Jegyzőkönyv. A marxista történettudomány időszerű kérdései. A DISZ Petőfi kör ankétja" [Minutes. Timely Questions of the Science of History. Plenum of the Petőfi circle DISZ] in Hegedűs B. András and Rainer M. János eds., *A Petőfi kör vitái hiteles jegyzőkönyvek alapján III. Történészvita*. [The Debates of the Petőfi circle in Authentic Minutes III. Debate of Historians] (Budapest: Múzsák - 1956-os Intézet, 1990.) 133.

⁶³ "Jegyzőkönyv", 135-136. Appendix 3.

documents. He implies that they could not rely on any other system of reasoning than the logic of the party's current ideology. He means that there was no independent account on the history of the party, and the practitioners restricted themselves to the repetition of the political claims. He goes as far as he questions the existence of party historiography in his present.⁶⁴

Réti became cynical in his reply and refused the accusation for being blind at the party's abuse of its own narrative. Instead of performing self-criticism which was expected by the audience, he demonstrates that the Institute followed the only possible party behavior. Réti came out with an explanation that eventually party historiography's contribution had looked the party's interest whatever it seemed to be retrospectively.

All in all, party historiography in the first years developed a methodology of constructing evidence for the leader's exceptional merits and for the filtration of the party's historical background. From 1953 political rehabilitations took place and the diversity of party history was gradually gaining shape. It is still a question to be researched whether the political rehabilitations already effected the publications of the Institute that time. But eventually after the 20th congress, concrete rehabilitations took place such as György Lukács and the Blum-theses as tradition of anti-sectarianism⁶⁵, or János Kádár absolved of being a "liquidator of the party" in 1943.⁶⁶ It happened so because by 1956 a more radical claim was announced. Party historiography was required to stand in one line with academic historiography.

⁶⁴ "Jegyzőkönyv", 128.

⁶⁵ Friss Istvánné and Szabó Ágnes eds, "Vita a Blum-tézisekről" [Debate on the Blum-theses] *Párttörténeti Közlemények* 2. no. 3. sz. (October 1956) 95-138.

⁶⁶ Kádár published an account on his previous experience on party dissolution during the 2nd World War. - Kádár János „A Kommunisták Magyarországi Pártja feloszlata körülményeinek és a Békepárt munkájának néhány kérdéséről (1943. június – 1944. szeptember)” [On Some of the Questions of the Circumstances of the Dissolution of the Communist Party of Hungary and the Work of the Party of Peace] *Párttörténeti Közlemények* no. 3. (1956) 20-26.

1.2. Self-criticism of party historiography as a consequence of the 20th congress of the Soviet party

The 20th congress of the Soviet party motivated public discussion in Hungary and for Marxist intellectuals it was a challenge to clarify the consequences of the past of socialism. The basis of Khrushchev's message⁶⁷ was that Stalin had not been who he had been believed to be and consequently, the party under his total control had not been what it is supposed to be. By the 20th congress the party took responsibility for the emergence of the *cult of personality*, which meant retrospectively the distortion of the party's "genuine" *collectivity* and self-control mechanisms. The *Secret Speech* made explicit the stakes in a new narrative of party history instead of the *Short Course*, which legitimized the Stalinist dictatorship. The restoration of the *collective leadership* was announced.

In October 1956, the journal called *Párttörténeti Közlemények* [Party Historical Publications], which was the publication of the Institute of Party History, came out with an article titled *The Instructions of the 20th Congress of the CPSU and the Hungarian Party Historiography*.⁶⁸ The article was a proclamation about party historiography's past and future on behalf of the Institute. In this article, party historiography represented itself as a part of the broader academic historiography, and performed a comprehensive self-critical account on the political abuse of its practice in the recent past.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ See the *Secret Speech* on a closed session of the congress. Nyikita Hruscsov, *A személyi kultuszról és következményeiről. Beszámoló az SZKP XX. kongresszusának zárt ülésén 1956. február 25.* [About the Cult of Personality and Its Consequences. Communiqué on the Closed Session of the 20th Congress of the CPSU 25, Febuary, 1956] (Budapest: Kossuth, 1988.)

⁶⁸ "Az SZKP XX. kongresszusának útmutatásai és a magyar párttörténetírás" [The Instructions of the 20th Congress of the CPSU and the Hungarian Party Historiography] *Párttörténeti Közlemények* 2 no.3. (October 1956) 1-19.

⁶⁹ "Az SZKP XX. kongresszusának", 1-2.

According to the party-jargon, by the time of the so called *cult of personality* between 1948-49 and 1953 *dogmatism* and *sectarianism*⁷⁰ were the attributes of the party, which had overtaken the entire party including party historiography. The *cult of personality* did not let develop *scientific* features in the historiography of the modern age in general, but it took effect on party historiography more intensely, because it was more dependent on the party leadership and its directives.

The Institute of Party History gave a try to reckon with the abuse of party history. Instead of party historiography's *scientific* development, party history had stayed a *projection* of the central political claims, propaganda without reconstruction of the past. The experts in charge *distorted the historical reality*, when they looked for the party leaders' interest, and *misinterpreted* the party history from the perspective of the leaders' eminence. As a result, their activity revitalized the *cult of personality*.⁷¹ The article implies, if party history had been worked out in a *scientific* manner, it could have helped the party to hold back personality cult by demonstrating an "authentic", collectivist tradition on the basis of *reality*.

Party historians were convinced that the narrative of party history is decisive in how party members take the notion of the party and how they complete their tasks in each function of the party. Retrospectively, party history as propaganda was seen as the most harmful instrument which had fuelled the party's distortion from within. As a new initiative, *scientific party historiography* was urged to help the party's operation with a critical approach to the party history of a "Great Man", which had made the party members believe in Mátyás Rákosi's exceptional skills in making history. In order to achieve real collectivity, it was high

⁷⁰ These were general normative notions of the language of ideology. Dogmatism meant first of all ideological inflexibility, and sectarianism meant a mentality of narrow mindedness and a pejorative elitism in the case of the party. These notions genuine meaning was originated in the party's image in the times of illegality.

⁷¹ "Az SZKP XX. kongresszusának", 2.

time to engage the people with a new approach to party history. The party membership had to be “liberated” from the mental confines deriving from the past.

Therefore the central organs made up their mind and enabled the revision of party history by certain autonomy of research of the party’s past. The central political organs had to realize the need for research in order to change not just the dominant narrative but the practice of party historiography from mere illustration of party-leaders’ political claims to the reconstruction of *historical facts*.

In the followings, I will investigate how such an autonomous party historiography, which was labeled as *science*, was imagined by party historians in the prerevolutionary context of 1956. I argue that the *workers of ideology* on this field of historiography recognized a chance for becoming prominent authorities within the party, because from this time on the academic statements on the party were about to gain legitimacy in their practice.

1.3.What makes party historiography a *science*?

The idea that the misinterpretations in party history endanger the development of socialism was a characteristic trait of the moral crisis of the post-Stalinist regime. The party historians were in charge of explanation of the mystery, how come the *cult of personality* had happened to the *vanguard’s collectivity*.

The Institute of Party History could follow Soviet patterns of adaptation to the transforming ideological context of the 20th congress. Soviet articles, such as *The 20th Party-congress and the Tasks of the Research of Party History*⁷² translated to Hungarian from the

⁷² “A XX. pártkongresszus és a párttörténeti kutatás feladatai. (Voproszi Isztorii 1956, 3. sz.)” [The 20th Party-congress and the Tasks of the Research of Party History (Voprosy Istorii no. 3. 1956)] *Párttörténeti Közlemények* 2. no. 2. (June 1956) 1-15.

Soviet historical journal, *Voprosy Istorii* [Problems of History] showed them what message to import from the congress to their field of expertise. As the title demonstrates, it was the quest for research.

The article represents the apology of party historiography unlike the self-criticism of the Hungarian equivalent published a few months later.⁷³ According to the Soviet article, by the time of the 20th congress party historiography was a part of social sciences, but mere propaganda was insufficient in any science.⁷⁴ The rehabilitation of party historiography as a *science* was an ultimate goal in the Soviet Union:

“During the last 17 years the *Short Course of the History of the C(b)PSU* was the basis of the propaganda of party history ... It is silent about many difficulties which the party had to struggle with ... Not a few factual errors turn up in this book. The *Short Course* of party history says appropriately that Marxism is not a collection of dogma, not catechism, but a vivid, advancing study. However, each and every thesis of the *Short Course* was converted into dead dogma. The scientific works had also adapted to this popular textbook. ... Party historians stopped gathering and summarizing new facts. They questioned the probable significance of archival materials as historical sources, even though the researchers did not even have access to them. There was no research on sources of party history. They considered superfluous and reprehensible the research and the criticism of new sources ... The research work in party history lost its scientific character.”⁷⁵

As the Soviet article demonstrates the research for facts, the analysis of historical sources had to be reinstalled in the field of party history. But how to take the challenge of research in the field of party historiography? First of all, party historians understood their practice in ideological terms. According to the party-tradition, research on the history of the party was meant to “show the connection of the party’s theoretical and practical activity”⁷⁶ Party history in this sense was an inventory of the party’s *experiences*. As the article continues, the fundamental goal was to provide extracts from the past to let the current party

⁷³ “A XX. pártkongresszus”, 3.

⁷⁴ Markwick in his analysis of Soviet historiography highlights the importance of the journal *Voprosy Istorii* and the academic staff in its background, who wanted to “establish history as a discipline rather than as a mere agency for agitation and propaganda”. - Markwick, “Thaws and Freezes”, 175.

⁷⁵ “A XX. pártkongresszus”, 4. Appendix 4.

⁷⁶ “A XX. pártkongresszus”, 6.

(especially the central organs) make conclusions (*generalize*) and shape the *experiences* to form the *party line*, which is supposed to direct the party in any decisions:

“The party defined its politics on the basis of practical experiences and substantially modified it by generalizing its experiences. ... It has to be shown how the party laid out the path of constructing socialism on the basis of generalization of the practical experiences.”⁷⁷

The final purpose of the party’s analysis was the creation of texts, which enable party members to reflect on the *experiences*, and to let them become adherents of the party in a mental sense. Once party historiography is genuinely devoted to the party’s identification, how could it aspire for autonomy of research? The contradiction could only be relieved by a particular understanding of *science*, which is not a *bourgeois academic* scholarship but an enterprise for an integrative scholarship including academic practice and *Marxist-Leninist methodology*.⁷⁸ The former excavated historical materials, while the latter meant the application of documents as materials to be shaped for the support of the party’s ideological premises with *historical facts*.

The experiment of a new, integrative *science* in the field of party historiography is authentic phenomenon of the post-Stalinist context. At this moment, the history of the party seemed to be transmittable into a Marxist narrative of national history. Concerning the past of the communist one-party system, party historiography could not go without academic historiography anymore. Institutions had to get closer to each other under the cover of Marxist historiography. As even the Soviet article pointed out:

“Soviet historians according to the historically significant resolutions of the 20th congress, reorganize their work. ... Proper solution for full-fledged matters became attainable because of the common effort of the historians, the freedom of exchanging opinions, procreative debates and serious scientific research. We have to start more courageously to work in a new manner, and to sweep all obstacles away on the path of creative work of science.”⁷⁹

⁷⁷ “A XX. pártkongresszus”, 9. Appendix 5.

⁷⁸ “Az SZKP XX. kongresszusának”, 3.

⁷⁹ “A XX. pártkongresszus”, 15. Appendix 6.

However, in Hungary, the synchronization of the work was a demanding exercise from all sides, both from the academic institutions' and from the party's point of view. For the Institute of Party History the question was, how could party historiography satisfy both party and academic institutions? Once party historiography was not limited to the reproduction of political narratives, many party historians engaged with the reconfiguration of their practice, which could then allow them to get rid of direct political bounds and submerge into the party's research.

1.4. Work with documents as an academic attribute of party historiography

Party historiography's challenge by this time can be seen as a genealogy⁸⁰ of a science characteristic of the East-Central European countries in the Cold War. In Hungary, unlike many other fields of historiography, the communist party as a subject matter could not have been analyzed only by means of *bourgeois* historiography within the traditional national institutions. It had been so, because the 'communist party' was the central motive of the regime's ideology. The 'communist party' was the protagonist whom the mission of creating a new world was addressed, thus the party was first of all an ideological notion. It was Marxism-Leninism, the basis of the party's ideology, which gave authentic meaning to the communist party as the *vanguard of the working class*. Consequently, the party's analysis could only have been pursued by a scholarship which integrates Marxism-Leninism and takes into account the ideological content of the 'party'.

⁸⁰ Genealogy in a Foucauldian sense: Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy and History" in D. F. Bouchard ed., *Language, Countermemory, Practice. Selected Essays and Interviews* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977.) http://home.comcast.net/~platypus1848/foucault_nietzsche/genealogyhistory.pdf (Last download 6th June 2015)

However, in a narrative prepared by party historiography, the communist party was not simply an ideological abstraction anymore. Party historiography had to create a notion of the party as a historical entity. Historical contexts attributed the party concrete features, and by the time of destalinisation, it was more and more the context of national history which designed the party's character in the party's representation.

In fact, this enterprise for a new type of knowledge pointed at the core matters of implementing the socialist regime in East-European countries after the Second World War. From the national history's point of view, the notion of the party was not that of the communists', but it referred to the political plurality in the preceding period of the one-party system. Consequently, party historiography was tasked to release the tension between the notion of party in modern history and the communist party's ideological notion, which demanded exclusivity in the post-war political scene. In order to get away with the traditions of the multi-party system, party history was in charge of explaining the communist one-party system as a historical necessity. In this narrative, the communist party's progressive attribute was the elimination of *retrograde* ideologies. While the party believed that *antagonistic* ideologies do not cease to exist without their party proper, the explanation the communist party's historical claims was even more important in the *fight* against them in the one-party system. Party history was supposed to mediate the party's ideological purpose to party members or affiliates, who could disseminate the message. This knowledge made them the *vanguard* of the society.

While the single party rule was the fundamental political premise of socialism, by the time of the 20th congress the goal was to improve the reasoning of the party in the propaganda. The *credit* of the party's representation was believed to be dependent on *historical facts* excerpted from historical materials, especially that of the archives. Political narratives of party history needed to incorporate the findings of academic research.

At the same time, from the practitioners' side there was a need to authorize party historiography by academic institutions, in order to defend their arguments from the emerging political counternarratives. To make academic historians embrace party historiography, the research had to explore and interpret the historical questions of the party in a new manner. It had to be announced that party history became dependent on historical analysis. The questions of the party's adaptation to each historical context, how the party reframed its political goals and organized itself under particular circumstances were opened for research to a different degree, but the answer also depended on the sources. The handling of the materials could be similar academic practice as in other fields of historiography, but the interpretation still required their reconsideration from the party's current perspective. In addition, in the case of party historiography, the consultation with leading functionaries could be integral part of the research, when the status of the document, whether it can be discussed more academically or more politically, was not obvious. Party historiography's conversion into a science, which integrates academic source-criticism could not be executed as a unidirectional transformation, but it inevitably meant the shortening of the distance between the party and the academic institutions in general.

1.5. The platform of Marxist historiography in the making

The intensification of debates in the mid-1950s represents increasing public interest in the possibilities of the regime's reconfiguration. Historians as a particular group of intellectuals, gave voice to their political imagination regarding the transformation of the Stalinist model. According to their discussions, in this process, the political use of the knowledge about *historical reality* had a prominent role.

The analysis shifts the focus to a public debate of the historians, which took place in a regular intellectual gathering called Petőfi circle. The debates, which characterized the circle had been organized already before the 20th congress from 1954-55, but the circle's activity intensified after the congress along the initiatives of Gábor Tánczos, who was commissioned by the party's official youth organization, the Workers' Youth Alliance (DISZ).⁸¹ The circle gave opportunity for inter-institutional discussion about the intellectuals' participation in public life. The exchange of ideas circulated around the rehabilitation of the *critical role* of intellectuals.⁸² This means that the participants wanted to contribute to the regime's transformation from within by their means of expertise.⁸³ The questions of each professional domain provided opportunity to talk about political matters⁸⁴, but as a consequence, the debates were denounced for going too far in criticism already by early July in a party resolution.⁸⁵

While the events' official background was the youth organization and many young people were present in the circle's events, in the actual discussion, especially in the historians' debate different generations represented themselves. The debate on "Marxist

⁸¹ Hegedűs B. András, "Adalékok a Petőfi kör történetéhez" [Additional Data to the History of the Petőfi circle] in *Évkönyv I.* [Yearbook 1.] (Budapest: 1956-os Intézet, 1992.) 39-42. http://www.rev.hu/rev/images/content/kiadvanyok/petofikor/petofikor_hba2.pdf (Last download 9th April 2015)

According the synthesis of Gyarmati and Valuch, "thousands of people began to attend Petőfi circle events". See Gyarmati and Valuch, *Hungary Under*, 224.

⁸² Rainer M. János, "Bevezetés" [Introduction] in Hegedűs B. András and Rainer M. János eds., *A Petőfi kör vitái hiteles jegyzőkönyvek alapján IV. Partizántalálkozó – Sajtóvita*. [The Debates of the Petőfi circle in Authentic Minutes IV. Meeting of the Partisans. Debate of the Press] (Budapest: Múzsák - 1956-os Intézet, 1991.) 13.

⁸³ Szabó Miklós, "Bevezetés" [Introduction] in Hegedűs B. András and Rainer M. János eds., *A Petőfi kör vitái hiteles jegyzőkönyvek alapján III. Történészvita*. [The Debates of the Petőfi circle in Authentic Minutes III. Debate of the Historians] (Budapest: Múzsák - 1956-os Intézet, 1990.) 8.

⁸⁴ See about the political connotations Szabó, "Bevezetés", 13-15.

⁸⁵ "A Központi Vezetőség határozata politikai kérdésekről, a Petőfi-kör vitáiról" [Resolutions of the Central Directorate on Political Questions, on the Debates of the Petőfi circle] in Horváth Julianna and Ripp Zoltán eds., *Ötvenhat októbere és a hatalom*. [October 1956 and the Power] (Budapest: Napvilág kiadó, 1997.) 434-436.

historiography”⁸⁶ became an event of a future oriented common thinking, and the platform of Marxist historiography was also seen as a generational challenge.

At the same time, the debate was fuelled by personal and institutional claims. Different representatives of the Academy of Science, party institutions such as the Institute of Party History, as well as high-school and university teachers and less exponent intellectuals reflected each other.⁸⁷ Among all, the leaders of the debate dominated, because for them, more time was provided to give their speech. They were Aladár Mód⁸⁸, László Zsigmond⁸⁹, and the party historian Sándor Györffy⁹⁰.

The debate of the historians took place on the 30th May and the 1st of June 1956 and elevated the historians’ self-understanding into a new sphere. The central message of the debate was that academic historiography has to become the integral part of the party’s *scientific politics*. In the preceding years, historiography had lost its academic autonomy, which was to be restored in order to transform the unidirectional relation of politics and scholarship into cross-fertilization of the two spheres.

Accordingly, the academic institutions were expected to produce knowledge about the *social reality* by which the party creates ideological directives. The historians’ contribution to the political agenda was articulated by Mód the most explicitly: “science has

⁸⁶ This debate was the second after the debate of economics, which gained wider public attention and made the circle well known in the public sphere. Szabó, “Bevezetés”, 7.

⁸⁷ The circle also organized itself through a social network, so it was not necessarily the institutional background which counted in showing up in the audience. See about the milieu: Rainer, “Bevezetés”, 12.

⁸⁸ From 1954, Mód was the head of the Department of Scientific Socialism at Eötvös Loránd University. – Hegedűs B. András and Rainer M. János, “A felszólalókról” [About the Speakers] in Hegedűs B. András and Rainer M. János eds., *A Petőfi kör vitái hiteles jegyzőkönyvek alapján III. Történészvita*. [The Debates of the Petőfi circle in Authentic Minutes III. Debate of the Historians] (Budapest: Múzsák - 1956-os Intézet, 1990.) 193.

⁸⁹ László Zsigmond was the head of the Department of Hungarian Modern History at the Institute of History in the Academy of Sciences until 1953.

⁹⁰ Sándor Györffy was the head of the Academic Department of the Institute of Party History. – Hajdu, “Emlékeim”, 7.

to be the mirror and at the same time, the compass” of politics.⁹¹ The *practice* cannot go without *science*, which enables the party to adapt to social conditions, and also to *correct* its policy. The academic research as an integral part of the *scientific* activity, constantly follows the changes in the *social reality*. This attributes to scholars a peculiar *responsibility* to offer academically verified knowledge for the party’s use. According to the logic of the politically *engaged intellectuals*, this means that scholarship should also take an instructive function by the knowledge it regularly produces.

As the comments suggested, the party was meant to be the highest authority, which applies scientific knowledge in leading the society on the *path towards communism*. The emergence of science to such an instructive position was in accordance with a global program announced in the 20th congress of the Soviet party, as it was recalled in the debate by László Zsigmond:

“When comrade Khrushchev said it is possible to progress without war too, then a great and honorable task stands also in front of the historians, because the science of history should be elevated to such level which enables us to conquer the mind of scientists living in other countries. I think the process which has just been started, could not be retained because we also have the forces proper, and the party has to stand and stands indeed to their front line, but it is also urged by the entire international situation, and the central question, which we call the question of the defense of peace.”⁹²

Accordingly, historiography of the socialist regime could not have been other than an applied discipline in a *struggle between ideologies*. However, institutional autonomy and the inherent “democratism of the sciences”⁹³ were about to be reconstructed by the central initiative of the party. The personal leadership was to be deconstructed on the field of historiography, since it was seen as a harmful legacy of the Rákosi era, and the debates were

⁹¹ “Jegyzőkönyv”, 83.

⁹² “Jegyzőkönyv”, 112. Appendix 7.

⁹³ An academic practice as a collective work had good connotations, a particular value in the context of post-Stalinism. Lajos Lukács used this term (“tudományok demokratizmusa”) - “Jegyzőkönyv”, 27. Later in the debate Péter Hanák said “academic democratism” (“tudományos demokratizmus”) – “Jegyzőkönyv”, 79. Aladár Mód also adapted democratism into academic context. - “Jegyzőkönyv”, 90.

to be brought back into academic life as an essential part of academic practice. The new kind of local autonomy of the institutions needed to take effect on the methodology of research and the status of the *facts*. As Lajos Lukács historian of the Lenin Institute⁹⁴ said:

“I think we necessarily take a side when we choose a topic, while standing on the basis of Marxism-Leninism. We have certain idea about that topic, we do not have the anarchistic standpoint of the bourgeois science that we could forget everything when we get down to work on a topic which would then enable us to develop our views. We have the standpoint of Marxism, but beyond that, if the facts modify the presumption then the facts should not suffer this as they did in recent years...”⁹⁵

According to Lajos Lukács, the *facts* aspired for a prominent position in describing the *reality* even at the expense of ideological presumptions. The quotation shows in accordance with other comments in the debate that the historians had to get access to *facts* beyond political needs. The research had to distance itself from the ideological context in order to overcome the limits of truth-telling. A new, integrative and tolerant scholarly *atmosphere* was to be constituted in academic institutions⁹⁶, where Marxism-Leninism framed the purpose of research, but the academic logic prevailed in the foundation of *facts*.

In order to reveal what kind of challenge was such an *atmosphere*'s creation, we should devote some attention to the most memorable motive of the debate. It was the hassle between Erzsébet Andics, who was known as the party-governor of academic life in historiography, the director of the most important institutions, and on the other side, Domokos Kosáry, who was a prominent historian educated in the interwar period and representing *bourgeois* historiography, even after his marginalization on the academic scene. Their personal disagreement articulated the problem of rehabilitating the autonomy of academic

⁹⁴ Lajos Lukács was research assistant at the Academy of Sciences and teacher at the Lenin Institute in the Eötvös Loránd University Faculty of Arts. The main profile of the Institute was ideological education, and this institute's staff and students were outstanding in the revolutionary event in October 1956. They had radical claims addressed to Imre Nagy. See Ripp Zoltán “A pártvezetés végnapjai” [The Final Days of the Party Leadership] in Horváth, Julianna and Ripp, Zoltán eds., *Ötvenhat októbertől és a hatalom*. [October 1956 and the Power] Budapest: Napvilág kiadó, 1997.) 303.; Hegedűs and Rainer, “A felszólalókról”, 192.

⁹⁵ “Jegyzőkönyv”, 29. Appendix 8.

⁹⁶ For the frequent usage of the term, see especially Zsigmond's speech. “Jegyzőkönyv”, 102-113.

institutions. Their correspondence revealed that such autonomy can only be achieved through a consensus between both traditions of historiography: the one represented by *bourgeois* historians and the other by those who had Marxist-Leninist education. These intellectual orientations intersected in the sphere of Marxist historiography. Accordingly, the *bourgeois* historians had to find their engagement with Marxism and the Marxist-Leninists had to embrace traditional academic practices in research, especially concerning the status of historical sources.

While the debate of Andics and Kosáry pointed at the difficulties to cooperate on a new platform of Marxist historiography, the current tasks were defined by others. The project of a Marxist history of the modern times aimed to reveal the *party's real struggles*:

“... we progress through conflicts and by them do we become true human beings and the party ever greater. The problem in the past was not that we showed these conflicts, on the contrary, that we sorted them out, we did not show the difficulties, although they educate the party, the working class, they generate respect and honor for the party.”⁹⁷

Party historiography was a central issue of the discussion.⁹⁸ According to László Zsigmond, neither a *rosy* nor a *negativist* narrative but a narrative of *conflicts* would be the appropriate interpretation of party history to revitalize the party's authority. Party historiography would show the party's *struggle* within its own lines and “the conditions which let the cult of personality develop”⁹⁹. The need to reevaluate the recent past and to mark the

⁹⁷ “Jegyzőkönyv”, 105. Appendix 9.

⁹⁸ Importantly enough, the first and the last speeches were given by the prominent party historians of the Institute of Party History. Ferenc Mucsi, a member of the collective of the Institute of Party History started with a speech of collective self-criticism on behalf of the Institute. No doubt that it was not a spontaneous performance, but as an opening speech it purposely signified the time to rethink party historiography within the field of academic historiography. László Réti, József Szigeti, János Molnár, Dezső Nemes, Péter Hanák are not quoted here but spoke about the matters of party historiography.

Miklós Szabó also emphasizes this motive of the debate, as the essential and prestigious part of the science of history that time. Szabó, “Bevezetés”, 9.

⁹⁹ “Jegyzőkönyv”, 95.

bad tendencies leading to the cult of personality, was the message of the 20th congress for the historiography of modern times.

Party history as a subject matter stepped over its borders of its exclusivity. As András Siklós, a historian of contemporary history announced, party historiography's central importance improved because the party of the socialist regime became an issue of national history:

“Let me comment on only one question from the many which has been raised during the debate here, the problem of party historiography. Others have already pointed out that concerning this, we, of course, cannot perceive it as a marginal question because the way party history is written, by what kind of methods, what kind of views prevail in its practice, this effects the entire Hungarian historiography and effects in particular, almost determines the fortune of the historiography of Hungarian modern history.”¹⁰⁰

According to Siklós, the entire Hungarian historiography relied on the academic standard of party history. Any kind of research topic resonated with the canonized knowledge on the party's past. This means that the historian of the modern age is confined within mental boundaries drawn by the canon of party history. The comment implied that at the same time when the codified taboos of the party cannot be relieved by other than political leaders, the academic support of party historiography is necessary to extort the change of view of the political leadership on the party's historicized matters. The *liberated atmosphere* was particularly important for party historiography to grow out of the former propaganda-function:

“It is truly liberating that the 20th congress and especially its closed session came to light.¹⁰¹ On the 20th congress, the cult of personality was identified, accordingly, a great many of Stalin's theses were proved to be wrong. This was the event, which directly crashed dogmatism. It had a liberating effect worldwide in the international communist movement, and the liberating force is perceptible in our debates...”¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ “Jegyzőkönyv”, 122. Appendix 10.

¹⁰¹ This is the only reference I found on the reception of Khrushchev's *Secret Speech* among party historians.

¹⁰² “Jegyzőkönyv”, 143. Appendix 11.

Sándor Györffy¹⁰³ wanted to make clear the stakes in the research of party history.

The representatives of the Institute of Party History admitted the harmful effect of neglecting academic practice, which they have to integrate into their field of study, not for the purpose of *agitation* but for other *tasks*:

“The task of *science* is different from the *task* of agitation, and from this viewpoint, a *radical* turn should be taken in our perception ... as the comrades do, in the Soviet Union. In the leading article of the *Voprosy Istorii* they write for example about the need for a new manner of work that all obstacles should be swept away from the path of science.¹⁰⁴ Such obstacle was the cult of personality.”¹⁰⁵

Györffy wanted to prove that party historians see the difference between the purpose of scholarship and propaganda. Hence he brought two historical cases, in which party historiography was involved. One of them was the rehabilitation of György Lukács and the so-called Blum-theses from 1929 as an anti-sectarian initiative, and the other was Attila József, the Hungarian poet of the working class and his problematic relation to the communist party in the 1930s. Both were cases in which the speakers showed particular interest. By these issues Györffy could demonstrate his competence as a party historian in source-criticism. He read out materials, which had been hidden in the archive of the Institute of Party History. This performative act was a key moment for arguing for party historiography’s academic competence. Before, the most problematic part of party historiography, which made it a non-academic genre, was the obvious neglect of source-criticism, more than that, source manipulation. Györffy concluded in regretting the misuse of information in their hands:

“The real science is about the respect for the facts and not about the respect for each leader. We have always taught about the interest of the proletariat that it incorporates the entire truth and this is the power of Marxism. However, we still measured whether a document could be published, we conceived the interest of the party as identical with the interest of each leader.”¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ He was an exception in the Institute’s collective, who had historical education from the early 1940s.

¹⁰⁴ “A XX. pártkongresszus”. It was still unpublished in Hungarian by the time of the debate.

¹⁰⁵ “Jegyzőkönyv”, 145. Appendix 12.

¹⁰⁶ “Jegyzőkönyv”, 145. Appendix 13.

It seems that Györfly wanted to show the readiness of the Institute for an academic exploration of the recent past, and by the revelation of documents as their professional contribution to the change of the ideological climate. Party history gained a new form as a common matter of national history, a field, on which all historians should share the same *methodology*.¹⁰⁷ This methodology was to be created still by the actual research of each politically delicate materials. They required neither a purely Marxist-Leninist nor a *bourgeois* methodology *per se*, but practices which integrate both in the right place.

Györfly wanted to defend the authority of the sources. Party historians expected legitimacy from the academic institutions, which could enable them to come out with politically repressed issues. The emerging Marxist historiography signified a social authority, which could justify the research of the party's history. For the party's benefit, the new science backed by the institutional network of scholarship, was imagined to make contributions to a more solid party line, which does not fluctuate by every breeze of each political leaders. But other than that, the research of the party's past implied a critical function of party historiography too.

1.6. The reception of the 20th congress in the Institute of Party History and party historiography's critical function

Party history whether it was designed by party historians, central political organs or any other factors of the ideological sphere including academicians, pointed at the party's evolution from the party's current perspective. As a consequence, these relatively academic studies stayed within the realm of propaganda but they also transformed the meaning of it,

¹⁰⁷ See the announcement of József Szigeti, philosopher, the most prominent disciple of György Lukács this time. – "Jegyzőkönyv", 65.; Szabó, "Bevezetés", 8.

since they were prepared through both academic and political considerations. Party history was about to become propaganda in a new sense, a more sophisticated instrument to *transform the people's mind*.

Typical to the afterlife of 20th congress, the academic knowledge about the party's past could aspire for a political function in the party-life other than being raw material for propaganda. Party historians started to emphasize by this time that a new, factual knowledge could shed light on the current party from new perspectives, from which the party leadership could benefit in maintaining the *collectivism* of the leadership.

While party history always meant a selective canon of the party's past, the uncanonized knowledge on the party was an exclusive privilege of those who were commissioned with the arrangement of party documents. The collective which guarded the "unwritten" knowledge on the party appropriated a viewpoint in the party's past, which did not exist in the party's current paradigm. Their question was whether the central political organs want to use the knowledge they prepare. The revelation of any hidden information takes direct effect on the party-line, thus if historical sources come into light, they should have immediate political implications.

I propose to call as the critical function of party historiography the transformative effect it could potentially take on the party. This function could have only been the attribute of a politically supervised intraparty institution. If we follow the considerations of the historians devoted to the research of the history of the party, the critical function should be sharply distinguished from the propaganda-function. The former was unquestionably a delicate political function that could emerge as a concrete goal of party historiography's professionalization only in such progressive ideological atmosphere as the prerevolutionary period in Hungary.

Although the critical function has been never named as such¹⁰⁸, it was explicitly articulated in the internal discussions of the Institute. The Institute of Party History held two meetings, on the 23rd and the 27th of March 1956 to discuss the implications of the 20th congress of the Soviet Party on Hungarian party historiography. An edited form of the minutes of these meetings was published in *Párttörténeti Közlemények* around 20th June that year, so only after the historians' debate in the Petőfi circle.¹⁰⁹ Historians from outside the Institute were also present in the institutional meetings.¹¹⁰

While the debate was published in delay, the reception of the message of the 20th congress was fast. The colleagues of the Institute by late-March were already informed about the fundamental claims of the 20th congress. The minutes drives attention to channels of information available for the party historians.

The most important political document by the time was Khrushchev's *Secret Speech*. It was important for party historians in particular, because they could take it as a sample account on party history. Since there has been no evidence found so far when the collective learned its content, we can only rely on Györffy's reference to it in the debate of the Petőfi-

¹⁰⁸ Nancy Heer emphasizes that the "informal functions" of historiography were never "openly described" in publications. However, even if the critical function was informal in a sense that it has been never prescribed as such, the discursive context reveals in the Hungarian context, it could be a formal function in political decision making. – Heer, *Politics and History*, 13.

¹⁰⁹ Mucsi Ferenc and Szabó Ágnes eds., "Az SZKP XX. kongresszusa és a magyar párttörténetírás. Tanácskozás a Párttörténeti Intézetben." [The 20th Congress of the CPSU and the Hungarian Party Historiography. Discussion in the Institute of Party History] *Párttörténeti Közlemények* 2. no. 3. (October 1956) 90-132.

¹¹⁰ From outside, there was Péter Hanák, who taught that time at the Eötvös Loránd University, at the Department of Hungarian Modern History and before, until 1953, he worked at the Institute of History at the Academy of Sciences. István Kató was also a teacher of the department, while Miklós Lackó was at the Academy of Science. – Hegedűs and Rainer, "A felszólalókról", 191.

The speakers of the debate according to the published minutes, were the followings: László Réti, András Kürti, Péter Hanák, Bálint Szabó, Magda Aranyossi, Edit S. Vincze, Jolán Kelen, Kálmán Szakács, Sándor Farkas, István Kató, Tibor Hajdu, Erzsébet Scharle, Miklós Lackó, Ferenc Mucsi, János Jemnitz, Imre Kubitsch, Sándor Györffy, Gábor Sándorné, Svéd László. – Mucsi and Szabó eds., "Az SZKP XX. kongresszusa és a magyar"

According to the minutes of the Petőfi circle, the following 6 participated in both events: László Réti, Péter Hanák, István Kató, Miklós Lackó, Ferenc Mucsi, Sándor Györffy.

circle which shows that by the end of May the latest, the speech was known even for the circle's public.¹¹¹

The debate in the Institute shows certain excitement about how to adapt party historiography to the renewing ideological context. The minutes reveals not an atmosphere of panic¹¹² over party historiography's misfortune, on the contrary, excitement prevails in creative ideas concerning the renewal of the expertise.

The meeting's introductory speech was given by László Réti, who had been the head of the Institute since the foundation. He referred in the introduction of his speech to the report on the 20th congress performed by Rákosi in the preceding session of the Central Directorate of the party on 12th March.¹¹³ While we can assume that party historians had access to the Central Directorate's materials for inner circulation, the daily news in *Szabad Nép* also reported the party leadership's reception performed by Rákosi. The performances of party leaders immediately generated the reconsideration of the party historians' job.¹¹⁴

As the reader can tell from the references in the speeches given both in the Petőfi circle and in the institutional meeting, the colleagues of the Institute did not rely only on Hungarian publications about the congress materials to gain information about the Soviet Union. They studied Soviet periodicals, such as the historical journal titled *Voprosy Istorii*

¹¹¹ See Györffy's comment on page 40.

According to the synthesis of Gyarmati and Valuch, the text of the speech was "widely disseminated in Hungary within just a few weeks as well. Moreover, many Hungarians gained access to the genuine text of the CPSU first secretary's address, not merely the abridged and somewhat euphemized synopsis of the speech that had been distributed within the inner HWP apparatus." Gyarmati and Valuch, *Hungary Under*, 219.

¹¹² Polly Jones talks about "personal and professional panic" of party historians as a reaction to the 20th congress. Polly, *Myth, Memory*, 66.

¹¹³ Beszámoló a Szovjetunió Kommunista Pártja XX. kongresszusáról. 1956. március 12. Mátyás Rákosi, MNL OL M-KS 276/52/33., 18.

¹¹⁴ It was Ferenc Mucsi in the Petőfi circle who referred the performance by Rákosi, in which he admitted his personal responsibility for the Rajk-trial, the most famous show-trial of the Hungarian cult of personality. His self-criticism took place in front of the audience of the Party Committee of Budapest, on the 18th of May, 1956. – "Jegyzőkönyv", 21., 157.

and other two political journals, the *Kommunist* and *Partiinaiia Zhizn'*.¹¹⁵ In Hungarian, the first publication of the congress materials probably came out on the 26th March, so after the first session of the Institute's debate was held¹¹⁶, but Réti already referred to Khrushchev's public speech on the 23rd of March.¹¹⁷

László Réti in the Institution's debate repeated Anna Pankratova Soviet academician's account on the situation of party historiography as the most neglected segment of *ideological work*.¹¹⁸ While Réti's account might sound apologetic, he fairly says that party history for propaganda was different from the Soviet Union's, because the *work* was started only recently. Preparations for writing party history had been overwhelming, first of all, the creation of the party-archive. As he said, "writing of our party's history in a truly Marxist-Leninist sense is still a task ahead."¹¹⁹

In the Institute's debate the participants could explain in a more intimate circle what *scientific* party history would be able to provide for the party as a new concern. There were some direct reflections on this matter, among which the most comprehensive and explicit answer was framed by István Kató, a teacher of the university's Department of Hungarian Modern History:

"We regarded party history primarily, moreover, maybe exclusively a part, a branch of party propaganda and party agitation. In our work, not least, the conjunctural distortions were the consequences of this. The education of party history is of course a part and an important part of party propaganda, but the correlation of party historiography and the party's

¹¹⁵ Ferenc Mucsi refers to the newest issue of the Soviet journal *Kommunist* and the leading article about the cult of personality. – "Jegyzőkönyv", 21.

In the debate held in the Institute of Party History, there was a reference also for *Partiinaiia Zhizn'*. - Mucsi and Szabó eds., "Az SZKP XX. kongresszusa és a magyar", 119.

¹¹⁶ *Az SZKP XX. kongresszusa (1956. február 14-25.)* [The 20th Congress of the CPSU 14-25, February 1956] (Budapest: Szikra, 1956.)

¹¹⁷ Mucsi and Szabó eds., "Az SZKP XX. kongresszusa és a magyar", 91.

¹¹⁸ The speech was published around this time: "A Szovjetunió Kommunista Pártja XX. Kongresszusának anyagából." [From the Materials of the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union] *Századok* no. 1-2. (1956) 204-210.

¹¹⁹ Mucsi and Szabó eds., "Az SZKP XX. kongresszusa és a magyar", 94.

practical activity is primarily not laid in here. Party historiography is a science, or we should develop it into that, a science, which generalizes the experiences of the workers' party. Party history as a science cannot simply be part of the party's propaganda, historical support for already developed theses, but it can also explore regularities, which give something new to the party leadership too, and still do not exist in party propaganda and agitation. Moreover, they could, for some time, to a greater or lesser degree even contradict them. If we deny this, then we deny the existence of party history as science, which overwrites the old views and creates new ideas."¹²⁰

Accordingly, party historiography constantly revises the current party-image and effects on the leadership's ideological orientation, whenever some *facts* on the party's past comes out of research. In Kató's imagination, party historiography was elevated to an institution that sees the party from a different angle than that of *daily politics*. This position enables party historiography to take a critical function in service of the party.

While a new canon was about to be established on the basis of research, by the research new correlations of the party's present and past could be discovered. However, not all of these revelations could normally be built in the current canon. Even so, party historians could argue for them and stimulate the leadership's political line with offering the findings of the research. Party historians' intellectual products, *facts* on the party were believed to be able to make the party leaders *think* out of the box of a current paradigm of the party. In the position of the researcher, the uncanonized knowledge enables party historians to see even further than those, who do the current *practice*. In this sense, party historians while researching the past were not only adapting their findings to the present *party line*, but they were looking into the future as well.

Party historians' new role grew out of the changing political climate which promised a more liberal institutional environment for thinking on the party in historical terms. In one of the following speeches in the debate, Miklós Lackó¹²¹, who had been working in party

¹²⁰Mucsi and Szabó eds., "Az SZKP XX. kongresszusa és a magyar", 109. Appendix 14.

¹²¹ Miklós Lackó was a new member of the Institute of History of the Academy of Sciences since 1955. Formerly he taught in party education. He defended his dissertation in 1954 and he was offered to take this position. He became a respected scholar and an important figure of the Institute in the Kádár-era. See the

education and became a colleague of the Academy of Sciences, vindicated a position for the “Marxist scholar” in the “collective thinking” of the “collective leadership”. As he claimed, party historians should take the fortunate opportunity given at long last from above to execute a radical turn in party historiography and to “tackle the questions of the Hungarian party history in a courageous and constitutive manner”:

“... we should raise the question of the party historian’s position in the ideological work. It is particularly important for the historians and party historians of the period after the Liberation. They research the epoch, which takes a direct effect on the creation of the present and the future, an epoch, which signifies experiences that are indispensable in working out the party’s scientific politics and conducting the party’s current politics. Collective leadership means collective thinking as well, and in this collective thinking the Marxist scholar has an important place. We cannot relinquish the contribution to the creation of the party’s collective thinking by our own, modest forces.”¹²²

Lackó refers to a political position, which party historians were about to take side by side the political organs. Party historiography was imagined in this sense as a stimulating component of the party’s *thinking*. This claim was welcomed, since the party needed to go through a mental transformation after experiencing its own mental distortion. Lessons of party history were believed to enable the party to confront with the legacy of Stalinism and to eliminate consciously the inherited mentality:

“Vital questions of research, analysis emerge: what was the reason for a single person’s domination on an entire party, the Communist Party of the Soviet Union? What had been the conditions for the communist party’s inherent development, in the rules, methods of party life etc., which let it happen?”¹²³

The study of these questions makes the *cult of personality* the party’s decisive *experience* on which the politics of the party can be built. The knowledge about the *failures* were believed to enable the party to avoid the reoccurrence of such a distortion of the party. The *experiences* were to be identified not by the central political organs this time. It was party

interview made by Miklós Szabó: “Az írott szó morális jelentősége” [The Moral Significance of the Written Word] *Beszélő Hetilap* 3. no. 37. <http://beszelo.c3.hu/cikkek/az-irott-szo-moralis-jelentosege> (Last Download 5th May 2015.)

¹²²Mucsi and Szabó eds., “Az SZKP XX. kongresszusa és a magyar”, 113. Appendix 15.

¹²³ Mucsi and Szabó eds., “Az SZKP XX. kongresszusa és a magyar”, 115. Appendix 16.

historiography, which was supposed to lead the production of knowledge on the party's *experiences* and consequently contribute to the decision-making in the Politburo from the background. While such a collective was necessarily aware of the very current matters of the party, it could even offer "something new" for the leadership that struggled with these matters *daily*.

The institution which provides answer for these questions could *form the historical consciousness* of the party from the top to the bottom. Sándor Györffy differentiated the party history for the leadership and for party education. He reinforced Kató's understanding of the *scientific party history*, which goes beyond propaganda:

"We, propagandists really could not have taught in the past and cannot teach in the future about the history of the CPSU and about the history of our own party other than what is confirmed by the CPSU and by our party's Central Directorate. That is why new textbook is needed both in the Soviet Union and here as well. It will be confirmed by the party organs in charge and it will define the direction of party education. But I think that we, historians as creative workers who do scientific work, we still do have a job of raising questions, again and again, which, in our view, were previously not appropriately decided, not enough due to the facts, by the party collectives in charge. There are great many of such questions."¹²⁴

In Györffy's account, the interdependence of party leadership and party historiography is evident. While the political organs define the limits of propaganda, Györffy also stresses that party historiography has to critically revise what was politically determined before for the leadership's exclusive use. He definitely refers to the revision of party history from the time of the cult of personality. However, he goes further and frames it as a mission to be completed "again and again". He illuminated a permanent *responsibility* of the experts to inform the leadership about the new findings and the deviations of the canon from the *reality*. In this sense, party historiography could finally become the institution for the party-membership's mental optimization:

¹²⁴ Mucsi and Szabó eds., "Az SZKP XX. kongresszusa és a magyar", 122. Appendix 17.

“Our task is to guard the port of Marxism-Leninism. I think, today it means first and foremost the validation of the spirit of the resolutions of the 20th congress in Hungary.”¹²⁵

Györffy as the head of the academic department recognized themselves as the *guards* of the party’s collectivity after being the guards of the single party leader’s authority. This genre of historiography was called at one point in the debate by Ferenc Mucsi as *party history science* (“párttörténettudomány” sic!)¹²⁶, which was an uncommon term in Hungarian unlike Soviet terminology.¹²⁷ But this term signified precisely the prerevolutionary endeavor of party historiography, to represent a knowledge simultaneously authorized by the party and scholarship. The research of party history seemed to be gradually elevated to the highest intellectual activity within the party.

1.7. Conclusion

The reconfiguration of the collective leadership announced by the 20th congress of the Soviet party was understood in Hungary by many as the regime’s irreversible democratic transformation from above and as a continuation of the *reform line* within the party.¹²⁸ The change called for generative instruments to transform the party from within. Party historiography was an expertise at hand that could stimulate the party members mind and make them get rid of the harmful mentality developed during decades and by the traumatic experiences of the *cult of personality*.

¹²⁵ Mucsi and Szabó eds., “Az SZKP XX. kongresszusa és a magyar”, 126. Appendix 18.

¹²⁶ Mucsi and Szabó eds., “Az SZKP XX. kongresszusa és a magyar”, 116.

¹²⁷ “A párttörténet tudomány új fellendüléséről. A “Voproszi Isztorii” 1960. évi 5. számának vezércikke.” *Párttörténeti Közlemények* 6. no.4. (1960) 98-122.

¹²⁸ Szabó, “Bevezetés”, 14-15.

The importance of party historiography was announced by the party historians on the field of historiography as a direct consequence of the 20th congress. The representatives of the collective of the Institute of Party History embraced the challenging task of a new textbook of party history, because it was supposed to integrate *historical facts*, which could be excavated by academic means of research. Party historiography as a science, was not just the science of Marxism-Leninism anymore, but it simultaneously aimed to follow rules of the scholarship of academic historiography concerning the status of historical documents. The new, *scientific* reasoning solidified the position of the new party history narrative not to be swept away by any political claims. The new model of *science* achieved its highest goal, when it became applied by the central organs. Since this was its final purpose, *scientific party historiography* was about to be able to come out with *truth* that could even revise the party's stand laid down in resolutions and in propaganda materials.

On the basis of the hidden academic knowledge, the collective that conducted research of party history in the central Institute, aspired for a new and permanent function in the party. This was meant to be a critical function of party historiography, which could provide a viewpoint for the leadership out of the current context of the party. New facts of party history could change the leadership's perception of *reality* and let them look back on their *daily practice* self-critically. The acceptance of *scientific* facts about the party should on purpose initiate transformation of the *party-line*. Such an instructive role was in accordance with the purpose of any other sciences, which all had to contribute to the constant correction of party's policy. However, in the case of party historiography the revelation of the past could not only reinforce but jeopardize the party's cohesion.

2. Chapter: Party Historiography Challenging the Experience of October 1956 in the Making of the Communist Party

As a priority in creating the rule, the communist party was eager to determine the perception¹²⁹ of all that takes place within the regime. It was especially the case with 1956, when the ruler's legitimacy was questioned from a diversity of viewpoints. In the post-revolutionary context the evolving HSWP's goal was to arrange the *experiences* in one line. However, the idea that the events had been a *counterrevolution* was a challenging one even in the party's inner public.¹³⁰

In Max Weber's theory of rule, there is a "compelling apparatus"¹³¹ authorized by the rulers to complete tasks as being involved in the power of the leaders. As Weber says, the "sociological character of the structure of the rule" is dependent on this particular relation of the rulers with the apparatus and at the same time, also dependent on their common relation with those, who are subordinated to their joint power.¹³² Consequently, the initial task of building legitimacy is the "self-justification"¹³³ within the apparatus.

Following Weber's idea, self-justification is not "a matter of theoretical or philosophical speculation", but a complexity of real political stakes, which can be

¹²⁹ "Perception" was particularly important for Lenin in creating a worldview as Robert Service quoted: ">we obtain knowledge through sense perception, on the basis of which we build theories of the world<" - Service, "Lenin, Vladimir Il'ich", 153.

¹³⁰ The analysis of party historiography on 1956 is underrepresented in current literature except for a work of Zoltán Ripp and Julianna Horváth. Ripp Zoltán "1956 emlékezete és az MSZMP" *Múltunk* 46. no.1. (2002) 146-171.; Horváth Julianna "Bevezetés" [Introduction] in Horváth Julianna and Ripp Zoltán eds., *Ötvenhat októbere és a hatalom*. [October 1956 and the Power] (Budapest: Napvilág kiadó, 1997.) 13-28.

¹³¹ Max Weber, *Politikai szociológia. Politikai közösségek. Az uralom*. [Political Sociology. Political Communities. The Rule] (Budapest: Helikon, 2009.) 80.

¹³² Weber, *Politikai szociológia*, 91-92.

¹³³ Weber, *Politikai szociológia*, 92.

differentiated to two characteristic methods of reasoning: one that addresses the apparatus and the other, which addresses the society. For the two social spheres the claims are to be phrased in a different manner, since the apparatus has a peculiar view on those in power.

As for the social legitimacy of the reconstructed one-party rule in post-revolutionary Hungary, Péter Apor analyzed accurately, how important it was to identify the happenings of 1956 in an intelligible manner. The events turned out to be a consequence of the offensive forces of *counterrevolution*¹³⁴ in the communist narrative of the Hungarian national history. For the social legitimacy, the goal was to make the party from a marginal into an intelligible actor by explaining its point of view regarding 1956 as a common, national experience.

As for the legitimacy within the apparatus in the Weberian sense, the analysis has to shift the focus from the national perspective to the party. I argue that the notion of the party was in ultimate need to be reconfigured in a new narrative of party history of which 1956 is the ultimate peak. The paradigm of *counterrevolution* tried to function also as a narrative of party history, but it explained the *experiences* of the party without actually giving any specific account on what the party members and the leadership did in October-November 1956. The narrative of *counterrevolution* was believed to be able to justify the party widely known deeds under the blur conditions of its genesis, but as the following case study will show, the party's past asked for further clarification by 1958. A direct narrative of party history was first and foremost important for the construction of the party itself, thus for the legitimacy of the rulers within the apparatus in the Weberian sense.

On the one hand, the surviving apparatus perceived the events of October 1956 from multiple angles. Those, which led to the least problematic performances could signify

¹³⁴ In this chapter, I will consistently use the term 'counterrevoution', since the analysis will move into a sphere, where the notion was consensually accepted, even though not understood in the same way. It is a methodological concern, does not mean that the events of October 1956 should be labeled as counterrevolution.

competency in creating a narrative for of the party. On the other hand, the leadership lived through the crisis of dissolution and their personal experiences were decisive about the limits of a party history narrative. As an example from a Politburo session of December 1956, János Kádár's hectic tone of speaking corresponds with his experience in the party during the revolutionary days:

“... when we announced multi-party system, at the same time, we made the communist party nothing, because we proclaimed that we do not have anything in common with the HWP and an entirely different party is needed in such an atmosphere. I have to tell you my personal motivations why I was still in. At this time, me, personally became highly influenced by the group of Imre Nagy, maybe not by Imre Nagy's personality - who was, as far as I knew, a very pliable person -, rather his environment. It was pure madness what these people were doing that time. Many could tell how the resolution was born about the liquidation of the party, how Márton Horváth, Donáth and comrade Lukács received it. They rushed on us ... It is hard to describe the atmosphere there. The multi-party system should be announced immediately, this and that should be done immediately, because if not, the national war will immediately burst out against the Soviet Union...”¹³⁵

In the afterlife of the revolutionary events, in the party jargon the experience of these days was circumscribed by the phrase “*ideological confusion*”¹³⁶ or equivalents that referred to the mental *chaos*. This expressed the experience of those in the party, who had been looking at the intensified political life from an outer perspective, who had rather hesitated or who had been carried away by the events including the highest functionaries of the HSWP. As a result, the party needed a “mental recovery” also in its very inner institutions in an even more penetrating manner than the 20th congress of destalinisation implied.

¹³⁵ “Az MSZMP Ideiglenes Központi Bizottsága 1956. december 2-3-i ülésének jegyzőkönyve” [Minutes of the Session of the HSWP Provisional Executive Committee on the 2nd and 3rd December, 1956] in Némethné Vágyi Karola és Sipos Levente eds., *A Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt ideiglenes vezető testületeinek jegyzőkönyvei*. 1. köt. 1956. november 11- 1957. január 14. [Minutes of the Provisional Leading Bodies of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party Vol.1. 11, November, 1956 – 14th January 1957] (Budapest: Intera Rt., 1993.) 145. Appendix 19.

¹³⁶ Ádám Takács's lecture highlighted the importance of this key term in understanding 1956's role in the Kádár regime. The lecture titled “*Socialist Consciousness*”: *The Adventures of a Key Term in the Ideological Discourses of the Kádár Regime* was given on April 2, 2015 at the Central European University, History Department Research Seminar. - See more at: <http://history.ceu.edu/events/2015-04-02/history-department-research-seminar-adam-takacs-socialist-consciousness-adventures#sthash.CiIx09ul.dpuf>

It would be easy to say that the HSWP was built on those, who *really* experienced the events as the attack of the *counterrevolution*.¹³⁷ The Institute for Party History could have been one collective in the heart of the party, which could have had realized in time that a *counterrevolution* takes place. However, even though they were the experts of the party, later they could not claim to have seen the events as they became defined. The particular viewpoint from which they had seen the party's crisis had only made them disagree with each other about the perception of the current events. Their inner division became even more acute after the most critical days were over, when exactly this collective became tasked with developing a comprehensive and uncontested interpretation of this *experience* of a communist party.

I argue that the Institute of Party History in the first 2 years following the events of 1956, was still under the influence of the ideological diversity, the party's authentic experience of 1956. Consequently, they tried to practice the critical function, which was figured out during the prerevolutionary months. In the emerging *historical situation* the critical function was supposed to be a structural component of the party's cultural cohesion as it facilitates the party's self-studying process. Quest for materials came from the apparatus to advance the education of the party membership.¹³⁸ By a case study on the Institute's operation between 1956 and 1958, I do not intend to rehabilitate party historiography as an academic practice, but to reconstruct the challenges with the memory of 1956 given for both the Institute's collective and the central political organ, the Politburo.

¹³⁷ Ripp Zoltán "Az MSZMP legitimációja a Kádár-korszak kezdetén" [The Legitimacy of the HSWP at the Beginning of the Kádár Era] in Huszár, Tibor and Szabó, János eds., *Restauráció vagy kiigazítás. A kádári represszió intézményesülése 1956-1962*. [Restoration or Correction. Institutionalization of the Kádárist Repression 1956-1962] (Budapest: Zrínyi kiadó, 1999.) 44.

¹³⁸ Jegyzőkönyv a Politikai Bizottság 1958. szeptember 2-án tartott üléséről. [Minutes of the Politburo Session September 2, 1958] MNL OL M-KS 288/5/93. See as Jegyzőkönyv 1.

2.1. The Institute of Party History after the events of October 1956 in the original sources

The Institute of Party History as an intraparty organ provides a viewpoint on the crisis which the party went through in 1956. Since it was the institution, which was devoted to the analysis of the party, the question is almost given: how did this collective of expertise perceive the events of 1956? No official documents prove their activity in October 1956, but afterwards, the Institute turns up as one of the first intraparty organs under reconstruction. According to the original sources of these months, this is a period in the history of the Institute, when changes in the staff go along with seeking for the functions in the process of the party's recovery.

The status of an *institute of the central committee* could refer to a peculiar relation to the central political organs. In the files of the Orgburo we see that the Institute was discussed separately from other departments of the apparatus.¹³⁹ Still, it was considered a "department" by status¹⁴⁰, because it was neither controlled by other departments, nor was it superior to any.

On the 28th November, a proposition was discussed in the Orgburo session, which arrived from the Institute's leadership. The proposal demonstrates no academic but political

¹³⁹ Napirend a Szervező Bizottság 1956. november 28-án du. 2 órakor tartandó ülésére. [The Agenda for the Orgburo Session, November 28, 1956] MNL OL M-KS 288/6/4. 2.

¹⁴⁰ The first proposal for the status of the Institute in the HSWP materials also mentions first of all, that it is a department of the Central Committee.

Javaslat a volt Párttörténeti Intézet új státusára [Proposal for the New Status of the Institute of Party History] Réti László, 17th November 1956. MNL OL M-KS 288/6/4. 14.

The name Institute of Party History was used during the prerevolutionary months of 1956 too, for example in the journal *Párttörténeti Közlemények*. As we see in the first HSWP documents, the old name Munkásmozgalmi Intézet is simultaneously used in the first months. The Institute's new name as Institute of Party History of the HSWP's Central Committee was fixed only later in a proposal accepted on the 24th January 1957. See: Javaslát a Párttörténeti Intézet munkájára, munkatársainak létszámára és személyi összetételére [Proposal for the Work, the Number and the Composition of the Staff of the Institute of Party History] 22nd January 1957. MNL OL M-KS 288/6/9. 60.

tasks.¹⁴¹ It circumscribes a staff, which is eager to help the party get through the current challenges of legitimacy crisis. In this regard, the proposal claimed the Institute's involvement in the preparatory work of the forthcoming party congress. The party historians already wanted to think further the daily matters of the party's "temporary" weakness. Concerning the Institute's profile and the composition of the leadership the Provisional Executive Committee¹⁴² was in charge.

Although the proposal wanted to demonstrate the Institute's capacity for completing the tasks, other documents show the collective's capacity as dependent on the management of the tensions within. Already on the 4th December, a petition was handed in on behalf of the collective against the head of the Institute, László Réti.¹⁴³ Then, a few days later, Réti went into a counterattack, and proposed 9 colleagues to be fired. On the black list, there were obviously his opponents, who he considered *revisionists*¹⁴⁴, while he was said to be an old-style *sectarian* in the petition against him. This was the terminology for describing political diversity even in times as 1956, when a lot of different ideas were articulated.

The intra-institutional rivalry went on until the chair of László Réti was given to Endre Kálmán, who was not a party historian in any sense. During the post-war years, he had

¹⁴¹ Javaslat a volt Párttörténeti Intézet új státusára. Réti László, 17th November 1956. MNL OL M-KS 288/6/4. 15.

¹⁴² The Politburo of the HSWP was called as Provisional Executive Committee until the party conference held in July 1957.

¹⁴³ The petition wanted to move Réti from his chair. 26 out of 31 voted for the petition in the collective. Felterjesztés az MSZMP Intéző Bizottsághoz. [Proposition to the HSWP's Provisional Executive Committee] Az MSZMP MMI intézőbizottsága (Szabó Bálint, Kubitsch Imre, Milei György, Horváth Lili, Hajdu Tibor) 4th November 1956. MNL OL M-KS 288/6/4. 17-18.

¹⁴⁴ These names were: Tibor Erényi, Sándor Györffy, Tibor Hajdu, János Jemnitz, István Lengyel, György Milei, Ferenc Mucsi, László Svéd, Éva Szabó. - Réti László levele a Szervező Bizottsághoz. [Letter of László Réti to the Orgburo] 12th December 1956. MNL OL M-KS 288/6/6. 48.

Réti refers to the Orgburo's recent resolution on the status of the Institute. Probably the proposal discussed on the 28th November was accepted, although the materials does not show it. See Javaslat a volt Párttörténeti intézet új státusára. [Proposal for the New Status of the Institute of Party History] Réti László, 17th November 1956. MNL OL M-KS 288/6/4. 14-15. and the records of the Orgburo session: Jegyzőkönyv a Szervező Bizottság 1956. november 28-án tartott üléséről [Minutes of the Session of the Orgburo November 28, 1956] 28th November 1956. MNL OL M-KS 288/6/4. 2.

been working in the press.¹⁴⁵ It was still a question whether he can manage the Institute's conflictual life as an outsider. However, Réti stayed in the Institute in status.

On the other side, Réti's main opponent, Sándor Györffy, who was the head of the academic subdepartment, got fired by late January.¹⁴⁶ The Institute's collective was against this decision of the Orgburo.¹⁴⁷ No doubts, it meant a loss for a decisive part of the collective, since Györffy symbolized the progressive understanding of their job after the 20th congress of the Soviet party.

While these arrangements on the Institute's leadership took place, the current function of the Institute was also taking shape. On the 30th December 1956, the Orgburo accepted the Institute's proposal for taking on the "collection of historical documents and memoirs of the events of the 23rd October".¹⁴⁸ Search for historical materials was initiated throughout the country by the help of local party headquarters and administrative organs,

¹⁴⁵ See the short life-story of Endre Kálmán at Történelmi Tár Digitális História Adatbázis [Historical Library Digital História Database]:

http://tortenelmitar.hu/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=4526&catid=74%3Ak&Itemid=67&lang=en (Last download 17th May 2015)

¹⁴⁶ The proposal dated for 22nd January still counts on his work in the Institute. See *Javaslat a Párttörténeti Intézet munkájára, munkatársainak létszámára és személyi összetételére*. (not signed) 22nd January 1957. MNL OL M-KS 288/6/9. 62.

The petition to call him back (see 147th footnote) was dated for 29th January so he was fired that week, between 22nd and 29th January 1956.

¹⁴⁷ On behalf of the Institute's collective, the leaders of the Institute's party-organization wrote a petition not to let Györffy be fired without listening to him and this way giving one more chance to reconsider his case. The petition was undersigned by the executive members of the Institute party organization. The petitions and the Institute's inner elections refer to a democratic pattern of operation.

Az MSZMP KB Párttörténeti Intézete Pártszervezetének Végrehajtó Bizottságának a levele [Letter of the Executive Committee of the Party Organization of the HSWP's Central Committee's Institute of Party History] (Bálint Szabó, Tibor Hajdu, György Milei, Imre Kubits and Lili Horváth) 29th January 1957. MNL OL M-KS 288/6/9. 64-65.

¹⁴⁸ The proposal came from the Institute: *Javaslat az október 23-i események történelmi dokumentumainak és visszaemlékezéseinek összegyűjtésére*. [Proposal for the Collection of Historical Documents and Reminiscences of the Events of 23rd October] Réti László, 27th December 1956. MNL OL M-KS 288/6/7. 24-26.

It was accepted on the session of the Orgburo on 30th December 1956, and became a resolution of the Orgburo a few days later in January 1957. MNL OL M-KS 288/6/7. 27-30.

different associations of workers and plots. The journal of the party *Népszabadság* and the Hungarian Radio were also integrated in the project.¹⁴⁹ In the center, the collective of the Institute went after materials appropriated by the political actors such as the members of the Politburo.¹⁵⁰

While it seemed to be a project of a complete collection, some materials were possessed by the Ministry of Interior. These were the politically most profitable documents, including photography or other materials, which could serve as evidence against participants of the events.¹⁵¹ The first propaganda publication on the *counterrevolution* extensively used such documents of the Ministry of Interior. It was a first volume of a book series called *Fehér könyvek* (*White Books*)¹⁵² which was not the publication of the Institute of Party History but the Informational Office of the Cabinet (Minisztertanács Tájékoztatási Hivatala). Colleagues of the Institute worked primarily on the 3rd and the 4th volume published later.¹⁵³

The *Fehér könyvek* was a direct propaganda of the party. It was not party history in a sense that it did not tell the story of the party, but circumscribed what had happened to it by demonstrating the attack of the *counterrevolution*. A former HWP Central Directorate-member, Oszkár Bethlen worked on the publication. He became the colleague of the Institute

¹⁴⁹ Horváth, “Bevezetés”, 19.

¹⁵⁰ Antal Apró remembers in a document analyzed later in this chapter. Jegyzőkönyv 1., 57.

¹⁵¹ From the Ministry of Interior, only later in July 1958 were the materials decided to be given to the Institute. See the Records of the Politburo session of 8th July 1958. Jegyzőkönyv a Politikai Bizottság 1958. július 8-i üléséről. [Minutes of the Politburo Session July 8, 1958] MNL OL M-KS 288/5/86. 7.

¹⁵² *Ellenforradalmi erők a magyar októberi eseményekben (Fehér könyvek) I-V*. [Counterrevolutionary Forces in the Hungarian Events of October (White Books)] Published by: Magyar Népköztársaság Minisztertanácsa Tájékoztatási Hivatala. [Informational Office of the Cabinet] (no date and place of publication)

¹⁵³ Apor, *Az elképzelt*, 65-74.

See also Nemes Dezső levele Szirmai elvtársnak Réti László és Betlen Oszkár cikkeinek a Népszabadságban való közléséről. [Letter of Dezső Nemes to comrade Szirmai on the publication of the articles of László Réti and Oszkár Betlen in *Népszabadság*] MNL OL M-KS 288/22/1957/3. 192.

of Party History by late 1956.¹⁵⁴ He had also not been a party historian, since he had been working at *Szabad Nép* as a journalist, obtained the same “qualification” as Endre Kálmán’s.

In February, another proposal of the Institute was refused. The collective intended to implement a committee led by József Révai to explore the documents of October 1956.¹⁵⁵ We can assume that not the idea of the committee in itself but the leadership of Révai was disliked by the central organs, since he was an emblematic character of the Rákosi-leadership, who was marginalized not soon after.¹⁵⁶ However, in the circles of many party intellectuals, Révai was still popular.

In opposition to *Fehér Könyvek* another attempt was closer to “scientific” party historiography. The Institute proposed the making of a collection of studies on the *counterrevolution* by early July 1957. The goal was to publish them in two volumes.¹⁵⁷ According to the list of the provisional authors, not only members of the Institute but external colleagues were invited, and they finally produced 15 studies, out of which only 5 could become published after the Politburo examined the materials.¹⁵⁸ After March 1957, the publication of any works which were related to the events of October 1956 depended on the

¹⁵⁴ Some other colleagues could have worked on the 3rd and the 4th volumes, see a document I will discuss later: Jelentés a Párttörténeti Intézet munkájáról. [Report on the Work of the Institute of Party History] Kálmán Endre, 8th January 1958. MNL OL M-KS 288/5/62. 99.

¹⁵⁵ It was a not detailed proposal. In the committee the followings could have participated also others not from the Institute: Erik Molnár, Oszkár Betlen, Vera Lajtai, György Nonn, Sándor Farkas, Endre Kálmán, László Réti, Tivadar Matusek, Bálint Szabó and András Németh. Javaslat az Intéző Bizottsághoz [Proposal to the Executive Committee] 5th February 1957. MNL OL M-KS 288/5/14. 83.

¹⁵⁶ Kalmár Melinda, *Történelmi galaxisok vonzásában. Magyarország és a szovjetrendszer 1945-1990*. [Attracted by Historical Galaxies. Hungary and the Soviet System, 1945-1990] (Budapest: Osiris, 2014.) 111-114.

¹⁵⁷ The authors invited to the project of the collection of studies were: Bálint Szabó, Oszkár Betlen, János Jemnitz, Ferenc Mucsi, Tivadar Matusek, András Németh, László Réti, János Molnár, István Pintér, Ilona Sánta, György Nonn and Márton Horváth.

¹⁵⁸ *Ellenforradalom Magyarországon 1956, Tanulmányok I.* [Counterrevolution in Hungary 1956, Studies I.] (Budapest: Kossuth, 1958.) Oszkár Betlen’s and János Jemnitz’s study was published in the volume.

Horváth, “Bevezetés”, 20.

Provisional Executive Committee's agreement.¹⁵⁹ The 2nd volume has not been published ever since. The narration of the events of October was a challenging task, and even a selected board had difficulties to develop appropriate narratives.

2.2. The problems with the Institute's "political atmosphere"

In January 1958, a Politburo session discussed the post-revolutionary situation of the Institute. Two reports on the Institute's collective had been prepared for it, and the minutes of the Politburo session reflects the dilemma, whether the Institute formed a political opposition by early 1958. One of the reports had been written by Endre Kálmán, the director.¹⁶⁰ For the session finally arranged for the 15th January, two letters of self-criticism from László Réti and Oszkár Betlen were attached, after they had been asked for by the Politburo.¹⁶¹ The other report prepared for the session, was titled Complementary Report¹⁶² and signed by a committee which had been investigating the Institute's work through personal conversations with the staff.¹⁶³

¹⁵⁹ See the 'Mi történt Magyarországon?' c. könyvvel kapcsolatos állásfoglalás. [Position over the Book 'What happened in Hungary?'] 12th March 1957. MNL OL M-KS 288/5/18. 6.

¹⁶⁰ Jelentés a Párttörténeti Intézet munkájáról. Kálmán Endre, 8th January 1958. MNL OL M-KS 288/5/62. 98-106.

Actually it had 2 variations, the first was written on the 24th December 1957, but the discussion of it was delayed to have all prominent party leaders present. They were István Szirmai and László Orbán. Szirmai was the head of the Department of Agitation and Propaganda, Orbán was the head of the Department of Science and Culture.

¹⁶¹ Letter of László Réti to Károly Kiss. 4th January 1958. MNL OL M-KS 288/5/62. 113-115, Letter of Oszkár Betlen to the Politburo. 13th December 1957. MNL OL M-KS 288/5/62. 116-118.

¹⁶² Kiegészítő jelentés a Párttörténeti Intézet munkájáról. [Complementary Report on the Work of the Institute of Party History] (signed by István Szirmai, Galambos Sándor, Sebestyén Jenő, Bárd András, Ikladi Lajosné) 18th December 1957. MNL OL M-KS 288/5/62. 107-112.

¹⁶³ See Betlen's comment on the Politburo session. Jegyzőkönyv 1., 45.

The report of Kálmán starts with a reference to the flow of debates in the Institute after the 20th congress of the Soviet party. The director highlights that the collective could fortunately create a consensus which was laid down in the publication of October 1956 in *Párttörténeti Közlemények*.¹⁶⁴ Even though Kálmán announces, the consensus is still valid concerning the work, the collective's current state is anything but consensual because it is still effected by the *excitement* which culminated in the times of the *counterrevolution*.

As we recognize the report's terminology, the Institute's collective was described as being on both sides of the *ideological frontline*: *revisionists* on the one hand, and *sectarians* on the other. The terminology covers more than ideological orientation, because socio-cultural specificities of the milieu were inferred in the terms. They signified a generational conflict, tensions between the leadership and the working collective, and last but not least, different understandings of party historiography as a *science*.

Kálmán mentions that the collective did not turn against the party-leadership by the time of the *counterrevolution*. Still, excitement and tension was high in the Institute. The report tries to explain that fluster became a permanent characteristic of the collective since then, it became a dominating feature of the Institute's *political atmosphere*. The question was what such an ideologically heterogeneous and culturally divided atmosphere implies. Could it become harmful for the post-revolutionary state of the party? Could the Institute be converted into a political opposition? Or could the conditions obstruct the collective to complete the institutional tasks?

The reports and the minutes let us envision how the perception of the events of 1956 went to different directions in the Institute. The collective behaved as a special group of party intellectuals, who could not help themselves debating through the whole period of the

¹⁶⁴ "Az SZKP XX. kongresszusának", 1-19.

ideological turmoil in 1956, from its preliminary stage to the late afterlife in 1958.¹⁶⁵ It took effect on their *daily work*, because the different views engaged the colleagues with forming opinions and claims not only about the political developments, but about institutional and professional matters too. Those who looked at it from outside, namely the Politburo, the observing committee or sometimes even the director of the Institute, tried to show that it is harmful for their work.¹⁶⁶

If we look at the job the collective had been completing, we can tell they fulfilled diversity of demanding ideological tasks currently needed for the party. As Kálmán's proposal mentions, besides the *Fehér könyvek* and the collection of studies, they worked out political theses on behalf of each high-rank politician such as Gyula Kállai and Ferenc Münnich, as well as brochures for limited party use on the activity of Imre Nagy.¹⁶⁷ Kálmán claims excuse for the collective unable to publish materials for wider public because of being occupied with the *daily needs*.¹⁶⁸ But as he says, propaganda for wider public was a secondary task of the Institute:

“In our plan so-called “popular-scientific” publications are also included, but we disapprove the endeavor which tries to push our work primarily in this direction, because it would take our Institute away from its actual purpose, the scientific research and processing work. In the past, this endeavor was strongly felt, and most of the rightful criticism against our Institute arrived exactly because of our so-called “popular-scientific” publications.”¹⁶⁹

The collective did not want to become an instrument of propaganda again. They distinguished their *scientific* activity from the tasks of *agitation*, as they did in the

¹⁶⁵ Jelentés a Párttörténeti Intézet munkájáról. Kálmán Endre, 8th January 1958. MNL OL M-KS 288/5/62. 98-99.

¹⁶⁶ Jegyzőkönyv 1., 28-29.

¹⁶⁷ Jelentés a Párttörténeti Intézet munkájáról. Kálmán Endre, 8th January 1958. MNL OL M-KS 288/5/62. 99.

¹⁶⁸ Jelentés a Párttörténeti Intézet munkájáról. Kálmán Endre, 8th January 1958. MNL OL M-KS 288/5/62. 99.

¹⁶⁹ Jelentés a Párttörténeti Intézet munkájáról. Kálmán Endre, 8th January 1958. MNL OL M-KS 288/5/62. 100. Appendix 20.

prerevolutionary months. Among the types of publication, the proposal highlights the importance of creating documentary compilations.¹⁷⁰ This issue became timely since the Institute appropriated the documents of the former communist party, the HWP and the *counterrevolution*.

Kálmán's report emphasized about the current state of the Institute that the main threat comes from the "right", from *revisionism*. As he informs, the consequences of 1956 are still tangible within the Institute's walls, and he refers to serious clashes in the collective by late 1956. For more than a year, the different views of the colleagues had been tolerated, however, the tensions stayed unrelieved.¹⁷¹ By late 1957, the tensions in the atmosphere become manifest in different understandings of their job, and for Kálmán the biggest worry relates to the promoters of *bourgeois* academic work. The report ends with a proposal of a resolution, which summarizes the institutional tasks, including the fire of Ferenc Mucsi, the exposed figure of the discussions after the 20th congress.¹⁷²

If we look at the Complementary Report, we can detect differences and similarities in the two observations. This report highlights first of all, that the Institute fails to aspire for the *leading role in the historical front*, because it does not develop *scientific methodology*, organize *academic debates*, open to other institutions of historiography. The Institute does not even work on becoming a *center for all propagandists of party history*, but many colleagues dispraise propaganda-work.¹⁷³ The text almost repeats what Kálmán's report

¹⁷⁰ Jelentés a Párttörténeti Intézet munkájáról. Kálmán Endre, 8th January 1958. MNL OL M-KS 288/5/62. 100.

¹⁷¹ Jelentés a Párttörténeti Intézet munkájáról. Kálmán Endre, 8th January 1958. MNL OL M-KS 288/5/62. 102.

¹⁷² Jelentés a Párttörténeti Intézet munkájáról. Kálmán Endre, 8th January 1958. MNL OL M-KS 288/5/62. 104.

¹⁷³ Kiegészítő jelentés a Párttörténeti intézet munkájáról. 18th December 1957. MNL OL M-KS 288/5/62. 108.

detects: the tendency of separating the *scientific work* from the *political*. The “dysfunctionality” of the Institute was taken as a symptom of the inner problems of the staff.

As a distinguishable trait, the Complementary Report also pointed at the leadership’s position in the Institute. It reveals that Kálmán, as someone who is new on the field of party historiography, relies on László Réti in all concerns. He does not search for any other company in the Institute, and he cares little about the collective’s opinion. As a result, it is Réti’s will that prevails in decision making,¹⁷⁴ which generates a hierarchical conflict in the Institute.

The committee’s report also points at a generational conflict behind the hierarchical.¹⁷⁵ The leadership represent the *old comrades*, while in the collective, especially among the academic staff, the *youth* dominates in age between 25 and 30.¹⁷⁶ In the eye of the committee a generational conflict also covers professional disagreements. For the younger colleagues, the *old comrades* are not scholarly minded, and for the elderly ones the *youth* is not experienced enough in political terms. The generational conflict is burdened also with the hierarchical frustration of the younger colleagues. In their view, the “gerontocracy” wants to determine party historiography’s *scientific* character, which means that party historiography builds more on political competences than on academic skills.

In this context *revisionism* and *sectarianism* attributed complex socio-cultural meanings including political affiliations too. On the one hand, as the committee detected,

¹⁷⁴ Kiegészítő jelentés a Párttörténeti intézet munkájáról. 18th December 1957. MNL OL M-KS 288/5/62. 109.

¹⁷⁵ Kiegészítő jelentés a Párttörténeti intézet munkájáról. 18th December 1957. MNL OL M-KS 288/5/62. 108-109. The document says there are only 2 assistants, who have the level of a candidate (meaning basically PHD, they were László Réti and Mihály Korom), and among the 20 colleagues of the Academic Subdepartment, only 3 are aspirants (doctorate students, who were Edit S. Vince, Tibor Erényi and László Svéd).

¹⁷⁶ Out of the 32 colleagues of the Institute, 20 was academic colleague, and among them 14 was between the age of 25 and 30. See the comment of András Bárd in the Politburo session. Jegyzőkönyv a Politikai Bizottság 1958. január 15-én tartott üléséről. [Minutes of the Politburo Session January 15, 1958] MNL OL M-KS 288/5/62. 54. See as Jegyzőkönyv 2.)

there are still many in favor of Imre Nagy. In the case of Tibor Hajdu, Bálint Szabó and László Svéd, their *rightist* views became regulated, however, János Jemnitz and Ferenc Mucsi still meant a source of problems.

On the other hand, Réti's views signify a different universe to be analyzed. First of all, Réti claims that he anticipated the counterrevolutionary turn. This was a strong claim for authority as a Marxist-Leninist. In the eye of the committee in accordance with the members of the Institute's collective, he ended up in a feeling of superiority which made him act arbitrarily against colleagues also by the list of the nines.¹⁷⁷ This attitude of superiority and uncompromise was a circumscription of *sectarianism*, and recalled patterns of behavior typical of the Rákosi-era.

The report asserts that the tensions obstruct the Institute's work. The leadership avoids open debates, which could have solved the political problems, since it was believed to be a specific instrument to eliminate incorrect ideas in the party's *practice*.¹⁷⁸ It seems that as long as the hierarchy represents the oppositional sides in generational, political and professional terms, the collective cannot be arranged in one line, that of the party's.

Summing up, the Institute was seen in a bad condition to complete all tasks in accordance with the prevailing concept of Dezső Nemes¹⁷⁹, who was a chief editor of the daily press *Népszabadság* that time:

“The main goal of the Institute of Party History will be to process the material of the documents of the counterrevolution, but not as the materials of each working collective but the publications of the Institute for which the Institute takes responsibility on a full scale.”¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁷ See 144th footnote.

¹⁷⁸ Vass Henrik ed. et al., *Munkásmozgalomtörténeti*, 453.

¹⁷⁹ He neither had academic position these years, nor was he a Politburo member yet.

¹⁸⁰ Dezső Nemes's comment on the Politburo session. Jegyzőkönyv 2., 33. Appendix 21.

Regarding the Institute's political responsiveness the political content of their products was at stake. Since we can only learn about the *atmosphere* from the correspondence controlled by the Politburo, the least we know about is the opinion of the actual practitioners, whether the ideological heterogeneity stimulated their work.¹⁸¹ In the new understanding of party historiography, the plurality of ideas was tolerable or even needed to a certain degree. I believe the actual researchers took political diversity as an inherent characteristic of their professional activity, and their real problem was that the leadership does not let it prevail. Then the question is: did the leadership have any specific reason for that?

2.3. The implications of the Institute's autonomy – is it a place for political opposition?

The Politburo discussion on the two reports reveals the political stakes in the Institute's academic autonomy.¹⁸² According to the director, the tensions go back to the conflict between Réti and the others by late 1956. Since then, many colleagues did not revise their stand against Réti, while Réti is constantly struggling with his “old, sectarian failures”.¹⁸³

In accordance, Dezső Nemes recalls the Institute's crisis a year before. The months following the events of October 1956 intensified the collective's political responsiveness. The subversive effects of the events of October made the collective attracted by an escalating *line* questioning the new leadership led by Kádár:

“... after the 4th of November, danger evolved that certain party-oppositional groups conquer the Institute and use it as the base for their own oppositional work. It was the time

¹⁸¹ See the positive attitude towards the atmosphere by Oszkár Betlen. Jegyzőkönyv 2., 45.

¹⁸² Jegyzőkönyv 2., 20-56. - The speakers were the following: Endre Kálmán, György Marosán, Jenő Sebestyén, Dezső Nemes, János Kádár, Antal Apró, Oszkár Betlen, Bálint Szabó, Imre Kubitsch, László Réti, István Friss, István Szirmai, Sándor Galambos, András Bárd.

¹⁸³ Jegyzőkönyv 2., 23.

when there was Márton Horváth and around him as well as around Győrffy, the majority of the Institute's workers gathered. They were under their influence, and then, in a quite sharp struggle comrade Réti and Kálmán were in relative minority. In this struggle comrade Réti had a proposal to fire 9 people. His real faults, the rigidity, the subjectivism was used against Réti indeed. Comrade Réti's general competency as historian is weak, he worked himself up to here as a communist party-worker and achieved some results. Thus there had been an endeavor by these groups to use the Institute for the practice of their own line."¹⁸⁴

The short memory refers to a fundamental experience of the Institute about the collective's transformation into a political *front*. As also others refer to this moment of the common past, the Institute started to form a base for an intraparty opposition. The group around Márton Horváth was labeled as *revisionist*, and from the Institute's staff the highest academic authority, Sándor Győrffy contributed to mobilize the collective. The list of the 9 people preserved who could practically support Horváth's and Győrffy's "own line".

By late 1956, Győrffy had already been a prominent party historian of stalinisation as well as destalinisation. He had had significant public role in the leadership of the Petőfi circle, but he had been dismissed from this position after 23rd October 1956.¹⁸⁵ As we see his political roles in the afterlife of the revolutionary days, it is likely that he consistently developed party historiography's critical function into a *revisionist* political agenda, when Márton Horváth appeared in the Institute. But in opposition to Horváth, Győrffy immediately asked membership in the HSWP after the 4th of November.¹⁸⁶

Horváth's appearance in the Institute's life does not have any trace in the documentation of the central organs. Before the events of October 1956, he had been one of

¹⁸⁴ Jegyzőkönyv 2., 31. Appendix 22.

¹⁸⁵ He used to have position as the secretary of the Történelmi Főbizottság and as a head of one of the departments in the Lenin Institute in Eötvös Loránd University. Az MSZMP KB Párttörténeti Intézete Pártszervezetének Végrehajtó Bizottságának a levele [Letter of the Executive Committee of the Party Organization of the HSWP's Central Committee's Institute of Party History] (Bálint Szabó, Tibor Hajdu, György Milei, Imre Kubits and Lili Horváth) 29th January 1957. MNL OL M-KS 288/6/9. 65.

¹⁸⁶ Az MSZMP KB Párttörténeti Intézete Pártszervezetének Végrehajtó Bizottságának a levele [Letter of the Executive Committee of the Party Organization of the HSWP's Central Committee's Institute of Party History] (Bálint Szabó, Tibor Hajdu, György Milei, Imre Kubits and Lili Horváth) 29th January 1957. MNL OL M-KS 288/6/9. 65.

the most important actors on the field of literature beside Révai. While he was well known for his Stalinist past, by 1956, when he was the chief editor of the *Szabad Nép*, the official daily press and he stood up for Imre Nagy to push forward a progressive change within the party. He was one of those, who wrote the text of the foundation of the HSWP in the party's most hectic day of October 1956.¹⁸⁷ Horváth got into the Institute after the Soviet tanks came in. It is telling about his political views and position that he did not apply for party membership, only later, when he got already refused.¹⁸⁸

It seems plausible that the heyday of the Institute's direct political activity was achieved when Horváth and Györffy organized the Institute's life in November and December 1956. Horváth had been a prominent party member, who could have aspired for remarkable support of the Stalinist, the ex-Stalinist comrades as well as the supporters of Imre Nagy. Györffy could have sympathizers from the social network of the Petőfi circle, and he enjoyed the support of the Institute's collective in his back.¹⁸⁹ However, we cannot decide at this stage of the research, to what extent could they have a chance to stand up as an intraparty opposition.

Anyhow, the case of the Institute with Márton Horváth forms a decisive moment of the professional development of party historiography, even if we only learn about it from memories. I would like turn these memories into the following working hypothesis: as a consequence of the transformation of the party initiated by the 20th Soviet congress, party historians thought of themselves in a position that can be critical to the *party line*. This could

¹⁸⁷ Ripp, "A pártvezetés végnapjai", 312. This moment was recalled at the beginning of the chapter by János Kádár. See page no. 54.

¹⁸⁸ He was still invited for writing a study in the collection, which was supposedly published in 2 volumes by the Institute in 1957. After this by summer 1957, he disappeared from the scene. (See the 157th footnote.)

See the short life-story of Márton Horváth at Történelmi Tár Digitális História Adatbázis [Historical Library Digital História Database]: http://tortenelmitar.hu/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=4385&catid=66%3Ah&Itemid=67&lang=en (Last download: 24th May 2015)

¹⁸⁹ See again, the amounts of votes for the petition against Györffy's dismissal.

make many of them be willing to challenge the party leadership in the politically undeveloped context after October 1956, when also the authority Márton Horváth turned up in their institutional horizon and represented alternative ideas.

For the political organs, the conclusion was that ideological heterogeneity in the Institute is dangerous. They believed, it is party historiography's *scientific* autonomy, which sets forth ideological heterogeneity, because the collective runs out of political control under the "shelter" of *science*. Such freedom of analysis of party-issues inevitably generates plurality of political thought. It seems to be verified by the case that ideological heterogeneity makes the Institute unable to resist political influence, especially the *revisionism* based on the criticism of former party politics.

Because of the concrete experience of such an ideological overrun, the Institute's leadership, Kálmán, Réti and also Betlen was worried about the return of a *revisionist line*. The colleagues objected the limitations, they wanted to live with plurality of thoughts in their everyday work, because debates on the party-issues meant for them progression in their profession. It did not necessarily mean *revisionism* as *rightist views* that they criticized Réti and the leadership's idea about the regulation of collective work without plurality of thoughts.

While the collective's political performance was looked with anxiety from outside, there was a dire need from inside to defend the rights for autonomy of *scientific work*. It had to be explained for the political organs, how their work is fundamentally different from *rightist* propaganda. Regarding the matter, it was Oszkár Betlen, who could have never been accused of *rightist views*, tried to mediate between the Politburo and the representatives of the Institute. He tried to argue for the need of a *scientific* approach in party historiography for the party's benefit:

„... issues frequently happen to evolve, and they seem to be rightist although they are not at all. I.e. the following issue: there is a serious anxiety in some of our colleagues,

which they express sometimes, sometimes not, that we will subordinate again the Institute's scientific work to the party's certain daily agitational needs at the expense of science. Here somebody said, the colleagues of the Institute want to get away with the support of the party's daily politics by this. It has to be supposed that this is a serious question of conscience by us. They have bad experiences from the recent years. They do say, they perceived as the party's interest to forge the history. They are afraid that they will do the same things again. This is not a bad thing *per se*! We have to accept that they are afraid in some regards from the old comrades like Kálmán, Réti, me, because they think these will reinstall this line again. There is a scientific mistrust against these comrades. As long as we cannot explain how manageable the support of the party's politics is by severe science, and the party's agitational claims should not be pushed to the background, because this is how we can scientifically precede, reservations could be kept up. These have already burnt their finger once and they are afraid. However, it does not mean that they have reservations toward the current leadership. It is genuinely healthy, because what they care is the objective Marxist science.”¹⁹⁰

Betlen tries to deconstruct the image of the collective as an intraparty opposition controlled by the Institute's leadership. He argues that the colleagues of the Institute do not hesitate to work on propaganda because they do not support the party's leadership, but the abuse of their job during the *cult of personality* makes them insist on their affiliation to scholarship. However, it sounded as if the party leadership has lost its competency in setting up the criteria how party historiography makes good for the party. This generated the leadership's mistrust. Bálint Szabó, a party historian of the younger generation warns not to misunderstand their endeavor for keeping the *scientific* standards:

„When the comrades¹⁹¹ come up with the standard of scientific work in the Institute's work and they claim it, they care for the party. It should not be judged as the comrades' endeavor for objectivity¹⁹².”¹⁹³

According to Szabó, the party historians try to argue for accepting their *partisanship* as depended on a certain autonomy of their *scientific* activity. Interestingly, the political leaders such as Kádár and Szirmai came out with an even more general problem with the collective. Kádár, who was in any case the most important voice in debates, wanted to make explicit that the central organs are not dependent on the Institute of Party History in

¹⁹⁰ Jegyzőkönyv 2., 47. Appendix 23.

¹⁹¹ Here Szabó means the colleagues of the Institute.

¹⁹² Here Szabó means *bourgeois objectivity* science that neglects Marxism-Leninism.

¹⁹³ Jegyzőkönyv 2., 47-48. Appendix 24.

propaganda or any other issues. He urged a change in the Institute's attitude towards the party-leadership instead of the immediate regulation of intra-institutional affairs:

“In my view, we cannot expect much from the Institute to support the party's daily struggle now in 1958 with practice of agitation and propaganda. Why? Because there are very few people who support the line of the Central Committee without reservations. This is my personal conviction. There are people like this and that, rightists and leftists too. If I said, is there anyone who does not agree with the main line of the party today, I guess there wouldn't be any. Certainly, they think too that the rescue of the power of the proletariat was right, but those who support the party's line without any reservations form the minority. I claim this on the basis of different observations. What kind of relations are there? There are those, who think of Imre Nagy as the greatest Hungarian theorist. There are others, who regard and think of the Central Committee compared to Gerő and Rákosi as a kind of haphazard company, elves, whose goodwill is not negligible in their view, but they are more or less diligent children, who do the job, as long as the order won't be restored. In my opinion, comrade Réti and Betlen basically think like this. What they wrote down¹⁹⁴, I believe, because their opinion has changed, but even in this letter, it is there how they disagreed at first our action against the position of Révai, which was a harmful position. Thanks god, they have thought it over again and they also got the point. If you want to help the party's struggles then forget about this superior, professoral condescension towards the Central Committee. It is not a must of course, because we have fought for one and a quarter year without the particular support of our work by each.”¹⁹⁵

According to Kádár, the disorder is not within the Institute but in the relation of the Institute's leadership to the party-leadership. He complains that the leadership of the party is supposed to feel a kind of “inferiority complex” looking back on itself from the viewpoint of the Institute's representatives. Szirmai similarly points at the Institute's misunderstanding of its position within the party:

“I think the comrades have the idea that the Institute is a different universe, closed, holy territory, what is Galambos and Sebestyén¹⁹⁶ doing here? It is high time to eliminate this kind of bad spirit.”¹⁹⁷

From the party leadership's point of view, the paternalistic attitude was a symptom of a disturbing superiority of the elderly party intellectuals. Kádár does not seem to be afraid from the emergence of a political opposition, but if he is so, not from *revisionists*,

¹⁹⁴ Kádár refers to the letters of self-criticism written by Réti and Betlen attached to the reports.

¹⁹⁵ Jegyzőkönyv 2., 40. Appendix 25.

¹⁹⁶ They are the members of the committee, which was commissioned with the investigation in the Institute.

¹⁹⁷ Jegyzőkönyv 2., 51. Appendix 26.

but from Réti's authority. In his eye, Réti might be able to build up a separate realm within the party, which can be characterized with lack of unconditional respect for the HSWP's leadership for their "merits" in reconstructing the party-state. And as Szirmai detects the conditions were already set up.

Could an institutional superiority be a correct perception of Kádár and Szirmai? I believe that it was a plausible observation. In the context of the 20th congress and after the experiences of the events in October 1956, the older generation represented by Réti could have seen themselves as the "sacred" experts of the highest authority in history, the communist party. They could imagine themselves superior to those, who do the *daily practice*.

The young party historians might have thought of the leadership differently, but they also aspired for a peculiar authority, which they supposedly obtain by *scientific* knowledge on the party's past. As we will also see in the case of the documentary compilation a few months later, they also performed a "professoral condescension" since they wanted to *teach* the party leadership for what the *counterrevolution* really was. But the Politburo made a conclusion even before the case that the party historians have to learn as an intraparty institution that party historiography either for political propaganda or even for *science* cannot be other than a service strictly in line with the party.

As a result of the investigations and the discussion over the Institute's stabilization, a resolution was accepted by the Politburo.¹⁹⁸ This is almost like a new document of foundation. It announces that the primary purpose of the Institute is *research* on the field of party history, then the second is the *support* of the party's *daily matters* and finally, the work

¹⁹⁸ Javaslat a Párttörténeti Intézet munkájáról szóló határozatra. [Proposal for a Resolution on the Work of the Institute of Party History] 7th February 1958. MNL OL M-KS 288/5/68. 112-115. (The proposition was accepted on the Politburo session. Jegyzőkönyv a Politikai Bizottság 1958. február 25-én tartott üléséről. [Minutes of the Politburo Session February 25, 1958] MNL OL M-KS 288/5/68. 4.)

in *agitation and propaganda*. As the document declares, the key to satisfy all demands is a high standard of *scientific work*.

According to the resolution, the Institute is supposed to take a central position on the field of Marxist historiography, but the concrete conditions are still far from this. The Marxist-Leninist understanding of *scientific* historiography has to be developed in this particular institute and as a pattern of a Marxist-Leninist science, which has to be spread out to “different fields of the scientific and cultural life”. In order to achieve such an ambitious goal, the institutional setting has to be reorganized and the members of the Institute’s collective have to build a network of historians from both the academic institutions and the departments of scientific socialism in each university.¹⁹⁹

In an additional proposal given by the Department of Agitation and Propaganda, a new control-institution’s plan is laid down. The so-called Academic Council was designed to provide assistance for the director of the Institute, Endre Kálmán. It was obviously not an academic committee, but a body of prominent figures of the ideological sphere. Dezső Nemes was the head of the council, but a leading functionary both from the Department of Agitation and Propaganda, and from the Department of Science and Culture were in the committee, as well as Erik Molnár, who had currently become the head of the Institute of History in the Academy of Sciences.²⁰⁰ From this point on, Dezső Nemes was becoming the highest authority in matters of party historiography even at the expense of the collective expertise represented by the Institute. As a parallel step of rearrangement, we learn from another proposal signed by István Szirmai that the two *revisionist*, Ferenc Mucsi and János Jemnitz

¹⁹⁹ Javaslat a Párttörténeti Intézet munkájáról szóló határozatra. 7th February 1958. MNL OL M-KS 288/5/68. 112-115.

²⁰⁰ Javaslat a Párttörténeti Intézet munkájáról szóló határozatra. 7th February 1958. MNL OL M-KS 288/5/68. 116.

was fired from the Institute, while László Réti was kept in his status, even though ordered not to participate in the collective's work.²⁰¹

The Politburo's initiatives by early 1958 wanted to make party historians realize that the leadership is above in hierarchy to the party historians' intellectual authority. At this point, the question is to be raised how party historiography's critical function survived these years, especially after Sándor Györffy was removed from the scene. The challenge for intellectual prominence between the Institute and the leadership becomes once more contested in the post-revolutionary context in a conflict around the interpretation of the *counterrevolution*.

2.4. Scandal in the party's background: the confusing counterrevolutionary documents

In the months following the new arrangement, the Politburo expected changes from the Institute's collective. However, ongoing projects could not change that fast. The most important of all was a compilation of documents which had been produced during the days of the *counterrevolution*.²⁰² The story of the compilation testifies that the message of Sándor Györffy was still in the air in the Institute's atmosphere:

"If we want to elaborate party historiography as a science then we have to embrace the task of helping the creation of the correct party leadership, which is based on intense analysis of objective historical facts."²⁰³

Even though Györffy was not in the Institute anymore, the "disciples" thought of party historiography's critical function. The Politburo had already tried to discourage the

²⁰¹ Javaslat a Párttörténeti Intézet munkájáról szóló határozatra. 7th February 1958. MNL OL M-KS 288/5/68. 118.

²⁰² It was decided in a meeting of the subdepartment of the Institute on the 19th July 1957, that such a compilation will be published as manuscript and in numbered copies. – Horváth, "Bevezetés", 21.

²⁰³ Mucsi and Szabó eds., "Az SZKP XX. kongresszusa és a magyar", 123. Appendix 27.

Institute's collective to *teach* the leadership, but the party historians still wanted to invest their expertise in the sphere of political decision-making.

In the line of the most prominent publications of the Institute of Party History, a *collection of counterrevolutionary documents* should be situated, even though it was prevented from print. However, the story of the withdrawal is even more telling about the party after one and a half years of the revolutionary events. The collection of primary sources of the events was supposedly constituted from "articles, pamphlets, radio broadcasts, proclamations, minutes" and probably other materials on 5-600 pages in 3000 copies.²⁰⁴

By the end of August 1958, the compilation was sent to the print. Somehow, only at this point after the final stage of editing, the editor Éva Szabó went to János Kádár and asked him, whether he allows to publish the materials related to his personal activity in the *counterrevolution*.²⁰⁵ Interestingly enough, only at this moment became the party leadership anxious about the publication of the documents. It proved to be difficult to read them as justification of the HSWP, once they vividly represented Imre Nagy's rightful behavior:

"The documents in the volume are compiled in a manner that provide a non-realistic image of the counterrevolution. It contains mostly documents that do not unmask but mask

²⁰⁴ The existence of any printed issues is unknown. (Julianna Horváth's oral notification). The proposal for publishing a documentary compilation on the counterrevolution was accepted by the Secretary November 8th 1957. - Javaslat az októberi ellenforradalom dokumentumainak kiadására. [Proposal for the Publication of the Documents of the Counterrevolution of October] Kálmán Endre, 5th November 1957. MNL OL M-KS 288/7/16. 82.

²⁰⁵ Jegyzőkönyv 1., 61.; See also Szirmai's proposal for the committee to be sent for investigations. Javaslat a Politikai Bizottságnak. [Proposal for the Politburo] Szirmai István, 23rd August 1958. MNL OL M-KS 288/5/92. 67.

As we learn from the Politburo session, the most delicate materials in the corpus of the compilation were János Kádár's speeches on the 30th of October and on the 1st of November. The first was a radio speech broadcasted after that of Imre Nagy, who announced the multi-party system. Kádár expressed the HWP's agreement on the elimination of the one-party system. - Ripp, "A pártvezetés végnapjai", 299.

The text of the radio-speech of Kádár on the 1st of November was retrospectively also a highly problematic one. In this speech, Kádár expressed the view of the HSWP on the events as a *national democratic uprising*. - Ripp, "A pártvezetés végnapjai", 313. See the original text as a proclamation of the HSWP: "Az MSZMP Intéző Bizottságának nyilatkozata az MDP feloszlásáról, az MSZMP megalakításáról" 1956. november 1. [Proclamation of the HSWP's Executive Committee On the Dissolution of the HWP and the Foundation of the HSWP] in Horváth Julianna and Ripp Zoltán eds., *Ötvenhat októbere és a hatalom*. (Budapest: Napvilág kiadó, 1997.) 476-478.

the counterrevolution, deceptive documents and documents of failures. ... Documents were published which show Imre Nagy communist, in favor of the party, devoted to the power of the people, but documents are not published which prove Imre Nagy's illegal activity, his camouflage tactics, his violent claim for power. ... There are many groups of documents in the volume which make the impression that Imre Nagy had a broad mass support and he acted under the pressure of significant social organs, institutions and associations which linked together the people's masses. ... Part of the documents which were intended to be published, fits to a malicious interpretation of the behavior of the party's central directorates' members during the days of October."²⁰⁶

A committee of prominent functionaries commissioned by the Politburo²⁰⁷ wrote this report. They were the ideologically most competent and reliable party leaders such as István Szirmai, Dezső Nemes, Béla Biszku and György Aczél, who all became later symbolic figures of the Kádár regime. The committee's conclusion was distressing, because the leadership envisioned *chaos* in the party as a possible consequence of the publication:

"It could have been able to disorientate and confuse the middle strata of party and state functionaries, to generate mistrust towards each leader..."²⁰⁸

Since the committee detected danger, the party historians were strictly reprimanded by the Politburo because of the trouble they almost caused, by the words of Dezső Nemes:

"...the entire compilation could only cause harm for the party ... this volume of documents in this composition is able to spread mistrust against this or that member of the party leadership. Exactly because of this, we have to make a conclusion, and we should not allow for rightist elements to read out the justification of their claims. As I see it, in this Institute of Party History a so-called ideological cleaning-up has to be done."²⁰⁹

From the committee's proposal, it seems that the Institute took an oppositional stand to its own propaganda work in interpreting the *counterrevolution* and providing means to

²⁰⁶ Jelentés és javaslat a Politikai Bizottságnak. [Report and Proposal for the Politburo] Biszku Béla, Nemes Dezső, Aczél György, Szirmai István. 27th August 1958. MNL OL M-KS 288/5/93. 143. Appendix 28.

²⁰⁷ It might need further investigation why the commission could not have been one of the Central Control Committee, which was in charge of party discipline and the party membership's morality. It was reorganized by early 1957. Miklós Somogyi, the head of the Central Control Committee is not mentioned in the case, he was not even present in the Politburo sessions although he was a Politburo member. See Németh Jánosné ed., *Az MSZMP központi vezető szervei üléseinek napirendi jegyzékei*. [Agenda Directories of the Sessions of the HSWP's Central Leading Organs] vol. 1. 1956-1962. (Budapest: Magyar Országos Levéltár 1995.) 209.

<http://www.arcanum.hu/mol/> (Last download 23rd May 2015)

²⁰⁸ Jelentés és javaslat a Politikai Bizottságnak. Biszku Béla, Nemes Dezső, Aczél György, Szirmai István. 27th August 1958. MNL OL M-KS 288/5/93. 144. Appendix 29.

²⁰⁹ Jegyzőkönyv 1., 42. Appendix 30.

exclude Imre Nagy from the party's tradition. However, even if the committee's report declares that the collective almost tried to rehabilitate Imre Nagy, it is plausible that the party historians did not want to go against the political directives of the leadership. If this had been really the case, the Institute would have made explicit by this step that the collective is a faction, which would not have been a viable strategy of a political opposition immediately after the execution of Imre Nagy.

Even so, the specificity of the compilation is that it could have been read in contradictory ways indeed. There is no factual evidence in our hands that the Institute did not intend to raise skepticism against the evaluation of the events of 1956 to such extent that could motivate change in the leadership. But we could learn from the discursive context that the project did not intend to be politically subversive, and it was not in favor of Rákosi's return or the emergence of any competing authority.

The compilation did not even represent a particular political *line*, which could be seen as the Institute's own. Different layers of the Institute's collective stood behind this work, and as we could be informed from the early reports of that year, no ideological consensus could be created among them. In the editorial board, there was an editor, Éva Szabó, who was a member of the post-war research group of the Institute being also responsible for the collection of the materials of the *counterrevolution*. The director, Kálmán and Oszkár Betlen also stood behind the compilation, as well as Bálint Szabó, the head of the Institute's party organization. They continuously worked with materials of 1956 since the time of the events. As a consequence, in their particular milieu, they did not read these documents as mediators of *revisionist views*.

The colleagues of the Institute demonstrated that they did not believe at all that the compilation could make the party fall apart. There was another type of political purpose behind the publication, which was true to the professional goals of party historiography. They

believed that the party leaders by learning the documents could engage with the idea of the *counterrevolution* more directly. However, the real problem was not that the compilation was *revisionist* in political terms *per se*, but that the documents in the reading of the Politburo members recalled the crisis of the party in an unexpectedly tangible manner.

2.5. Party historiography misunderstood: the clash of professional and political claims in the context of memories

According to the minutes of the debate held on the 2nd September 1958²¹⁰, the representatives of the Institute do not pretend naivety about the political stakes in their work, but they make their considerations explicit to prove their correct intentions.

There are two basic units in the session. In the first part, the speakers are those, who have certain responsibility for the compilation. In the second part, the Politburo members dominate the debate. Importantly enough, the colleagues of the Institute are self-critical only to a certain degree, even Kálmán and Betlen, who stand in front of the “judges” of the Politburo for the second time within few months. In return, some of the Politburo members vehemently react.

The entire session starts with Dezső Nemes’s speech, which identifies the compilation as a product of an academic approach. He asserts that the party’s *daily struggle* is always more important than *academic work*, which might contradict the party’s current purposes. The fault of the Institute’s leadership was that they did not turn down the project when they saw it cannot be in accordance with the political agenda.

²¹⁰ In the session, the followings were definitely present: Dezső Nemes, Endre Kálmán, Éva Szabó, Oszkár Betlen, Imre Győri, György Aczél, György Marosán, Antal Apró, Ferenc Münnich, Jenő Fock, Károly Kiss, and maybe from the Institute Bálint Szabó too. Jegyzőkönyv 1., 7.

Nemes's "introduction" reveals already that party historians still wanted to take the chance given by the 20th congress of the Soviet party to practice the critical function in the party. The compilation was an experiment with the revealing effect of the authentic documents on the party members' mind. In party historiography, the most important field was the analysis of contemporary history, which directly effects the party's politics.²¹¹ The documents signified here a new or a newly articulated information on the recent past that lets also the current party be seen from hidden viewpoints. Only the highest functionaries could get such delicate materials from the party historians, who are instrumental in making this knowledge accessible for them. This is the way how party historiography obtains a "critical function" in the party's political mechanism.

The compilation of authentic documents could be the closest to an academic narrative in the genre of party history, because they still do not go through a Marxist-Leninist interpretation. Consequently, documentary compilations should either manipulate the materials in order to form evidence for a demanding political narrative, or if they were published with academic care, the documents were able to compose a narrative that overwrites the other. Documents attributed an effect of factuality, which could eliminate ideological constructions of party history even in the party's inner circle.

The Politburo's reaction shows that the compilation of the counterrevolutionary sources was created with much less manipulation than what the narrative of the *counterrevolution* required. As a result, the documents easily made the events be read in sharp opposition to the political narrative laid down in party resolutions since 1956.²¹² In the eye of

²¹¹ See Éva Szabó's comment. Jegyzőkönyv 1., 43.

²¹² The documents were said to be in opposition to "what the party declared on the preparation and the organization of the counterrevolution"; but also to what the "Hungarian People's Court's Highest Council established as the grounds of the justification of the sentences in the trial of Imre Nagy and his company"; and even the "theses about the counterrevolution" declared by the party conference in June 1957. - Jelentés és javaslat a Politikai Bizottságnak. Biszku Béla, Nemes Dezső, Aczél György, Szirmai István. 27th August 1958. MNL OL M-KS 288/5/93. 144.

the party leaders, the composition in this form demonstrated destructive party-behavior of the Institute's collective and active resistance to what the post-revolutionary situation demanded from this a party-organ.

Even though Kálmán performs stronger self-criticism since his position in the Institute is more political and less professional, he also refuses Nemes's accusation that the Institute became *seceded* from the party's *daily politics*. He claims that the documents produced either by the enemy or by the leadership back then, could not *mirror* the party's current evaluation on the events. Accordingly, the political problem was coded in the idea of the publication of these sources. This argument brings forward the responsibility of the Secretariat, where the proposal for such a publication was accepted. The Politburo did not care much about the director's excuses.²¹³

While it seems that it is impossible to read the documents for the party's good, there is another kind of usage of the documents. Éva Szabó insists on the *purpose* of these documents aiming a deeper comprehension of the *counterrevolution's* real nature:

"When I received the task my goal was to make clear that it had been a counterrevolution that had taken place from the of 23rd October to the of 4th November, it had gone through certain development and at the same time, organized forces had an effect on, participated in this counterrevolution and attacked the dictatorship of the proletariat, the power of the people. I thought the documents which were integrated in the materials and included revisionist views, or Imre Nagy's earlier speeches, which had been created and given on 23rd -24th -25th, will not confuse the people but make them think, and these will explain the situation which had emerged. I thought Imre Nagy's later speeches and the whole series of his speeches would show the continuity of his activity and his progression on the path towards betrayal. I thought it is manageable with the documents."²¹⁴

Accordingly, the publication was not against but for the party when it wanted to make the prominent party members reflect on the experiences. The volume served a practice

²¹³ Jegyzőkönyv 1., 47.

²¹⁴ Jegyzőkönyv 1., 44-45. Appendix 31.

of critical reading, when the reader's task was to rearrange the documents in their mind as a *counterrevolution*, so from the party's current perspective.

Éva Szabó during her speech does not step back from the usefulness of the compilation she prepared, but she undersigns that in all cases at the end it is the leadership who decides whether to use materials in the party's public. She asserts her ideological convictions had been solid during the entire process and she did not intend to cause *confusion*.²¹⁵ Éva Szabó points at the purpose of the volume that is to initiate the engagement of the highest party functionaries with the leadership. This was her reading of the compilation, while others said, they had been hesitating about the message of the compilation.²¹⁶

Oszkár Betlen, who joined the work only later, tries to defend the volume by listing some concrete considerations, which motivated the publication to be edited. The publication as a raw material aimed to be at hand for the highest functionaries to create new narratives of propaganda, to interpret the sources by means of agitation. Consequently, there is no sense in searching for the party's stand in them, since they demand an interpretative context, which was going to be given by a 50 page-long introduction. As Betlen said, they had even been hesitating whether it is etic from their side to *teach* in an introductory study the leading functionaries about the *real* content of the documents. However, they believed there were many circumstances to be explained which party historians "professionally understood". They could reflect appropriately how the enemy *masks* itself and why the communist party's behavior was still the best in such case.²¹⁷

²¹⁵ Jegyzőkönyv 1., 45.

²¹⁶ As the report of the committee said, Kálmán, Betlen and Bálint Szabó hesitated over the compilation. Jelentés és javaslat a Politikai Bizottságnak. Biszku Béla, Nemes Dezső, Aczél György, Szirmai István. 27th August 1958. MNL OL M-KS 288/5/93. 143.

²¹⁷ Jegyzőkönyv 1., 52.

There was certain undefined responsibility of the Department of Agitation and Propaganda in the emergence of the case. Imre Győri on behalf of the department tries to defend the representatives of the Institute by reflecting the circumstances, which pushed forward the publication in this form. He reinforced Éva Szabó's report that she did not have materials about Imre Nagy's *illegal activity*, because these were still at the Ministry of Interior as Győri said, and he also added that Szabó tried to get access to those materials.²¹⁸ He also stresses that the compilation was to be suited to the new volume of *Fehér könyvek* still under construction, as well as the materials of the Imre Nagy trial, which were also not available by then.²¹⁹ Consequently, the edition was still far from publication. He points at the particular responsibility of the publishing house Kossuth, which urged the start of the preparatory work because of technical reasons.

The members of the Politburo²²⁰ apart from Jenő Fock and István Friss, did not take into account the excuses. When they talked about the publication, they only saw in front of them the problematic documents, which reminded them for their own experience in October 1956. Antal Apró, György Marosán and Ferenc Münnich burst out in harsh criticism, moreover, with a tangible anger. Already by the speech of Apró, the tone of the discussion changes to an intimidating rhetoric:

“Damned bourgeois views about objectivity and historical authenticity, all should be thrown off. The publication of speeches and proclamations, about which it was later revealed what kind of intentions motivated them, could have caused serious confusion for the party. It must be clear. Aspiration for historical truth at any price could have sorely harmed our class-politics.”²²¹

²¹⁸ Jegyzőkönyv 1., 55-56.

²¹⁹ Jegyzőkönyv 1., 56.

²²⁰ János Kádár, Béla Biszku, Lajos Fehér, Gyula Kállai, Sándor Rónai, Miklós Somogyi were away.

²²¹ Jegyzőkönyv 1., 57. Appendix 32.

His anger brings up such ambiguous statements that *truth* is against the party's politics. It was meant to say that the *facts* that can be read out without the party's *Marxist-Leninist theory*, generate a political danger of academic party historiography.

His comrade, György Marosán gives a longer speech and goes harshly against the Institute. He incriminates the representatives that they seek for their own political positioning and they want to blacken personally Kádár. His speech evokes the party leaders' collective memory in defense of Kádár:

“Everything took place in this room, we all know, how all the things happened. Comrade Kádár does not have a single step, which would not be signed by all in the Politburo.”²²²

Marosán's memory became activated when looking around the same room where they had been arguing 2 years ago in a critical situation. Ferenc Münnich, while accusing the Institute's leadership for whitewashing themselves, also refers to one of the most sensitive issues in party history in a rhetorical question:

“What do you think, would it make benefit for the party if we wrote how comrade Kádár and me left the government and how we came back?”²²³

The story of Kádár's and Münnich's departure to Moscow²²⁴ is an archetype of the taboos in party history. The situation in which even this memory could be a reference, characterizes the status of the Institute within the party. These taboos were shared with no other than the party historians. This hidden knowledge made the Institute the “heart of the party”.

²²² Jegyzőkönyv 1., 58. Appendix 33.

²²³ Jegyzőkönyv 1., 60. Appendix 34.

²²⁴ Kádár's and Münnich's sudden visit made them turn radically against the democratic achievements of the revolutionary events. The moment spent in Moscow was the foundation of Kádár's legitimacy against the popular support of Imre Nagy. This was the most crucial chapter of the history of the HSWP, practically impossible to be told in any narratives. Yet it was still only one of the moments of the “trauma”, which took place in the party's “lifetime” back in 1956.

Seeing the reflections of the Politburo members, I consider the reopening of memory an important element of the conflict. The leaders were not willing to uncover the uncomfortable memories but to defend the counterrevolution's current paradigm. The memories of the party leaders were not private issues, but hidden factors of the historical party's common sense.

Concerning another type of voice in the debate, György Aczél changes to a professoral tone of speaking. He is also strictly against the compilation. Instead of accusation of the Institute for direct political attack, he uses the term 'seceded from the party' to describe the situation which had happened to the Institute. This phrase was a synonym of *sectarianism*. Accordingly, the Institute was depicted as a "revisionist sect" within the party, a collective, which maintained *revisionist* beliefs in segregation from the dominant party spheres.

Aczél's vision was similar to the way Kádár and Szirmai expressed the Institute's situation in January that year.²²⁵ That time, the Politburo members detected the Institute's split with the party not from the perspective of the *revisionists*, but from Réti's authoritarian leadership which attributed the Institute with a peculiar "holyness".

Aczél was sent on behalf of the Politburo to introduce the so-called "resolution" to the Institute's collective.²²⁶ In the meeting, the Politburo's disapproval of the Institute was emphasized, because of the ideological life could not be handled by the Institute's leadership. The inner *atmosphere* distinguished the Institute from the party's general normality, and

²²⁵ On this session, Aczél was not present.

²²⁶ At the end of the Politburo session, the committee's report was ordered to be rewritten by Dezső Nemes. It cannot be found in the Politburo materials today, although it is referred as a "resolution of the Politburo". We can learn the content of this document from a meeting in the Institute of Party History, held on 19th October 1958. - Jelentés a Politikai Bizottság határozatának ismertetéséről a Párttörténeti Intézet taggyűlésén. [Report on Presenting the Politburo's Resolution in the Meeting of the Institute of Party History] Aczél György, 30th September 1958. MNL OL M-KS 288/5/97-98. 156-161.

We also learn the content from some instructions of change in the records of the session. See Jegyzőkönyv 1.,4.

eventually the Politburo rightfully claimed that it effected the collective's work. The end product, the documentary compilation did not fit in the party's scope.

While the "resolution of the Politburo" reprimanded the collective as a whole, it was László Réti, the *sectarian* who came out with strong criticism of the Politburo's conclusion. Most importantly he said, he had not ever experienced during 30 years of party membership that party members were punished for a failure they only planned to commit.²²⁷

While Réti let criticism be heard, the members of the collective made self-criticism one by one, even those, who were not reprimanded personally.²²⁸ Réti was also called upon revision of his stand, which he refused to do. In return, Aczél's report demanded Réti's exclusion from the Institute, but more than that, he urged even the right of visit to be taken away from Réti.²²⁹ The collective announced in the next meeting that the Institute will "come over, do away with the still existing theoretical uncertainty, ideological confusion in the principled fight against objectivism".²³⁰ Again, *confusion* was *still* there since 1956.

The penalty for a publication that was not published can only be understood in the context of the post-revolutionary years. On the one hand, the stakes in the publication were not less than the party's discipline. In the post-revolutionary context, the solidity of the inner structure had been reconstructed from a thrown back position. The politically delicate

²²⁷ Jelentés a Politikai Bizottság határozatának ismertetéséről a Párttörténeti Intézet taggyűlésén. Aczél György, 30th September 1958. MNL OL M-KS 288/5/97-98. 157.

²²⁸ Aczél's report informs there had been 18 speeches in the meeting. Jelentés a Politikai Bizottság határozatának ismertetéséről a Párttörténeti Intézet taggyűlésén. Aczél György, 30th September 1958. MNL OL M-KS 288/5/97-98. 156.

For the collective self-criticism and criticism of the former "liberal leadership, which avoided debates", and the judgement over Réti's claims see the Institute's resolution in the following meeting. Határozat (Párttörténeti Intézet 1958. szeptember 19-i taggyűlése) [Resolution (Institutional Meeting in the Institute of Party History)] 26th September 1958. MNL OL M-KS 288/5/97-98.

²²⁹ Jelentés a Politikai Bizottság határozatának ismertetéséről a Párttörténeti Intézet taggyűlésén. Aczél György, 30th September 1958. MNL OL M-KS 288/5/97-98. 160.

²³⁰ Határozat (Párttörténeti Intézet 1958. szeptember 19-i taggyűlése) MNL OL M-KS 288/5/97-98. 162.

documents were seen as dangerous in the newly started process of regulating the people's mind.

According to the other reading of the compilation, on the one hand, it wanted to improve the leadership's inner legitimacy. The materials would have engaged the party's prominent members with the most prominent through a reconstruction of their experience of 1956. It was a mental exercise to convert what one perceives as *real* to the *historical reality* of Marxism-Leninism. The improvement of argumentative skills became timely in the post-Stalinist context, when from *class antagonism* the *party's struggle* shifted to the *ideological front*, and the followers of Marxism-Leninism had to *argue* and *convince* the retrograde ideologies. For limited use, even documents in an academic setting were imagined to be applicable for training the *consciousness* of the party members. However, it is telling about the Politburo's sensitivity about their own legitimacy that they were unable to take the compilation this way.

2.6. Conclusion

As a significant aspect of the genealogy of the HSWP's ideological regime, the heart of the party, the Institute of Party History was proved to be a "revisionist sect". Since the Institute's collective insisted on certain autonomy, their perception about the post-revolutionary party failed when the sharply different reading of the counterrevolutionary documents pointed out that the party historians did not realize the leadership's understanding of 1956.

The confrontation ended up with limitations of the discourse over the party's experience in 1956 even within the party's highest sphere. These limitations attributed 1956 a traumatic experience of the party, since its memory became unable to be recalled by any collective, not even in the party. The party lost a traditional instrument which was at hand to process the "trauma", to develop a non-dogmatic interpretation of the *experiences* and to generate the party leadership's legitimacy within the apparatus by more self-reflective means of self-justification.

The Politburo's conclusion was driven by fear that the documents could revitalize "confusion" in the party. This could have been a step back in time to the events of 1956. The fear from the return was not just concerning consolidation practically, but refers to a mental boundary that could not be transgressed. If we accept these mental motivations in the solution of the case with the Institute of Party History, we can get closer to the party's real experience of 1956.

Final conclusions

Crises of the socialist regime's history can be characterized with a dire political need to rephrase the 'party' as a central notion of the regime's self-understanding. Such a politically delicate issue required particular care, for which the institutionalized party historiography could have been an instrument at hand. However, party history was so much central to the operation of the political leadership that it could not have been let out even to the party's experts in the apparatus.

By the time of destalinisation, the idea of the *collective leadership* was the central motive of the regime's renewal. The term signified the need for a "mental reconfiguration" in which first and foremost the party has to change and split up with the mentality developed inherently in the movement, especially in the Stalinist party of the post-war era. The idea was that unless the people recognize what had gone wrong by the time of the *cult of personality*, they still act the same way. The challenge was how to create the explanation, which was supposed to implement a new understanding of collectivism. The task brought the political role of intellectuals such as historians to the front.

In order to instrumentalize the transformation, it was high time to come out with a new, *factual* narrative of party history. In Hungarian party historiography the idea was welcomed, and the practitioners even thought further to their collective assistance to the party leadership. For the sake of the *party line's* constant update, some of them claimed a permanent, critical function on the basis of autonomy of a *scientific party historiography* that embrace some elements of academic research.

In Hungary, destalinisation amounted to a political crisis of the one-party system. The revolutionary events by October 1956 had a genuine characteristic: the communist party's disintegration. Retrospectively, according to the statement that the events signified a

counterrevolution, the party's reconstruction in the days of the multi-party system had been full of miscalculations. The HSWP had embraced the *democratic achievements* until the conditions were installed to start constructing legitimacy for the one-party system. The party's authentic experience of the revolutionary days proved to be impossible to recall even 1-2 years later.

However, it was not self-evident in the highest sphere of the apparatus. While the "grand narrative" of national history had been reframed from the perspective of the events of 1956 as *counterrevolution* and eventually it proved to be paradigmatic for the entire Kádár regime on a social scale, the construction of the legitimacy within the apparatus had to follow a different pattern, which was supposed to be the logic of party history.

The challenging task of party historiography was how to bring together the *facts* inscribed in historical documents and fragments of memory of October-November 1956 with the HSWP's political claims established basically in December that year. Since party historiography changed orientation from *propaganda* to *science* in the course of destalinisation, the first, post-revolutionary attempt, a compilation of the counterrevolutionary documents could not satisfy the party leadership, who immediately detected threat to the establishment in such a realistic narrative.

The Politburo recoiled of the interpretation by means of party historiography in 1958 and the case projected the HSWP's dogmatic understanding of 1956 for the following era. The regulation of party historiography in the case of the documentary compilation turned down the initiative of destalinisation to convert party historiography into a structural component of the party's reconfiguration, even though a "mental recovery" was even timelier after the party's institutional crisis caused by the *ideological turmoil* of the revolutionary events. Party historiography's direct limitation points at the need of the power to keep the *truth* an exclusive knowledge of the leaders.

Appendix: Original Hungarian texts of quotations

2. Chapter

1.

„Propagandánk az utóbbi tizenhét esztendő folyamán főként a párttörténet rövid tanfolyama volt. Pártunk dicső története a jövőben is a kádernyelés egyik legfontosabb eszköze kell hogy legyen. Ezért meg kell írni a párttörténet népszerű, történelmi tényekre támaszkodó, marxista tankönyvét, amely tudományosan általánosítja a párt harcának – a kommunizmusért vívott harcnak a világtörténelmi tapasztalatait, és amely a párt történetét napjainkig tárgyalja.”

2.

„Az intézet célkitűzése elsősorban a magyar munkásmozgalom történelmére és jelenére vonatkozó dokumentumanyagok rendszeres és tervszerű gyűjtése, rendezése, feldolgozása, és ezzel párhuzamosan a dokumentumanyag publikálása, a magyar munkásmozgalom harcos és hősi hagyományainak népszerűsítése, továbbá előmozdítása annak, hogy a magyar munkásmozgalom történetének gazdag tanulságai a jelen gyakorlatban felhasználásra kerüljenek és alkalmazást nyerjenek.”

3.

„(...) visszairányítása volt a felszabadulás utáni tapasztalatoknak a felszabadulás előtti párttörténethez. (*Általános felháborodás, közbeszólás*: Hallatlan, Milyen tapasztalatoknak?) Annak a tapasztalatnak, hogy dokumentumok állnak rendelkezésünkre, amelyek szerint ezek a vezetők árulók voltak (*közbeszólás*: Milyen dokumentumok? – Ki csinálta ezeket?) Akkor ezek a dokumentumok álltak rendelkezésünkre. Én nem csináltam egyiket sem. (*Derűtlenség*.) (*Közbeszólás*: Ha holnap hamisítanak, akkor mi lesz?) Lehet, hogy az elvtársnőnek van egy csallhatatlan módszere arra, hogy minden hamisítást azonnal fel tud ismerni, nekünk és valamennyiünknek ez nem áll rendelkezésünkre. Helytelen dolog volt a párttörténet kutatásában, hogy mi csak azokat a dokumentumokat olvashattuk, amelyek a mi rendelkezésünkre álltak és ezekből senki sem látta, hogy milyen képtelenségek vannak.”

4.

„Tizenhét éven át „Az SZK(b)P történetének rövid tanfolyama” volt a párttörténeti propaganda alapja. (...) elhallgat sok nehézséget, amellyel a pártnak meg kell küzdenie. (...) Nem kevés ténybeli tévedés is akad ebben a könyvben. A párttörténet rövid tanfolyama helyesen mondja, hogy a marxizmus nem dogmák gyűjteménye, nem katekizmus, hanem élő, fejlődő tanítás. Ámde magának a „Rövid tanfolyamnak” minden egyes tételét is holt dogmává változtatták. E népszerű tankönyvhöz „idomultak” a tudományos művek (...) A párttörténészek abbahagyták az új tények gyűjtését és összefoglalását. Kétségbe vonták, hogy a levéltári anyagoknak mint történeti forrásoknak jelentőségük lehet, de a legtöbb ilyen dokumentumhoz nem is fértek hozzá a kutatók. Egyáltalán nem volt párttörténeti forráskutatás. Feleslegesnek, sőt, elítélendőnek tartották új források keresését és kritikáját. (...) A párttörténeti kutatómunka elvesztette tudományos jellegét.”

5.

„A párt gyakorlati tapasztalatokra támaszkodva határozta meg, s a tapasztalatokat általánosítva lényegesen módosította politikáját. (...) Meg kell mutatni, hogyan jelölte ki a párt a gyakorlati tapasztalatok általánosítása alapján a szocialista építés útját.”

6.

„A szovjet történészek a XX. pártkongresszus történelmi jelentőségű határozatainak megfelelően átszervezik a munkájukat. (...) A megérett kérdések helyes megoldását elsősorban a történészek közös erőfeszítései, a szabad véleménycsere, az alkotó viták, és a komoly tudományos kutatások teszik lehetővé. Bátrabban kell hozzáfognunk új módon dolgozni, s elsöpörni minden akadályt a tudományos alkotómunka útjából.”

7.

„Amikor Hruscsov elvtárs azt mondta, lehetséges háború nélkül is előre menni, akkor nagy és megtisztelő feladat áll a történészek előtt is, mert munkájukkal olyan színvonalra kell emelni a történettudományt, hogy azzal meghódítsuk más országokban élő tudósok értelmét is. Úgy gondolom, hogy azt a folyamatot, amely megindult, nemcsak azért nem lehet feltartóztatni, mert nálunk is megvannak az erői, és ezek élére a pártnak kell állnia és a párt áll is, de ezt a nemzetközi helyzet egésze is sürgeti, és az a központi kérdés, amelyet a béke megvédése kérdésének nevezünk.”

8.

„Úgy gondolom, hogy a marxizmus-leninizmus alapján állva szükségképp állást foglalunk, amikor témát választunk, bizonyos elképzelésünk van arról a témáról, nem állunk a polgári tudomány anarchisztikus álláspontján, hogy mindent elfelejtünk, amikor a témához hozzáfogunk, és ennek alapján dolgozzuk ki nézeteinket. A marxizmus álláspontján állunk, de azon túlmenően, ha a tények az előzetes ítéletet módosítják, akkor ezt ne a tények szenvedjék meg, mint ez az elmúlt években történt...”

9.

“(...) konfliktusokon keresztül fejlődünk, és azokon keresztül válunk igaz emberekké, és válik a párt is mind nagyobbá. A baj a múltban nem az volt, hogy ezeket a konfliktusokat megmutattuk, hanem éppen ellenkezőleg az, hogy kiiktattuk, nem mutattuk meg a nehézségeket, pedig ezek nevelik a pártot, a munkásosztályt, teremtenek tiszteletet és becsületet a pártnak.”

10.

“Engedjék meg, hogy én az itteni vita során felmerült sok kérdés közül csak egy kérdéshez, a magyar párttörténetírás problémájához szóljak hozzá. Már mások is rámutattak arra, hogy ezzel kapcsolatban természetesen nem egy részletkérdésről van szó, mert hiszen az, hogy a magyar párttörténetet hogyan és milyen módszerrel írják, milyen szemlélettel művelik, ez kihat a magyar történetírás egészére, és különösképpen kihat, szinte meghatározza a legújabbkori magyar történetírás sorsát.”

11.

„A XX. kongresszus és különösen zárt ülésének nyilvánosságra kerülése ezért igen felszabadító hatású. A XX. kongresszuson néven nevezték a személyi kultuszt, ezzel kapcsolatban Sztálin egy sor tételéről kimutatták, hogy hibás volt. Ez volt az az esemény, amely konkrét csapást mért a dogmatizmusra, amely világviszonylatban a nemzetközi kommunista mozgalomban felszabadító erővel hatott, és ez a felszabadító erő érződik a mi vitáinkon...”

12.

„(...) a *tudomány* feladata más, mint az *agitáció feladata*, és ebből a szempontból egész szemléletmódunkban *gyökeres* fordulatot kell végrehajtani (...) ahogy ezt a Szovjetunióban is teszik az elvtársak. A Voproszi Isztorii vezércikkében például arról írnak, hogy új módon

kell dolgozni, hogy félre kell seperni minden akadályt a tudomány útjából. Ilyen fő akadály volt a személyi kultusz.”

13.

„Az igazi tudomány a tények tisztelete és nem egyes vezetők tisztelete. A proletariátus érdekéről mindig azt tanítottuk, hogy az a teljes igazság és ebben van a marxizmus ereje. Mi mégis nagyon sokszor méricskeltük, szabad-e egy dokumentumot nyilvánosságra hozni, úgy fogtuk fel, hogy a párt érdeke egybeesik egyes személyek érdekével. Ezzel függött össze a pártosság, a pártyszerűség értelmének eltorzulása.”

14.

„Eddig a párttörténetírást elsősorban, sőt talán kizárólag a pártpropaganda és a pártagitáció részének, ágának tekintettük. Munkánkban nem utolsósorban éppen ebből következtek a konjunkturista ferdtételek. A párttörténet-oktatás természetesen része és fontos része a pártpropagandának, de az összefüggés a párttörténetírás és a párt gyakorlati tevékenysége között elsődlegesen nem itt van. A párttörténetírás tudomány, vagy azzá kell fejlesztenünk, olyan tudomány, amely a munkásmozgalom tapasztalatait általánosítja. A párttörténet, mint tudomány nem lehet egyszerűen csak a pártpropaganda része, már kidolgozott tételek történelmi alátámasztója, hanem feltárhat olyan törvényszerűségeket is, amelyek adnak némi újat a pártvezetésnek is és nincsenek még meg a pártpropagandában és agitációban, sőt azzal ideig-óráig kisebb-nagyobb ellentmondásban is lehetnek. Ha ezt tagadjuk, akkor a párttörténetnek, mint a régi nézeteket meghaladó, újat alkotó tudománynak a létezését tagadjuk.”

15.

“(…) fel kell vetni a párttörténész helyét az ideológiai munkában. Különösen fontos ez a felszabadulás utáni korszak történészei és párttörténészei számára, akik olyan korszakot kutatnak, amelynek közvetlen kihatása van a jelen és a jövő alakítására, amely korszak tapasztalatai nélkülözhetetlenek a párt tudományos politikájának kidolgozásához és a párt aktuális politikájának viteléhez. A kollektív vezetés jelenti a kollektív gondolkodást is, és ebben a kollektív gondolkodásban a marxista tudósnak igen fontos helye van. Nem mondhatunk le tehát arról, hogy a magunk szerény erőivel közreműködünk a párt kollektív gondolkodásának kialakításában.”

16.

“A kutatásnak, elemzésnek életbevágó fontosságú kérdései merülnek fel: mi volt az oka annak, hogy egy ember meglephetett egy egész pártot, a Szovjetunió Kommunista Pártját? Mik voltak a feltételei a kommunista párt belső fejlődésében, a pártélet szabályaiban, módszereiben, stb., amelyek ezt lehetővé tették?”

17.

“Mi, propagandisták valóban nem taníthattunk mást a múltban, s a jövőben sem taníthatunk mást sem az SZKP, sem a mi pártunk történetéről, mint amit az SZKP, illetve a mi pártunk Központi Vezetősége jóváhagy. Ezért van szükség új tankönyvre a Szovjetunióban és nálunk is, amit a párt illetékes szervei hagynak jóvá, és amely megszabja a pártoktatás irányát. De úgy gondolom, nekünk, történészeknek mint alkotó, tudományos munkát végző dolgozóknak, igenis az a feladatunk, hogy bátran újra és újra felvessünk olyan kérdéseket, amelyeket illetékes pártfórumok előzőleg szerintünk nem helyesen, nem eléggé a tényeknek megfelelően döntöttek el. Ilyen kérdés nagyon sok van.”

18.

“Ami dolgunk őrt állni a marxizmus-leninizmus vártáján. Azt gondolom, ez ma mindenekelőtt a XX. kongressus határozatai szellemének magyarországi érvényesítését jelenti.”

3. Chapter

19.

„(...) ugyanakkor, amikor meghirdettük a többpártrendszert, ugyanakkor semmivé tettük a kommunista pártot, mert proklamáltuk, hogy az MDP-vel semmi közösségünk nincs és teljesen új párt kell egy olyan légkörben. Meg kell mondanom saját indítóokaimat, amiért ebben még benne voltam. Ebben az időben magam személyesen igen erős hatása alá kerültem Nagy Imrééknek és nem is talán Nagy Imre személyének – aki ismeretem szerint nagyon befolyásolható ember -, mint inkább a környezetének. Tiszta örület volt, amit ezek műveltek ebben az időszakban. Többen el tudják mondani, hogyan született meg a határozat a párt likvidálásáról, hogy fogadta ezt Horváth Márton, Donáth és Lukács elvtárs. Ránk rohantak, huszadmagunkkal tárgyalunk, de az Elnökség több tagja nem volt ott. (...) Nehéz leírni azt a légkört, ami ott volt; azonnal kell meghirdetni a többpártrendszert, azonnal kell ezt csinálni, vagy azt, mert ha nem, akkor kitör a nemzeti háború a Szovjetunió ellen.”

20.

“Szerepelnek tervünkben ún. “népszerű-tudományos” kiadványok is, de helytelenítjük azt a törekvést, amely munkánkat elsősorban ezek irányába kívánja terelni, mert ez elvonná intézetünket tulajdonképpeni feladatától: a tudományos kutató és feldolgozó munkától. A múltban ez a törekvés igen erősen érezhető volt, s éppen ún. “népszerű-tudományos” kiadványaink miatt érte intézetünket a legtöbb jogos bírálat.”

21.

“A Párttörténeti Intézet fő feladata lesz az ellenforradalmi dokumentumok anyagainak feldolgozása, mégpedig ne úgy, hogy ezek a munkaközösségek anyagai legyenek, hanem az Intézet kiadványai, amelyért az Intézet teljes mértékben felelősséget vállal.”

22.

„... november 4-e után felmerült az a veszély, hogy bizonyos pártellenzéki csoportok meghódítják az intézetet és felhasználják a maguk ellenzéki munkája bázisaként. Ez akkor volt, amikor ott volt Horváth Márton, és köré, valamint Györffy köré csoportosult az Intézet munkatársainak többsége. Az ő befolyásuk alatt álltak, és az akkor igen éles harcban Réti és Kálmán elvtársak viszonylag kisebbségben voltak. Ebben a harcban volt Réti elvtársnak az a javaslata, hogy 9 embert el kell bocsátani. Rétivel szemben tényleg felhasználták az ő tényleges hibáit, merevségét, szubjektivizmusát. Réti elvtárs általános történeti felkészültsége gyenge, ő mint kommunista pártmunkás dolgozta be magát ide és ért el eredményeket. Volt tehát törekvés, hogy ezek a csoportok felhasználják az intézetet a maguk vonalának a vitelére.”

23.

“... gyakran vannak olyan dolgok, amik jobboldalinak tűnnek, holott egyáltalán nem azok. Pl. a következő dolog: a mi munkatársaink egy részében van egy komoly aggodalom – amit hol megmondanak, hol nem – hogy megint alá fogjuk rendelni az Intézet tudományos

munkáját bizonyos napi agitációs szükségletnek oly módon, hogy az a tudomány rovására megy. Itt valaki azt mondta, hogy az Intézet munkatársai ezen az alapon akarnak kibújni a párt politikájának támogatása alól. Fel kell azt tételezni, hogy ez nálunk komoly lelkiismereti kérdés. Nekik az elmúlt években rossz tapasztalatuk van. Ők elmondják: úgy látták, a párt érdeke, hogy hamisítsák a történelmet. Félnék, hogy most hasonló dolgokat fognak csinálni. Ez önmagában véve még nem egy rossz dolog! Tudomásul kell venni, hogy bizonyos tekintetben félnék a régi elvtársaktól – Kálmántól, Rétitől, tőlem – mert azt hiszik, ezek fogják megtestesíteni majd újra ezt a vonalat. Tudományos bizalmatlanság van ezekkel az elvtársakkal szemben. Amíg mi nem tudjuk megmagyarázni, hogy mennyire összeegyeztethető a párt politikájának mindennapi támogatása a szigorú tudományossággal, és nem kell a párt agitációs érdekeit háttérbe szorítani, mert így járunk el szigorúan tudományosan, addig lehetnek ilyen fenntartások. Ezek megégették már egyszer az újukat és félnék. Ez azonban nem jelenti, hogy ez fenntartás lenne bennük a mostani vezetéssel szemben. Ez alapján véve egészséges, mert ők az objektív marxista tudományt féltik.”

24.

"Amikor az elvtársak felvetik az Intézet munkájában a tudományos munka színvonalát és igénylik is ezt – a pártot féltik. Ezt nem szabad úgy megítélni, hogy ez objektivitásra¹ való törekvés az elvtársak részéről.”

25.

“Véleményem szerint nem várhatunk túl sokat az Intézettől, hogy a párt napi harcát támogassa, most 1958-ban agitációs és propaganda tevékenységgel. Miért? Azért, mert ott nagyon kevés az olyan ember, aki fenntartás nélkül támogatja a Központi Bizottság vonalát. Ez az én személyes meggyőződése. Ott vannak ilyenek és olyanok, jobboldaliak és baloldaliak is. Ha azt mondanám, van-e olyan, aki a párt fővonalával nem ért egyet ma, - azt hiszem, nincs ilyen. Biztos, hogy véleményük szerint is helyes a munkáshatalom megmentése, de akik fenntartás nélkül támogatják a párt vonalát, azok a kisebbséget jelentik. Ezt különböző észrevételekre alapozom. Milyen viszony van ott? Vannak olyanok, akik szerint a legnagyobb magyar teoretikus Nagy Imre. Vannak olyanok, akiknek szemében és gondolkodásában természetesen Rákosihoz, Gerőhöz képest a jelenlegi Központi Bizottság afféle esetleges társaság, törpék, akiknek egy részétől a jószándékot nem veszik el, iparkodó gyerekek is nagyjából, viszik a dolgot, amíg a rend helyreáll a pártban. Véleményem szerint Réti és Betlen elvtársak alapján így gondolkodnak. Amit ők leírtak, abban én hiszek, mert változott a véleményük, de ebben a levélben is benne van, hogy nem helyeselték első hallásra fellépésünket a Révai féle pozícióval szemben, amely káros pozíció volt. Na, hála istennek utána gondoltak és erre ők is rájöttek. Ha maguk segíteni akarnak a párt harcában, akkor erről a fölényes tanári, vállveregető viszonyról a Központi Bizottság felé mondjanak le. Nem muszáj persze, mert mi harcolunk egy és negyedéve anélkül, hogy nagyon támogatták volna egyesek a mi harcunkat.”

26.

“Azt hiszem, az elvtársaknak olyan gondolatuk van, hogy az Intézet külön világ, zárt, szent terület, mit keres itt Galambos és Sebestyén. Ezt a rossz szellemet ideje volna felszámolni.”

27.

“Ha a párttörténetírást mint tudományt akarjuk művelni, akkor nekünk azt is feladatunknak kell éreznünk, hogy segítsük a helyes, az objektív történelmi tények elmélyült elemzésén alapuló pártvezetés kialakítását.”

28.

„A kötetben a dokumentumok olyan összeállításban szerepelnek, hogy így az ellenforradalomról nyújtott kép nem reális. Nagyrészt az ellenforradalmat nem leleplező, hanem leplező, megtévesztő dokumentumokat és a tévedések dokumentumait tartalmazza. (...) Olyan dokumentumokat közöl, amelyek Nagy Imrét kommunistának, pártszerűnek, a népi hatalom hívének mutatják, de nem közli azokat a dokumentumokat, amelyek Nagy Imre illegális tevékenységét, álcázó taktikáját, erőszakos hatalomra törését bizonyítják. (...) Sok olyan dokumentum csoport van a kötetben, amely azt a látszatot kelti, hogy Nagy Imre széles tömegbázissal rendelkezett, és jelentős, népi tömegeket összefogó társadalmi szervek, intézmények és szervezetek nyomására cselekedett. (...) A közölni kívánt dokumentumok egy része alkalmas arra, hogy a párt központi vezetősége tagjainak az októberi napokban tanúsított magatartását rosszhiszeműen értelmezzék.”

29.

„Alkalmas lett volna arra, hogy dezorientálja, megzavarja a párt és állami funkcionáriusok középéréteit, bizalmatlanságot keltsen egyes vezetőkkel szemben...”

30.

„(...) az egész összeállítás olyan, hogy csak kárt okozhat a pártnak (...) ez a dokumentumkötet ilyen összeállításban alkalmas arra, hogy a pártvezetés egyik, másik tagjával szemben bizalmatlanságot terjesszen. Éppen ezért le kell vonni mindenképpen a tanúságot, és nem szabad megengedni, hogy ebből jobboldali elemek a maguk igazolását véljék kiolvasni. Én úgy látom, hogy ebben a Párttörténeti Intézetben úgynevezett eszmei nagytakarítást kell végezni.”

31.

“Mikor a feladatot megkaptam, nekem az volt a célom, világossá tegyem, október 23-tól November 4-ig ellenforradalom zajlott le, bizonyos fejlődésen ment keresztül és ugyanakkor ebben az ellenforradalomban szervezett erők hatottak, vettek részt és támadták a proletárdiktatúrát, a népi hatalmat. Úgy gondoltam, hogy az anyagokba bevett, revizionista nézeteket tartalmazó dokumentumok, vagy Nagy Imrének a korábban 23-24-25 között keletkezett és elmondott beszédei is nem megzavarni, hanem éppen gondolkodásra fogják késztetni az embereket, és megmagyarázni fogják azt a helyzetet, ami kialakult. Úgy gondoltam, Nagy Imrének a későbbi beszédei és egész beszédssorozata mutatni fogja, milyen láncolata van az ő tevékenységének és hogyan néz ki haladása az árulás útján. Úgy gondoltam, ezt a dokumentumokkal meg lehet oldani.”

32.

“Azt a rohadt polgári szemléletet, hogy tárgyilagosság és történeti hűség, le kell vetni. Olyan beszédek és nyilatkozatok is közölni, amelyekről később kitudódott, hogy milyen szándékból történtek, a pártnak komoly zavarokat okozott volna. Ezt világosan látni kell. A mindenáron igazságra törekvés a mi osztálypolitikánkat súlyosan sértette volna.”

33.

“Ebben a teremben zajlott le minden, tudjuk, hogyan történt egy csomó dolog. Kádár elvtársnak nincs egyetlen egy lépése sem, amit a Politikai Bizottságban mindenki ne szignálna.”

34.

„Mit gondolnak, használna a pártnak, hogy megírnánk, hogy Kádár elvtárs és én hogyan hagytuk el a kormányt, s hogyan jöttünk vissza?”

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