

Eszter Bartha:

„This Workers’ Hostel Lost Almost Every Bit of Added Value it had”: Workers’ hostels,  
Social Rights and Legitimization in Welfare Dictatorships<sup>1</sup>

### Abstract

*The study presents everyday life in East German and Hungarian workers’ hostels under state socialism and aims to contextualize this micro-historical examination in the wider socio-political context of the labor policy followed in the two countries. Because the bitter experience of forced modernization in both countries resulted in bringing improving living standards and consumer politics to the forefront, these regimes are referred to as “welfare dictatorships” in this paper. Although in the short term the paternalistic state was popular, in the long term it became obvious that the socialist industry could not come near the consumer standards of developed capitalist countries, in fact, it cannot even maintain the steady development of standards achieved in the 1970s.*

*Workers’ hostels reflected the two faces of the paternalistic state precisely. On one hand the state attempted to provide shelter for everyone, on the other hand, for a significant portion of workers, this shelter was provided in the form of workers’ hostels, which lacked minimal comforts. The latter was also noted by lower-level party officials during the period of the regime’s disintegration. Their reports began to contain increasingly sharp criticism, which not only shows the regime’s legitimization crisis, but also that the loss of its social support. By examining closely these reports, the paper also seeks to contribute to an emergent literature on how knowledge was produced under state socialism and how this knowledge was used to legitimate – or, on the contrary, to delegitimize the regime.*

Workers’ hostels have been a relatively understudied area of the social history of the 1970s.<sup>2</sup> (Kohut 2008; Horváth 2012: 218-231). In this paper – apart from presenting two case studies, one in the GDR and the other one in Hungary – I argue that the contemporary literature produced in connection with the social rights (or rather, the lack of social rights as many workers felt it, who had to spend years in these “temporary” accommodation) can offer an insight into the decline of trust in the so called welfare dictatorships (see Bartha 2013) and the crisis of their legitimacy. Thus, the decline of state socialism – from the perspective of labor – started well before the actual collapse of these regimes when even low-level functionaries formulated – at least in Hungary – a strong criticism of a socialism, which cannot afford to provide workers with minimal levels of housing comfort (Housing was provided, but comfort was not). I argue that this slow erosion of legitimacy went hand in hand with the economic weakening of the state socialist regimes.

I seek to offer a new perspective from three aspects. Firstly, I compare the East German experience with the Hungarian everyday life at the hostels as we can reconstruct it with the help of contemporary surveys, sociological studies and literature. I interrogate the question of how we can modify the thesis of the uniqueness of the Hungarian “goulasch socialism” in the

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<sup>2</sup> Kohut (2008) offers a discussion of Hungarian sources but lacks the comparative dimension. Horváth (2012: 218-231) looks at the everyday strategies of resistance; he, however, focuses on the most problematic hostels in Budapest in order to verify his thesis about the overall criminalization of state socialism. Bouvier (2002: 152-201), who offers a review of the social policy of the GDR, likewise focuses on the most neuralgic aspects of housing under Honecker and the failure to fulfil the original promise of providing adequate housing to all GDR citizens.

light of comparison, how the similarities and differences of the kind of socialism propagated in the two countries reflect in the everyday life and how the local conditions and opportunities shaped the practice of modernisation and the development of new industrial sectors. Secondly, I introduce archival sources, which have not yet been studied in the existing literature: in the Archive of Trade Unions we can find several reports written by low-level functionaries and cultural workers about the functioning and conditions of the workers' hostels in Budapest in 1985-86 in the framework of a cultural contest (*Munkásszállások a közművelődésért* – Workers' hostels for public education). I analyse the role and function of the unusually sharp criticism formulated in these documents and I argue that the appeal of the Party has been decreasing well before the political collapse of state socialism. I stress that the reports were written by party members or at least by people loyal to the regime, which renders the question all the more important: what does this critique tell us about the legitimacy of the regime? Thus, we are less interested in the everyday life at the workers' hostel than in the issue of legitimacy, more precisely, the conflict between the social reality of welfare dictatorships and the official Marxist-Leninist ideology, which Burawoy (1992) also documented in Hungary in the 1980s. Finally, I seek to interpret the loss of legitimacy that I document in this paper in the context of the history of welfare dictatorships.

### *Commuters and applicants for state owned flats: Workers' hostels in the GDR and Hungary*

During the period of state socialism, Hungary succeeded to precede the industrially more developed GDR in some areas. One of them is the standard-of-living policy, which Honecker called the “unity of economic and social policy” but its essence was the same: the constant increase of the standard of living, rising wages and a generous social policy, which could concretely demonstrate the superiority of socialism for the people. I called these regimes welfare dictatorships because they were based on the recognition that the dictatorship of the proletariat could not change either human needs or the ways of satisfying these needs: it could not train the new socialist man, who lives in and for the community and has higher cultural needs than his/her exploited counterpart in the capitalist countries (Bartha 2013).<sup>3</sup> This was not just an agitprop slogan at the dawn of the establishment of the workers' state: Kotkin's work of Magnitogorsk (Kotkin 1995) nicely demonstrates how the building of the new, socialist city went hand in hand with the training of a socialist community, whose language and thinking is adapted to the regime (which was at the time a positive expectation on behalf of Communists).

In Hungary the failure of this project was manifest in the 1956 revolution.<sup>4</sup> The new policy towards labor, which was founded with the decree of 1958 reflected the recognition that the workers' needs were the same as in the capitalist countries.<sup>5</sup> The new policy aimed to satisfy the material demands of the workers, promised the solution of housing (which was a great social problem in the capital) and the support of workers' education and culture. There was a strict party control over the execution of the resolution: large state enterprises and industrial districts sent regular reports about the condition of the working class to the centre. János Rainer M. (2011) argues that Kádár sought to win over all social strata; I, however, share the view of Földes (1989) that the large industrial working class enjoyed a privileged position among the strata, which the Party sought to pacify.

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<sup>3</sup> This was also the ideal of the Western European socialist parties of the interwar period.

<sup>4</sup> On the relationship between the Party and labor at the dawn of the revolution see Pittaway (2012).

<sup>5</sup> The decree on the conditions of the working class was accepted at the meeting of the Central Committee of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party (MSZMP) on 13 October 1958. See in more details Földes (1989), Pető (1992).

Erich Honecker succeeded Walter Ulbricht as Party secretary in 1971. The latter had to go partly because of his insistence of a policy of austerity (Ulbricht sought to develop the so called strategic sectors first, and then extend the welfare policy).<sup>6</sup> The workers were, however, reluctant to wait; in the last years of the reform we meet very sharp criticism even in the party documents – which will be repeated only at the time of the fall of Honecker’s state.<sup>7</sup> Economists warned Honecker of the danger of the increasing indebtedness but Honecker refused to increase the prices with the argument that the Polish “counter-revolutionary” demonstrations all started with an increase of prices.<sup>8</sup> The citation well demonstrates that the welfare dictatorships – in spite of their Communist rhetoric – based their legitimacy on the increase of consumption.

In the field of housing Honecker’s GDR could indeed boast of impressive results: during 20 years the government planned to build 3,5 million flats with the promise that housing is a basic social right that should be solved centrally. Even though flat problems were documented even in the 1980s<sup>9</sup>, the East German workers’ hostels indeed offered temporary accommodation for the applicants. In Hungary, in the light of the surveys conducted by the trade union, the majority of the workers, who lived in hostels were commuters, and only about one-fifth of the residents used the hostel as permanent accommodation.<sup>10</sup> Those, who did so were indeed people, who belonged to the financially and socially deprived groups of state socialism: the same survey found that “68% of the permanent residents have practically no savings”.<sup>11</sup> The survey also showed that these people could not count on the help of the state or the council in the solution of their housing problem. For them the only hope to leave the hostel was to find a partner, who had a flat.

Péter Szigeti’s survey of 1976 likewise found that the majority of the workers of construction industry, who lived at hostels, were commuters, who contended themselves with the discomfort of this type of housing in the hope that they can make more money in the capital than in their home town or village. Szigeti by no means idealizes everyday life at the hostels; he, for instance, gives the following description of a building complex at Mogyoródi út:

We can practically speak of storied barracks ... There is litter everywhere, the kitchen shed its plaster, the tables are not cleaned after use, even though many people eat here.<sup>12</sup>

We also learn that even these barracks are over-crowded, 8 people sleep in one room and there are 8 gas-cookers for 240 people but out of them 2-3 don’t function. There is only one cupboard, which no one uses because things get stolen from it.<sup>13</sup> There are frequent fights and a lot of drinking, and the trade union and the enterprise together cannot solve such a basic problem as the provision of hot water for bathing. Albeit there is a hostel committee, which is supposed to provide for the self-government, its main task is to “discipline the alcoholics”.<sup>14</sup> The question of why people volunteered to live under such circumstances tells us something not only about the everyday life of hostels but also about the conditions, which forced these

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<sup>6</sup> On the East German reform see: Keren (1978); Haupt-Requate (hrsg., 2004); Steiner (2004).

<sup>7</sup> For examples see Bartha (2013).

<sup>8</sup> Steiner (2004: 190).

<sup>9</sup> See Bouvier (2002: 152-201). It is worth noting that single people stood at the bottom of the waiting lists.

<sup>10</sup> Láng-Nyilas (1987: 65).

<sup>11</sup> Láng-Nyilas (1987: 68).

<sup>12</sup> Szigeti (1976: 6).

<sup>13</sup> Szigeti (1976: 3). Kohut (2008) also mentions that clothes have been stolen from the common bath of the hostels. For a comparison: in the East German sources there is no complaint of stealing.

<sup>14</sup> Szigeti (1976: 3).

people to commute. The urban residence and higher wages meant for many an upward social mobility – even together with the hostel.

The contrast between the urban and rural residence was observed also in the contemporary sociography – a mixed genre of literature, sociology and ethnography. The workers' hostel was presented in many Hungarian ethnographic writing not as a socialist achievement but as hotbed of deviance and criminality, which thanks to the primitive living conditions, prevents the adaptation to the urban culture, and it induces the residents to find comfort in prostitution, alcoholism, suicide or medicine (youth was considered to be a particularly endangered group). This perspective is characteristics of contemporary sociography where the urban culture was anyway understood as a threat to young girls' morality. This otherwise conservative message can be, however, interpreted as a sharp criticism of workers' hostel and also as a hidden (or coded) criticism of the regime, which could not cope with deviance in spite of its promise of a "normal and safe life" for everybody. Some examples in this direction are the sociography of Alíz Mátyus, where the hostel represents the lack of perspective for young girls, who therefore become victims of prostitution and drinking<sup>15</sup> or the writing of Katalin Sulyok and Mária Ember, where the girls – instead of forming a happy community – prevent each other's marriage and end up as alcoholic spinsters, who sleep with elderly men for a drink.<sup>16</sup> The workers' hostel is presented as a symbol of the lack of perspective and the dreary life conditions that the girls cannot escape:

I am sitting in one of the rooms of the factory workers' hostel. Five beds are standing in a row. Five iron bunk beds. The room is unfriendly, the walls are undecorated and lighting is provided by one poor electric bulb. The floor has been faded by the overuse of detergent.<sup>17</sup>

At the beginning the girls attempt to defend themselves against the alienating environment by forming a close-knit community<sup>18</sup> but at the end it turns out that even the community is destructive: it renders adaptation to the urban culture impossible and it also prevents the girls from getting married (which is their only chance – in the light of the sociography – to escape from the workers' hostel and live a normal life). The latter is a very conservative message indeed but it is a very frequent stereotype, which was characteristic of the petty bourgeois world of the Kádár regime (that an unmarried woman counts automatically as a social outcast). However, the sociography offers no perspective outside of the realm of a "good" marriage: the directress of the hostel ends up in a mental institute; the girls form an alliance to prevent the marriage of one member of the community but she eventually manages to get married; the rest of the girls become desperate spinsters, who would do everything for sex.<sup>19</sup> It is worth noting that female individualism does not play a role in the sociography: the girls either form a close community where the individual is subordinated to the group, or they get married. However, apart from the conservative message related to female emancipation, the sociography can be easily interpreted as a coded criticism of state socialism since it is not the people themselves, who are responsible for their failed lives but the authors blame the inhuman circumstances for the inhuman outcomes: strenuous, monotonous factory work (the girls are textile workers) and the miserable living conditions which are embodied in the

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<sup>15</sup> Mátyus (1977).

<sup>16</sup> Sulyok-Ember (1976).

<sup>17</sup> Sulyok-Ember (1976: 34).

<sup>18</sup> „We created our own community. And this is not like the brigade that we do it because we have to. We really do here what we want.” Sulyok-Ember (1976: 34).

<sup>19</sup> Sulyok-Ember (1976).

workers' hostel, which perfectly matches the desolate work environment. We don't need a great fantasy to read the sociography as sharp criticism of a regime, which boasted of emancipating the working class: monotonous work, impersonal and dreary environment, distorted human relations and the blank future as described by an escape to alcohol, suicide or mental illness. We should note here that this image appears in other contemporary fiction: I can mention here the famous novel entitled *Makra* by Ákos Kertész, where Makra, a diligent and honest worker escapes from the "workers' state" by committing suicide. While in Hungary it was recognized even in the official sociology that the workers' hostel was very far from the promised socialist paradise, in the GDR the letters of complaint fulfilled a similar function for this genre was very much cultivated by the Party as a means of communication between the political power and the "little man".<sup>20</sup> Whereas the letters of complaint often depicted a very gloomy picture of the petitioners' life, public criticism was beyond the tolerance of the rigid GDR regime.<sup>21</sup> I mention here a survey of Eberhard Nemitz conducted among young skilled workers, which showed that the East German youth had an overall positive attitude to socialism. However, the picture was not altogether rosy: young people would criticize the shortage of certain desired consumer goods, the ban to watch West German TV-channels and they thought that the anti West-German propaganda was excessive and lacked credit. Eventually Nemitz published his study upon his immigration to West Germany (Nemitz 1988).<sup>22</sup> Those, who attempted to criticize the GDR from within, had to reckon with harsher means of repression: the town of Jena and its famous enterprise Carl Zeiss were considered as relatively "liberal" places but East German liberalism even here had its limits. In 1978 one researcher group, which could even boast of the title of the "collective of socialist work" published a satirical carnival newspaper for internal use within their factory unit. The story had the least funny ending after a political "case" was created out of this publication because it included "provocative" articles like one bearing the title "Conversation in the pub", which "highly distorts the work of the academic-technical personnel of the VEB Carl Zeiss Jena and practically describes them as idlers" while from the Zeiss-Alphabet one could learn that "B = brothel, the last institution that Zeiss still misses; C = chattering, the main content of the meetings of the leadership; S = stupidity, the precondition of employment in our enterprise; S as *Scheinwerfer*<sup>23</sup> = too thin for reading, too thick for toilet-paper." The leader of the research center immediately recommended that the main editor of the publication, comrade J, who was a physicist, should be expelled from the party and dismissed from his job. The IKPKK<sup>24</sup> chairperson, however, took the side of the physicist: he "got off" with a strong reprimand and was transferred to model building where "he should prove himself worthy of the confidence of the party because he violated political watchfulness at a time when the class enemy increased its activity in the field of ideology." The report stressed that it was the IKPKK chairperson who intervened on behalf of the physicist and apart from him two colleagues who were graduates, one of them was a group leader, were also transferred because of their involvement in the case of the carnival publication.<sup>25</sup> The gives

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<sup>20</sup> The letters written to the television by the GDR citizens also give valuable insights into everyday life under Honecker. See: Merkel (hrsg., 2000).

<sup>21</sup> See e.g. Fulbrook (1995); Maier (1997); Lindenberger (hrsg., 1999).

<sup>22</sup> On the East German sociology see Laatz (1990). It is worth mentioning that in the last years of the Honecker regime there were concessions made also to Western sociologists. See, e.g. Niethammer et al. 1991.

<sup>23</sup> The title of the newspaper of the factory.

<sup>24</sup> IKPKK (Industriekreis-Parteikontrollkommission): control committee of the party organization of the factory

<sup>25</sup> ThStA, Rudolstadt, Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Gera. Nr. IV-D/4/13/85, IKPKK, Informationsberichte 17.02.1978.

one example of how the system created “enemies” and it also reveals why it would have been naive to expect that discontent at the grass-roots was expressed in public forums. Considering how far “political and ideological watchfulness” was demanded from the East German citizens (and in particular from the party members) one cannot escape wondering how sharply critical the tone of the workers’ correspondence was with the authorities – especially if we take into account that the workers were petitioning the omnipotent representatives of power. The following citation from a letter of complaint demonstrates not only that some workers’ hostels lacked minimal comfort even in the GDR (even though we find no outright complaining of stealing, which was a more frequent complaint in Hungary!<sup>26</sup>) but it also shows that the workers were very much conscious of their social rights, the enforcement of which they demanded (not asked!) from the otherwise feared authorities.

I have been working as a locksmith for sixteen months in the VEB Carl Zeiss Jena. I live now in block 86/87 in the hope that I would eventually get a one-room flat where I could move in with my girlfriend, for whom I came here to work. I was told that I would get a flat after a year. Therefore I kept on waiting patiently even though life in the hostel cannot be described as pleasant. The toilets and washing facilities are in a very bad condition or they are altogether unfit for use. I put up with all the inconvenience and lack of comfort because at least my individual freedom was not limited. But for a few weeks members of the security personnel of the factory have been sitting at the entrance, and when one enters, one immediately gets the impression that it is a boarding school or a barracks. I feel an immediate attack on my personal freedom. The requirement to register guests annoys my girlfriend and friends who visit me here. At 10 pm every visitor has to leave the hostel and sometimes visits are denied in the absence of an identification card. This applies also to the weekends when we, young people would like to spend more time together. Not even an extra ten minutes can be arranged with the security staff. *One is constantly controlled here as soon as one enters the hostel. The police also regularly patrol the neighborhood, which makes one feel like a common criminal. Sometimes the policemen quietly creep from door to door, and they eavesdrop on people.*<sup>27</sup> I have come to Jena to build an independent life, which is impossible under these circumstances. Only a flat could give me prospects. I spend the whole year in Jena and I can only travel home for a couple of days, three times in a year. Therefore this small room with the many orders and prohibitions and a real jailer is, after all, my main residence. I think that 23-year-old people have a right to expect something better than this.<sup>28</sup>

Even Hungarian cultural workers criticized the strict control at the entrance of the hostels and the ban on receiving guests in the evening (when the workers would have time for social life). The criticism in the more liberal Hungary appeared not only in the reports of the cultural workers, which had few readers but also in the contemporary professional literature. “The sexual misery of the workers’ hostels is shocking” – we can read in the introduction of a publication of 1980 entitled *Szállás, otthon* (Accommodation, home), which was targeted at a wider audience.<sup>29</sup> The author openly took the side of the young people condemned to “sexual misery” instead of a moral preaching or supporting the hostels’ strict house rules:

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<sup>26</sup> See also Kohut (2008: 65).

<sup>27</sup> Stress is mine.

<sup>28</sup> UACZ, VA 933, Eingabe zur schlechten Unterbringung in der AWU, 09.03.1974.

<sup>29</sup> Veres (1980: 23).

Under these circumstances, young people are pushed to live their most intimate and most private life publicly at the banks of the river Danube and they even risk of getting penalized by the police.<sup>30</sup>

We have to note that while “loose morals” and “sexual freedom” were frequent targets of attack of the newspapers of workers’ hostels and trade union functionaries, here we can read a relatively “liberal” call for the recognition of the right of the young people to a normal sexual life and in general, for a life free of political or other control – exactly what the young East German worker missed from Honecker’s state. While the writing of the letter required certain courage, we have to take into account that precisely the social right guaranteed in the welfare dictatorships strengthened the author’s situation and consciousness since it is highly unlikely that he intended to provoke the authorities, who could have helped to solve his housing problem. As the letter shows, GDR citizens were very much conscious of their social rights – and this reinforces my point that the self-legitimation of the regime (the workers’ state) was not only a political slogan but both the workers and the authorities took it seriously. This explains the sharply critical tone of the workers’ correspondence with the authorities, which would be otherwise unexplainable and irrational in a “police state” – as the GDR is depicted in the mainstream social science.

In the more liberal Hungary sociologists, cultural workers and even low-level party functionaries assumed the role of mediating between the political power and the “little man”. Following the lead of Iván Vitányi, one can demonstrate a reformist wing among the cultural workers, who boasted of reading Western literature and referring to Western paradigms in their reports. One can, indeed, argue that the “Westernization” of Hungarian sociology alongside the loss of credit of the Marxist ideology started well before the actual collapse of state socialism. Whereas both in the GDR and Hungary we can find several complaints about the lack of comfort of the hostels and the unsociable nature of some roommates, in the Hungarian reports of cultural workers we can observe the frequent stressing of alienation and atomization, which are associated with the “primitive” hostel life. Since in the reports of 1985-86 many cultural workers refer to Western sociologists, we have to take into account that this discourse expressed a general intellectual disappointment with state socialism, and indeed, very often the study of deviant phenomena (such as alcoholism, prostitution or suicide) were themselves seen as part of a “dissident” intellectual culture. In any case, in the Hungarian literature it is a recurrent hypothesis that less material resources automatically result in a lack of human relations. According to the research of Péter Szigeti, “half of the Hungarians and one third of the Roma people have no friends at the hostel”<sup>31</sup> and it is remarkable that “few can count on the newly acquired friends in case of trouble”<sup>32</sup>. In the research of Katalin Láng and György Nyilas “the permanent residents of the hostels are lonely, and part of them cannot turn to anybody in case of bigger problems.”<sup>33</sup> I stress, however, that these authors operate with a normative concept of a community, whereas there can exist other communities who live according to different norms or possess different sets of values. It seems that even though they were disappointed with state socialism, cultural workers continued to believe that “organic” communities can be formed out of the atomized individuals provided that they share similar cultural values. Szigeti, for instance notes:

Out of the residents of this hostel many stand at a lower cultural level and they cannot appreciate the communal establishments. This is often expressed by the damaging of

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<sup>30</sup> Veres (1980: 23).

<sup>31</sup> Szigeti (1976:73).

<sup>32</sup> Szigeti (1976:73).

<sup>33</sup> Láng – Nyilas (1987: 69).

the furniture or other equipment. A further problem is that real, organic communities cannot be formed at the hostels because of the circumstances.<sup>34</sup>

The author adds that “it is shocking that cultural workers at the hostels cannot even cope with illiteracy”<sup>35</sup> (for a comparison: in the East German sources we can find no such complaint!), and he again gives a list of the deviant phenomena that are characteristic of the hostels (most notably alcoholism). However, the author failed to note that human relations can be formed not only in learning groups and evening schools but also in the TV-rooms (which the cultural workers mentioned with despise), pubs and discotheques. It is another question that the urban workers often looked down on the residents of the workers’ hostels and they were reluctant to make friends with them.<sup>36</sup> But we have to be aware of the fact that the residents of the hostels themselves did not form a united group: there were big differences between those, who often possessed a house somewhere in the countryside, and they chose to live at the hostels in the hope for higher wages and those, who would have been practically homeless without the hostels.<sup>37</sup> If we want to analyse the social composition of the residents of the hostels in Hungary, we cannot overlook these important differences in the social stratification within the hostels.

Whereas the lack of comfort of the hostels were frequently criticized both in the GDR and Hungary, complaints about the unsociable nature of some roommates shed light to one more important feature of the welfare dictatorships: that even “deviant” people had an inalienable right to the basic social provisions of the regime. As we will see, “deviant” behaviour existed also in the ideologically more rigid GDR (even though it was less tolerated than in Hungary).<sup>38</sup> The following letter of complaint to the chief director of Carl Zeiss was written by a young worker, who worked in three shifts, and whose patience was heavily tried by his new roommate (who had to move in because of his divorce):

I am a 26 year-old worker and I work on the three-shift system. I live in Neulobeda-West, block 10. My reason for writing is the following. At the beginning of this year a young man, Mr K<sup>39</sup> moved to our flat. He does not work in the VEB Carl Zeiss and he does not have a permanent job. He has, however, a hobby, he is a disc jockey. He stores his music equipment in the flat. He frequently comes home very late in the night with lots of other people who are very loud. The noise is really extreme in particular at weekends. There are sometimes as many as ten strange people sleeping in the flat. They often help themselves to my food and drink from the fridge, and they leave the bath and the kitchen in a filthy state. I have worked for ten years in VEB Carl Zeiss Jena on the three-shift system, which is very tiring, especially when one can’t sleep at home. I told to the managers of the hostel about the problem but it seems that they either don’t care or they can’t help with this problem. Therefore I would like to ask for

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<sup>34</sup> Szigeti (1976: 82).

<sup>35</sup> Szigeti (1976: 38),

<sup>36</sup> Bartha (2013) observed that there existed a bias against the rural workers, which were considered to be „backward” also within the Party.

<sup>37</sup> Horváth (2012) focuses only on the latter group without noting that it constituted only the smaller part of the residents.

<sup>38</sup> I mention here the example of a young worker called Matthias Domaschk, who founded a living community with his friends. Since they opposed the compulsory military service, had church connections, etc., eventually Matthias Domaschk was pushed to commit suicide and his friends immigrated to West Germany. *Thüringer Archiv für Zeitgeschichte "Matthias Domaschk"*, Jena F6 Friedengemeinschaft.

<sup>39</sup> The initial has been changed.

your help because this situation is getting on my nerves. I really need my rest so that I can concentrate on my work by the machine in the plant.<sup>40i</sup>

In this case we know the answer letter: investigators found that Mr K had married a woman who also worked in the Zeiss factory, and they received a one-room flat in a family hostel. The couple, however, broke up and Mr K was asked to relinquish the common flat, which he refused, arguing that he had nowhere to go. Then he received a room in the hostel of the petitioner. It turned out that Mr K was currently unemployed because he had resigned from Carl Zeiss declaring that he would earn his living by making music. Despite repeated warnings Mr K refused to change his lifestyle: "In March, after several complaints the managers of the hostel went to his room (he lay in bed and he did not make any effort to get out of bed) and they demanded that he should look for alternative accommodation, a new job and should respect house rules while he lives in the hostel. He does not pay his rent on time, and he had to be warned many times to behave himself. In May 1983 he was again asked to leave, but he answered that he considered it unthinkable."<sup>41</sup> The reply promised that there would be stricter enforcement of the house rules, but effectively management was as powerless in this case, as the hostel: the letter repeated that Mr K was allowed to stay in the hostel for as long as he had no alternative accommodation.

Let's recapitulate, what has happened here! The young man, Mr K obviously showed "deviant" features of behavior: no work, loud music, frequent partying, no respect for the authorities (he did not even bother to get out of the bed when the flat committee visited him!) and individual lifestyle. The petitioner, on the other hand, was a loyal and diligent worker, who even worked in three shifts and needed to rest after work. Still, the authorities were powerless since even the "deviant" young man had the right to a basic social provision such as housing. The case shows that despite the repressive climate in the GDR, people not only defiantly asserted their rights but these rights (among others the right to housing) were indeed strictly protected by law and by the *common understanding* of the authorities. Whereas the system undoubtedly was not the kind of socialism that Marx had envisaged, it *did* respect some important socialist achievements, and people, who "ran" the system were very much conscious of these social rights.

The story of Mr K is not unique in the GDR. There is evidence that the situation of single mothers received special consideration: a young woman turned to the chief manager with the complaint that she did not receive the one-room flat that the flat distribution committee had promised her, and the management of the hostel where she lived refused to store her furniture that she bought for the new flat: "Two weeks ago colleague Mrs P invited me for a discussion with the management of the hostel. She did not let me speak and explain the situation and she was totally reluctant to help me. She told me: »You can put your furniture on the street, that's your problem. By 30 September the room should be cleared«. It was not the first time that she spoke with me in this manner. I am no longer willing to deal with this colleague, and I really need a larger room for my furniture. I would like to ask for your support."<sup>41</sup> The letter was marked with the comment "Scandal!!!". The reply, unfortunately, has not survived but if the investigation proved the complaint to be true, Mrs P would have received a strong reprimand for her heartless words.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> UACZ, VA Nr.3742, Eingabe 09.06.1983.

<sup>41</sup> UACZ, VA Nr. 3742, Untersuchungsbericht zur Eingabe des Kolln. X, 24.6.1983.

<sup>42</sup> UACZ, VA Nr. 3453, Eingabe 23.09.1980.

While Bouvier describes at length what *was not* fulfilled from Honecker's flat program and which groups' housing problem remained unsolved,<sup>43</sup> it is also worth noting that the state socialist regime itself never claimed that the hostel provided "ideal" housing conditions; it was meant as a temporary solution for people, who would have otherwise nowhere to go. The inadequate conditions of the hostels were described at length by petitioners in the GDR and by cultural workers or ethnographers in Hungary. After the change of regimes it became a fashion to "discover" the deviances of state socialism and present them as novel findings; in the Hungarian case the "deviant" discourse was part and parcel of an intellectual climate, which became increasingly hostile firstly to official Marxism and secondly, the whole idea of socialism and Marxist thought. While it was widely recognized that the permanent residents of the hostels constituted a deprived social group,<sup>44</sup> it is worth asking: what would have happened to them without the hostels? (The answer was given after 1989 when hostels were dissolved or transformed into privately run enterprises: many indeed became homeless). While the GDR was undoubtedly more developed than Hungary (think of the frequent complaints of stealing in Hungary and the high ratio of illiterate residents!), the West German standard of living in general was higher than that of the GDR (where the functionaries endlessly "fought" for the sufficient provision of the people with consumer goods). An exclusive focus on the deprived groups under socialism is, however, biased, and will only end in the reproduction of Cold War stereotypes. We may as well stress that certain social rights and values were observed and respected by the functionaries of the regime as well as the central power – which highlights the essentially *socialist* features of the regime. Even the most deprived groups were entitled to a basic social provision such as housing. The lack of comfort and the overcrowded accommodation did not result in the "evil" nature of the regime; these were signs of the essential material *limits* of the welfare dictatorships. However, workers were well aware of the fact that they had the inalienable right to petition the authorities and *demand* (rather than ask for) basic social provisions. This explains the daring and sharply critical tone of the letters of complaint in a state, where even the publication of a harmless satirical newspaper could lead to severe repressive measures and the feared secret police constantly watched over the citizens. I return to the example of Mr K, who worked as a disc jockey. His depicted lifestyle was in sharp contrast with the working-class ideal of the regime and deviance was much less tolerated in the GDR than in Hungary where alternative cultures – in different frameworks depending on the period – could appear even in public. The young man was not even employed by the enterprise, he consistently violated the house rules and he even failed (or refused) to pay the rent. All these were not enough to expel him from the hostel because he had nowhere to go.

But I can also cite another example: that of a desperate family man, who consistently wrote letters of complaint to the chief director of the enterprise in order to solve the housing situation of his family:

I have lived for five years in an AWU<sup>45</sup> of the VEB Carl Zeiss. My daughter was born last year and since then three of us have been living in a room of 12 m<sup>2</sup>. I think our situation needs no further description. Since we were on the priority list of our plant, we were supposed to get a new flat in 1980. To our great disappointment, instead of the promised new flat we received an offer of a totally miserable, sleazy old, wet flat without a bath, a toilet or functioning wiring. Under no circumstances would I move to

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<sup>43</sup> Bouvier (2002: 152-201).

<sup>44</sup> Apart from the cited literature see Ferge (2010: 71), who argues that sociologists showed already at the end of the 1960s that there existed poverty in socialist Hungary.

<sup>45</sup> AWU (Arbeiterwohnunterkunft): workers' hostel

this flat with a small baby. What has happened to the flats that our plant received? I was told that out of the 84 flats, 59 were allocated according to the decisions of the management, not by the flat distribution committee. Why do they make priority lists then if the managers allocate the flats anyway and it is connections that matter, not the situation of the family concerned? I cannot at all understand that there are couples without babies who spend only some weeks in the AWU and then they immediately get a flat. Where is justice here?<sup>46</sup>

After he received the flat list of his plant, the angry family man turned to the manager with a new complaint:

I do not accept the reply to my former letter because my questions have been only partly or not at all answered. The list that I got confirms my main argument: flats are not allocated according to the social situation of people. Otherwise how can childless couples receive two-room flats while families with a child have to wait for years in the AWU? When I inquired about the concrete cases, the flat distribution committee was unable to justify these decisions. They referred to the "summary of criteria" but they could not be concrete about them. I was told that the age of the child was not important. For us who are concerned, it is, however, a crucial question: How long we have to live with our child under these miserable conditions? I expect a concrete answer to my question!<sup>47</sup>

The reply was characterized by the authoritarianism of the managing director, even though it was most probably written by one of his administrators:

In my answer to your repeated complaint I take the opportunity to explain to you once more the flat policy of the factory. According to the regulations of 1973 the factory has full responsibility for its employees with respect to housing. I have decided the following: First, every plant receives a flat contingent in each year. Second, the managers of the plants are fully responsible to me in this question. Third, there is a special contingent at my disposal so that I can personally solve special cadre problems or urgent social problems during the year. *I am fully aware of my responsibility, and my decisions are in line with the social political requirements of the Ninth Party Congress.*<sup>48</sup> I do not tolerate any deviation in this respect. My colleagues told you about the tense flat situation of the town. That's why it is all the more incomprehensible to me that you have refused two offers for old flats (a three-room flat in Mühlenstr. 41 and a two-room flat in Dornburger St. 131) because of the external toilet and the lack of a bath. I once more inform you that according to the urgency of your case your name will appear on the list of the next year. That said, I regard your complaint to be once and for all settled.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> UACZ, VA Nr. 3741, Eingabe 01.04.1980.

<sup>47</sup> UACZ, VA Nr. 3741, Eingabe 24.04.1980.

<sup>48</sup> Stres is mine.

<sup>49</sup> UACZ, VA Nr. 3741, Ihre erneute Eingabe vom 24.04.1980, 08. 05.1980.

The correspondence between the persistent petitioner and the chief manager does, in fact, prove the *opposite* of his argument: his social situation was, after all, taken into consideration. Further, the many checks in the system (flat distribution committees, priority lists, letters of complaint and the need to justify decisions) show that the social rights of people were, in fact, strongly protected, and that the applicants who were waiting for flats were all entitled to this benefit. It is, however, remarkable that the sharp criticisms of housing policy did not affect negatively the chances of the stubborn man: this suggests that petitioning also had the psychological function of venting passions, and the official bodies therefore tolerated the disrespectful language. I stress, once more the almost defensive tone of the statement “my decisions are in line with the social political requirements of the Ninth Party Congress”. As we have seen, even the otherwise widely feared chief director was subordinated to the social policy of the regime.

Amongst the many petitioners we can find an equally desperate mother, who also worked as a shop steward, and who turned to the Council of Ministers of the GDR with the following threat:

My husband is a technologist in the optical precision instruments' plant of VEB Carl Zeiss Jena. I work as a nurse at the women's clinic of the Friedrich Schiller University. We have lived for seven years in a small furnished room of the nurses' hostel. Since my childhood I have had lived in poor conditions: when I was six, my parents got divorced and my mother and I got one room in a house. This room was wet with mould fungus on the walls. It took my mother ten years to get a bigger flat. When I came to Jena, I lived for three years in a dormitory, where I had only a bed and a shelf that I could call my home. In 1977 I received a room of 9 m<sup>2</sup> with sloping walls. Half year later I got married and my husband moved in with me. We lived for three years in this room where we could only sleep on a couch because there was no room for a bed. Then we got a room of 12 m<sup>2</sup> and we could finally have a double bed. Last year we had a baby so right now three of us have to live under these miserable conditions. The last offer that we received was a two-room AWU-flat but I think that it is senseless to move from one AWU into another. I find it very unjust that after six years of waiting we can only get an AWU-flat and even this is too small. I hope that my family will get an adequate flat before the end of this year because *I have no more strength to live in this state with my child.*<sup>50 iii</sup>

The woman refused to appear in front of the committee because, according to her husband, she recognized that her letter contained incorrect and false statements. The husband himself did not know of the letter and he declared that he would have prevented its mailing:

He found the sentence »I have no strength to live in this state with my child« particularly shocking, and he could not easily accept it. He maintained, though, that the sentence had no political message, and his wife did not think of leaving the GDR.<sup>51</sup> The chairperson of the committee and another member visited the woman in her home where they were personally convinced of the bad living conditions of the family. The

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<sup>50</sup> UACZ, VA Nr. 4617, Eingabe an den Ministerrat der DDR, 14.03.1983; stress is mine,

<sup>51</sup> At that time it was possible to apply for the so called *Ausreiseantrag*, which enabled immigration to West Germany. The applicants were, however, considered to be the „traitors” of the regime, and they were heavily pressurized to renounce the application.

colleagues made it clear to her that her letter had a political message, particularly if one took into account that she was active in the trade union as a shop steward. They concluded that she just wanted to underline the urgency of her case for which she does not blame our state.<sup>52</sup>

It was, at any rate, stated that the letter was written because of an administrative mistake since the flat problem of the family had been already solved. In 1983 a single mother with a child received a three-room flat by mistake. This flat was then allocated to the family of the nurse while the single mother moved to a two-room flat. According to the report the problem was caused by the slow flow of information between the offices.<sup>53</sup> The case, however, reveals not only the extensive propaganda war between the two Germanies but it also shows that socialist officials were in fact attentive to the social problems of people.

There is evidence that some people used rather disrespectful manner during the personal discussions of their flat problem. A certain Miss R, for instance, refused two offers for old flats and another two for AWU-rooms because, "as she put it, the other tenants were »dirty pigs«. However, because of the tense flat situation in Jena many young people and mothers with children live in AWU, and one cannot describe these people as this.... After the members of the flat committee discussed the problem with Miss R, she answered that »it is bad enough that other colleagues accept everything and they don't dare to open their mouths«. She wanted to know whether we, the members of the flat committee had ever lived under similar conditions. She put this question to a 64-year-old comrade, who grew up under capitalism." The report ended with the statement that "even though the members of the committee are trying to help Miss R, they are not ready to deal with her problem only. She received four acceptable offers in two years that she declined. She would like to have a dream flat that we cannot offer to her at the moment. She said that she would make a new complaint."<sup>54</sup> It is quite remarkable that Miss R did not refrain from openly criticizing living conditions in the GDR in front of the flat committee. Despite the provocative conduct of Miss R, it was important for the committee to demonstrate that they did everything to help her. This again shows that the officials were expected to consider the social situation of people (even though the question of whether the 64-year-old comrade had ever lived in AWU was evidently held to be a negative political comment).

Within the framework of this paper I cannot make a systematic comparison of the East German and Hungarian housing conditions and possibilities. I would, however point out three important aspects, which came out of the however asymmetric comparison. Firstly, in the Hungarian case we can consider the extensive camp of the commuters as a specific group: they had to be contended with the workers' hostels not because they had no possession but because they could make more money in the capital than in their rural residence. In the research of Szigeti many respondents explicitly mentioned the support of their families as one reason of their choice of the hostel.<sup>55</sup> If we look at workers' wages in the survey conducted by Szigeti (1976) or Láng and Nyilas (1987), they do not support the one-sided thesis of the deprivation of this group. I would rather explain this through the so called status-inconsistency which we know from the research of Péter Róbert (1985) and Tamás Kolosi (1987), which was very much characteristic of Hungary: there is inconsistency between

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<sup>53</sup> UACZ, VA Nr. 4617, Untersuchungsbericht zur Staatsrat- und Ministerrats - Eingabe in der Wohnungsangelegenheit Frau X, 27.04.1983.

<sup>54</sup> UACZ, VA Nr. 934, Aussprache mit Kollegin R am 4.2.76.

<sup>55</sup> Szigeti (1976: 30).

several status indicators, e.g. between housing and income. But I can also refer to the consumer groups of Ágnes Utasi (1984), where consumption reveals similar inconsistencies in the middle groups (it is for instance characteristic that members of these groups acquire expensive durable consumer goods which they see as status symbols, e.g. a television or a motor bike, while consumption is very much restricted in other areas). Contemporary ethnographers likewise found that the acquisition of status symbols was an important goal for workers: they observed that today “it is not like in the 1950s”,<sup>56</sup> and young people spend their earnings on expensive tape recorders and other durable consumer goods instead of saving.<sup>57</sup> Láng and Nyilas (1987) speak of “consumer hedonists” (it is worth again noting the influence of Western sociology mainly with the classification!); the term suggests that this group could not be deprived in all dimensions.

The workers’ hostels undoubtedly gave accommodation also to people, who can be seen today as “social cases”: have-nots, who lived at the periphery of society and who had nowhere to go without the hostel.<sup>58</sup> It is a different issue that the idealist ideologists of socialism indeed expected deviant phenomena to be declining in the new regime; social outcasts or other “hoboes” were recommended to get communal support.<sup>59</sup> Today’s historians, however, should not evaluate the practice and opportunities of the welfare dictatorships according to the unreasonably high expectations of a socialist utopia, nor should they interpret the contemporary *Zeitgeist* in the present intellectual climate.<sup>60</sup> The fact that poverty existed in socialist Hungary was well known to sociologists and ethnographers some of whom published their discoveries. Workers’ hostels were considered to be necessary evil rather than socialist achievements by ethnographers, leaders of the hostels and even by cultural workers. This is supported by their reports and ironical observations such as the “joint effort of the trade union and enterprise was not sufficient to solve the provision of a hostel designed for 4,000 people with hot water”.<sup>61</sup> The criticism of the “sexual misery” of the hostels likewise suggests that functionaries were well aware of the inadequacy and discomfort of this type of housing. While, however, cultural workers often tended to assume that residents constituted a

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<sup>56</sup> The first half of the 1950s – the so called Rákosi era – was characterized by great poverty and a general shortage of consumer goods. On the relationship of the Party and the working class in this era see Pittaway (2012).

<sup>57</sup> Veres (1980: 27).

<sup>58</sup> An 1979 report of the workers’ hostels found that „the lifestyle, social attitudes and values of the residents of the workers’ hostels are decisively influenced by the environment and material conditions in which they live. *This is best shown by the fact that deviant behaviour forms at the hostels occur three-four times more frequently than the national average.* [Stress is in the original .] It would be important to consider how far the present ambiguous nature of the hostel – it is neither a hotel nor a dormitory – reinforces a deviant conduct.” The report adds that the researchers cooperate with the Department of Public Education of Eötvös Loránd University of Sciences. PIL XII. 14/8. 114. ő.e. 15. 1979. november 21.

<sup>59</sup> We can find several heroes and heroines in the Soviet literature, who were influenced by this somewhat naive ideology. I cite here Rybakov’s classical work, *Children of the Arbat*, which is partly autobiographical. The main hero of the novel can be seen as a role model of the socialist ideal of a community man. He, however, gets into conflict with the regime precisely because Stalinism in fact relies on a different type of human character.

<sup>60</sup> There is a globally distinguished Soviet literature in the 1920s, which reflects on the distance between the socialist ideal and the Soviet reality while *it does not question the ideal itself as a progressive ideology*. The immortal hero of Ilf and Petrov, Ostap Bender, who is in pursuit of elusive riches, does not oppose the human principles advocated by the new regime; it is not the socialist ideal itself which is ridiculed in the two novels (*The Twelve Chairs* and *The Little Golden Calf*), whose main hero is Bender but the power, which distorts the ideal. Even though Ilf and Petrov had different social agenda than Bulgakov, we should note that in the famous circus scene of *The Master and Margarita* Woland masked as the devil, reveals that in the Communist capital people are as much greedy as under capitalism and if we think of the special shops where one could buy only for gold or hard currency, even there remained differences in the distribution of consumer goods.

<sup>61</sup> Szigeti (1976: 82).

homogenous group, we have to add that many people had no plans to move to the capital.<sup>62</sup> Modernization theory, which gave a preference to the urban dwelling, or rather, associated it with a higher cultural level, undoubtedly influenced many cultural workers and functionaries but it is, however, an open question how many of the commuters desired this kind of mobility. We may assume that young people were more attracted by the city than middle aged men, who had left their families behind, but even within this group objectives and motivations could have varied: not everybody wished to live in a new block of flats, which was the most viable solution to the housing problem of those, who could rely on their savings.<sup>63</sup> We cannot, however, study the Hungarian workers' hostels without studying the commuters, and we always have to bear in mind that the real have-not constituted a minority among the residents of the hostels.

The second point that I stress is the fact that in the more developed GDR the hostels indeed functioned as temporary accommodation and people had a realistic chance to acquire newly built flats after they had spent some time at the AWU. Single people constituted here the most disadvantaged group because they stood at the bottom of the waiting lists (family, shift work and social activity were all factors that could shorten the waiting time).<sup>64</sup> Early marriage and child birth were often motivated by the desire of young people to acquire their first new home.<sup>65</sup> Peter Hübner (1995) argues that the social policy of the GDR centered on the enterprise; I would rather argue that the regime transferred social political tasks on the enterprises, which in the post-Fordist corporate enterprise culture are strictly separated from the realm of labor. The East German managers had to deal with the housing problem of the workers as part of their managerial duties but there were also cases when workers asked for help because of an alcoholic partner, adultery or an unsociable roommate. People in the GDR would not hesitate to *demand* the enforcement of their social rights; and the functionaries – even at the top level – had to demonstrate that they cared for the social wellbeing of the citizens. In that sense the letters of complaint and the whole system of petitioning – while it undoubtedly reinforced paternalism – reflected a mutual understanding (shared by workers and functionaries) that workers had an inalienable right to basic social provisions and these social rights were part and parcel of the official legitimating ideology of the regime.

This duality of the enterprise culture and social policy can be observed also in Hungary: while the reports openly discuss the social problems of the permanent residents of the hostels (alcoholism, suicide, drug-addiction, prostitution, higher level of criminality), they fail to ask the question: is it really the hostel that triggers all these deviances? I would rather argue that the enterprise was *socially* responsible for the workers and functionaries had to deal with social problems as part and parcel of their official duties. While I spoke at length of the lack of comfort of many “problematic” hostels, we should also consider the fact that without the hostel and the social policy of the enterprise, which employed (or rather, had to employ) even social “cases”, many of these people had simply nowhere to go and nothing to do with their lives. Under state socialism, people were entitled to a certain social minimum (including employment and housing!) – and as we have seen, it was rather the “objective difficulties” of

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<sup>62</sup> Szigeti (1976).

<sup>63</sup> The new blocks of flat were also frequently seen by sites of alienation and atomization. For instance in a novel by Ágnes Bálint entitled *Madárfürdő* (Birdbath) the alienated family moves from the capital to a village, where they meet organic communities and family relations are restored. In a novel by Endre Fejes entitled *A fiú, akinek angyalarca volt* (The boy with the face of an angel) the whole Kádarian society is penetrated by greediness, betrayal and selfishness. Everybody is alone, relations are not functioning and not even the money-grubbers are happy in the novel. The main hero escapes from society by committing suicide and the only positive way out is offered by a group of uncorrupted young people, who want to establish a living community.

<sup>64</sup> See the interviews conducted by Bartha (2013).

<sup>65</sup> See the interviews conducted by Bartha (2013).

a semi-peripheral country, which accounted for the inadequate provisions than the “evil” nature of the party functionaries.

Thirdly, and I consider this difference as an introduction to the next chapter, where I analyze the reports of cultural workers from the mid-1980s, whereas in the GDR the system of petitioning served as the main forum of criticism, in the more liberal Hungary, criticism of “actually existing” socialism has increasingly become part and parcel of a dissident intellectual discourse, which consciously relied on non-Marxist (or outright anti-Marxist) Western authors as references. While many sociographers undoubtedly believed in a more human-faced society, where people did not have to live at overcrowded workers’ hostels, lacking basic comfort and sometimes even hot water for a bath, disappointment with the Kádarian society slowly turned into a firm belief that socialism was to be blamed for the wide gap between ideology and social reality. Sociography undoubtedly had a rich anti-systemic tradition in Hungary (in the interwar period criticism was mainly targeted at the semi-feudal conditions of the country and rural poverty). The cited writings of Katalin Sulyok, Mária Ember and Aliz Mátyus highlight the essential contradiction between an ideal socialist society and the dreariness and hopelessness of the everyday life of the textile workers as embodied in the hostel. We should note that in spite of the fact that the authors were all female, a certain conservatism regarding the gender roles can be observed. Upward mobility for the girls is exclusively represented by marriage; failure to marry either induces them to prostitute themselves or they have to return to their rural residence, from which they sought to escape.<sup>66</sup> The lack of perspective as represented by the hostel undermined not only the official Marxist-Leninist ideology but also the legitimation of the welfare dictatorships. In Honecker’s state the extensive and intensive correspondence between the authorities and the citizens can be understood as a corrective mechanism: the citizens formulate a complaint, the authorities investigate the case and justice is restored thereby reinforcing the harmony between the power and the “masses”. However, those, who risked to say in public that the East German economy cannot compete with West Germany or criticized openly the regime were faced harsh repressive measures (enough to think of the “political case” created from the carnival newspaper!).<sup>67</sup> Silence led the regime to believe that it enjoys the support of the wide masses in those years when trust in the Party and the state was quickly diminishing. It is therefore illuminating to study a period when in political and economic liberalization Hungary preceded its neighbors – even the industrially and socially more developed GDR and Czechoslovakia.

#### *Critical discourse and public education: Decreasing legitimacy in the welfare dictatorships*

In what follows I introduce a group of sources, which have not been studied so far: these include the evaluating reports of cultural workers alongside reports of the visits of the workers’ hostels for the cultural contest *Munkásszállók a közművelődésért* (Workers’ hostels for public education) in 1985-86. I also seek to analyze the language of these reports and thereby contribute to an emerging discussion about knowledge production under state socialism. My main argument is that the discourse produced by the cultural workers became increasingly critical of the Kádarian society and expressed serious doubts about the main legitimating discourse of the welfare dictatorships, which relied on the ever increasing standard of living of the people. I go even further to argue that this discourse fit in with an overall dissident intellectual culture, which gradually undermined the legitimacy of the Kádár regime. When even low-level party functionaries started to share this critical discourse (or

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<sup>66</sup> Working-class girls are represented similarly in the American canon of the interwar period (e.g. in the novels of F. Scott Fitzgerald or Theodore Dreiser.) See also Bartha (2014).

<sup>67</sup> The *Antragstellers* also faced harsh repression.

wanted to demonstrate their belonging to the intelligentsia by reproducing discourses of atomization and deviance), this essentially brought to surface the deepening crisis of legitimacy.<sup>68</sup>

But let's see first the statistics! The first meeting about the public education of the workers' hostels of the capital was held in 1975. From 1980 we have the following data: 43% of the workers' hostels in Budapest was maintained by the State Construction Company (ÉSZV). 22,000 people lived in these hostels. The councils maintained 88 hostels with 9,000 residents. 92% of the residents of the Budapest hostels were men, and 87% were commuters (which shows that the have-nots indeed constituted a minority!).<sup>69</sup> We have to remember the frequent complaints of the cultural workers about the high ratio of illiteracy (we can find no similar complaints in the East German sources!!!): 35% of the men and 39% of the women, who lived at the hostels, did not finish primary school.<sup>70</sup>

In 1986 the following guidelines were given for the evaluation of the applicants for the contest:

The traditional forms of public education (films, lectures, entertaining festivals, contests, exhibitions) exist at almost all of the hostels of ÉSZV. There are, of course, opportunities beyond these "*conserve*" programs<sup>71</sup> (which serve as the basis for the evaluation of the work of cultural workers). It depends on the local circumstances, how much these opportunities can be exploited.<sup>72</sup>

The reports of the visits of the hostels, however, failed to be flattering. We can rather observe that the writers of the reports relied strongly on the rich critical tradition of Hungarian sociography. In most of the evaluation reports there are no attempts to pay lip service to the workers' hostel; it is depicted as the distressing symbol of a dreary working-class life, which gives little if any hope for an escape:

I have already written long comments about the ugly building of this hostel, which alongside other hostels of ÉSZV reminds one of the grey socialist realism of the 1950s: it is half way between a railway station and a monstrous cultural hall. The mere sight of this institution makes me feel distressed. One feels here completely lost; and the bareness and unfriendliness of the environment is not mitigated even by one more intimate room or club. Public life is restricted to the long queue before the canteen (where they cannot even bring their guests!). The canteen looks like a third-rate pub, where I spent some time and talked to a few people. It was full of Polish guest workers, soldiers, who were on leave from the neighboring barracks and residents of the hostel, who had already consumed an impressive amount of alcohol. In the long

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<sup>68</sup> For an illuminating discussion of legitimacy under state socialism see Pittaway (2012).

<sup>69</sup> PIL XII. 14/8. 115 ö.e. 5.

<sup>70</sup> We should note that this was not a very bad ratio: in one of the most developed parts of Hungary, Győr-Sopron county according to the surveys conducted in the Rába factory (which was considered to be a socialist model factory!) 24% of the total workforce did not finish primary school. GYML XXXV. 415/195/3. Pártbizottsági ülés jegyzőkönyve. Jelentés a munkásművelődés tapasztalatairól, helyzetéről és szerepéről, fejlesztésének feladatairól a Magyar Vagon- és Gépgyárban. Melléklet (MVG összes dolgozójának iskolai végzettség szerinti megoszlása korcsoportonként) 1977. július 6.

<sup>71</sup> Stress is mine.

<sup>72</sup> PIL XII. 14/8. 120 ö.e. 198. 1986. július.

corridors of the ground floor we can find the same climate: beer, cards, billiard, and in the distance some young people apathetically play ping pong. (Note that the fight against alcoholism occupies a prominent place in the cultural plan of the hostel).<sup>73</sup>

The same hostel – an ÉSZV hostel on Tejút street, in Csepel<sup>74</sup> - is described in a similar vein by another visitor:

We have not experienced any positive change in the hostel, which looks like the neighboring military barracks. Everything is long, large and dreary – corridor, canteen and the TV room nicknamed as the “club”. The only difference between the barracks and the hostel is that soldiers and the residents of the hostel are waiting for dinner in different queues. *It is, however, a big difference that whereas military service lasts one and half year, residents of the hostel spend decades at the hostels of Tejút, Bartók, Venyige, Könyves and Harmat...*<sup>75</sup>

I stress once more the vivid description of alienation and the lack of meaningful human relations in the reports: young people “apathetically” play ping pong; the only entertainment is to get drunk; the utter lack of organic communities and intimate space; the underlining of *temporariness and the tense feeling of being suspended* (note the comparison with the military barracks!). Home is associated with intimacy, private space, comfort, safety and stability. Here everything is described as just the opposite of a home. People feel essentially *insecure and unstable* in this environment; no wonder that they turn to drugs or alcohol. The desolate picture that the above author depicted of the hostels of Tejút, Bartók, Venyige, Könyves and Harmat is supported by another report of Venyige<sup>76</sup>, which today functions as a prison:

This hostel displays all forms of “deviance” that we can find at the workers’ hostels. High fluctuation (about 600 people are replaced in a year), high level of alcoholism (70% of the residents are Roma). 15-20 suicide attempts a year, 3-5 successful. People who are under police surveillance or have to go to prison from the hostel. Analphabetism, unfinished primary school. Polish and Yugoslavian guest workers, who don’t speak Hungarian, and therefore cannot communicate with the other residents. Two cultural workers have to deal with all of these problems and objective difficulties, who are completely ineffective because there are 2,400 residents.<sup>77</sup>

Another cultural worker wrote a long report of the alienation that he experienced at the same hostel (Venyige) in Kőbánya:

One feels like a prisoner at this hostel: huge halls, canteen, a monumental theatre hall, rambling corridor systems and a labyrinth of alcoves. In spite of the spacious halls, however, one has the feeling of being a rat in a psychological experiment: I am

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<sup>73</sup> PIL XII, 14/8, 120. ő.e. 12-13, 1986. február.

<sup>74</sup> A traditional working-class district in Budapest.

<sup>75</sup> PIL XII. 14/8, 120. ő.e. 29-30, 1986. október 8; stress is mine.

<sup>76</sup> Venyige was located in the working-class district of Kőbánya in Budapest.

<sup>77</sup> PIL XII. , 14/8, 120. ő.e. 43.44, 1986. február.

captivated by this modern prison, which is equipped with all illusion of comfort, who is desperately searching for the way out but I am always confronted with new and new walls.

How can one enter the office of the cultural workers of the hostel?

The first wall: the office is located in the living space of the residents so one needs a permission from the doorman to enter. Perhaps this explains that during our visit no one wanted to talk to the cultural workers. This was the hostel where I *felt the most relevant the axioms of alienation formulated by David Riesmann*.<sup>78</sup> The organization of cultural events and other programs is impersonal, routine-like, inflexible and fully alienated. The cultural workers have no living contact with the residents so all communication is impersonal. I remember no faces, just a grey mass of uniformized “patients”.

Youth club without a club leader: having visited the club room, I fully understood that no one visits it: it is a dreary little room with bare walls and some shabby-looking armchairs, which are in use in the waiting halls of railway stations, an empty TV-shelf, and some tables pushed together because there had been some conference here in the distant past, which required this effort... Not even one table cloth has been put on the tables. Why do we have to address this room as “club”? *Because it required a name for the official reports and this contest*.<sup>79</sup>

The hobby club of photography of the hostel is advertised by some indistinct photos, which are supposed to describe an unrecognizable Korean landscape. I could not understand – even after long contemplation – how this “visual propaganda” renders photography attractive in the eye of *people of Roma ethnicity (the favorite term of the cultural worker of the hostel!), who constitute 70% of the residents?*<sup>80</sup> My feeling is that this hobby club is a mere formality such as the other hobby clubs of photography of workers’ hostels.<sup>81</sup>

I cited the above reports at length to demonstrate that low-level functionaries (who wrote these reports) were well aware of the decreasing legitimacy of the welfare dictatorships and while writing their reports of the hostels, they in fact criticized the regime, which could not offer anything better for the workers. Workers’ hostels were frequently described as military “barracks”, where it was not only the dreary environment, the bunk beds, the lack of private space and private comfort that poisoned the life of the residents but also the constant surveillance of their lives and the lack of political freedom. There is an indirect message in the reports that under these circumstances one cannot even expect the formation of “organic” communities, which could have exerted a considerable influence from below to change things. Sociography thus becomes a critique of the regime (even if it reflects the conservatism of the cultural workers in other areas – see the underlined citation about the “people of Roma ethnicity” or the gender biases, which we will also discuss below!). Szigeti (1976: 4) also mentions with criticism that there are no meetings of the residents of the hostels and the main task of the hostels’ committee is to discipline the alcoholics. While researchers of the 1970s urged the formation of organic communities and the uplifting of the cultural level of the residents (e.g. fight against illiteracy), here we cannot see any progressive initiatives: neither

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<sup>78</sup> Stress is mine.

<sup>79</sup> Stress is mine.

<sup>80</sup> Stress is mine.

<sup>81</sup> PIL XII. 14/8, 120 ö.e. 111-114. 1986. április,

*there is an opportunity to improve the material circumstances of the hostels nor we can find attempts of democratization within the hostels.* Thus, the criticism of the hostels is translated into a more far-reaching critique of a malfunctioning regime, whose official Marxist-Leninist ideology has lost credit even in the eye of low level officials. The comment that “because it required a name for the official reports and this contest” apparently ridicules the formality of public education alongside the formality of official ideology (e.g. the comment on the hobby club of photography). There is a clear distance between the people and the Party as embodied by the cultural workers, and this alienation is described at length in the report cited at length. At the same time we should note that the author obviously wanted to stress that he was familiar with Western sociology (see the reference to David Riesmann!). Marxist classics have been replaced by Western sociologists in the vocabulary (and presumably library) of people, who constituted the cultural elite of the country (or at least claimed there a membership). The cited reports cannot be dismissed as “not typical”; in fact, we have several other accounts of hostel visits written by other officials, which reflect the same disappointment with the outdated Marxist-Leninist ideology of the regime:

In the past 25 years no one did anything to change the barrack-like atmosphere of the hostel, at least nothing indicates the presence of a cultural worker, who is committed to cultivate the living environment. Unfortunately, the “visual propaganda” (posters and other wall decorations), is equally outdated and unable to attract the attention of people (cultural lectures, which had been held ages ago, political advertisement covered by dust under the dirty glass windows, which no one reads and no one changes, etc.). While we visited the hostel, we had the impression that there is no living contact between the cultural worker and the residents, he, however, is busy producing administrative reports such as “brigade diaries” (!) or other “absolutely necessary” reports in the good old fashion of the 1950s and 1960s.<sup>82</sup>

The cultural worker of this hostel at Könyves Kálmán road, which is nicknamed as Könyves, gets the least flattering evaluation:

His ideas and concepts are completely confusing and unstructured. He proposes young people to visit cultural lectures at random, and his other plans are also unsystematic: visits to the zoo (!) get mixed with propaganda lectures, where he seeks to convince *the youth, who admires the West*,<sup>83</sup> to return to the “socialist” way of life. I raise a fully justified question: in this dreary, prison-like environment why should we blame the youth for harboring Western sympathies and dreams that they see in the Western movies? (*Note that guests cannot enter the hostel, further, at dawn police makes frequent raids on the residents while in the bare and undecorated TV-room we can read some congress speeches of 15 years ago about the nobility of physical work.*)<sup>84</sup>

The adjectives are repetitive (even though the reports were written by different persons!): dreary, bleak environment, lack of decoration, lack of any signs of domesticity and intimacy, whereas the police makes frequent raids on the residents to arrest the “uninvited” guest. It

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<sup>82</sup> PIL XII. 14/8, 120. ö.e. 93-94, 1985. október.

<sup>83</sup> Stress is mine,

<sup>84</sup> PIL XII. 14/8, 120. ö.e. 94-95, 1985. október; stress is mine.

seems that a whole language has been created, which transformed into an overall criticism of the welfare dictatorship, which could not provide welfare, only surveillance. As we have seen from the above, there are no perspectives of a future improvement of the conditions (in that sense it is worth observing the similarity with the literature exemplified by the sociography of Sulyok, Ember, and Mátyus!), “catching-up” development<sup>85</sup> (the promise of catching up with the consumer levels of the developed capitalist countries) turned to be a dead end and the “socialist way of life” is best associated with the “congress speeches of 15 years ago”, which have been covered with dust in the mausoleum of the working-class movements of the old left. The accounts of the hostel visits suggest that even low level officials, who had once loyally produced brigade diaries, and who belonged to the strata, who tried to make the regime function, perceived this crisis of legitimacy. Many of them reached the conclusion in the mid-1980s that the welfare dictatorships exhausted their resources and the official Marxism-Leninism is useless, in particular in the eye of young people.<sup>86</sup> I stress the citation “*the youth, who admires the West*”, which was indeed becoming a widespread phenomenon in the 1980s in Hungary – and also in the GDR.<sup>87</sup> It is another question that apart from the study of Western sociologists, not even those could propose a new, socialist perspective, who were sharply critical of the paternalism of the whole system:

Informal or intimate talks at the hostel have immediately come to an end, when officials appeared in the circle of the speakers. *I would compare the relationship between the cultural workers and the residents to that of a parent and a stupid kid. I was deeply annoyed by the paternalistic tone that the officials of the hostels used during their interaction with the residents.*<sup>88</sup>

During the talks with the cultural workers, it became clear that their application to the contest contains several untrue statements. The youth club has no leader – two cultural workers volunteered for this task but they are not so much interested so the club practically does not function. The hobby club of anti-alcoholics is at best formal; not even the club leader understands why the club should function.

The hobby clubs of readers, language learners and fishermen all failed. *Women’s club is organized today – with not much success. Self-organizing groups – in the opinion of cultural workers – cannot be formed.*<sup>89</sup> It is, however, worth noting that they stressed the importance of certain archaic hierarchical relations in some groups of Roma people (e.g. voivode).<sup>90</sup>

This again cannot be seen as a unique complaint: we can find the criticism in several reports that there is no intimate or close relationship between the residents and the cultural workers – this reinforced the frequent stressing of alienation (even though we don’t know the opinions of the residents!). It should be noted, though that the “Roma question” is a recurring topic of the reports, which suggests that Roma communities in fact existed (see the reference to the

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<sup>85</sup> On catching-up development and gender see: Susan Zimmermann (2010).

<sup>86</sup> The lack of credit of official Marxism-Leninism is also shown by another comment about the cultural worker of Harmat hostel: D. I. [the culture worker of Harmat hostel, the original initials have been changed] is enrolled at a crash course of Marxism-Leninism. Is this really what she needs? We should note that she was not admitted to the university – in spite of many trials. PIL XII. 14/8. 120. ö.e. 63-65. 1986. január.

<sup>87</sup> On the decreasing legitimacy of welfare dictatorships see Bartha (2013).

<sup>88</sup> Stress is mine.

<sup>89</sup> Stress is mine.

<sup>90</sup> Here: Roma leader.

voivode!) but the officials of the hostels were unable to cooperate with these communities.<sup>91</sup> The statement that below a certain cultural or material level “organic” communities cannot be formed, is even more illuminating. This level, was, at any rate, not provided in late socialist Hungary.<sup>92</sup> The following citation gives us illuminating insights into the “internal democracy” of the hostels (which was already criticized by Szigeti!):

In the building, which was built in the style of the 1950s, we listen to an endless tirade of the cultural worker about how one can apply the public education plan of ÉSZV to the hostels, and what opportunities are lost because of the centralization. One would need a remarkable creativity to transform the formality of this concept into living relations between officials and residents. *The leader of the hostel’s committee is contended with the things as they are because the members of the committee enjoy several privileges including a private TV in their rooms.*<sup>93</sup>

The citation nicely illustrates the system of “back doors” within the system: the members of the hostels’ committee enjoy unlawful privileges, which practically render them “yes-men” in the collective bargaining with the hostel’s management. We should also remember here the criticism of Szigeti, who argues, that the only noticeable act of the flat committee is the disciplining of the alcoholics. This is indeed a sad summary of the opportunities of the self-governance of the hostels (and it seems to reinforce the notion that below a certain cultural and material level we cannot speak of “organic” communities – a favorite term of cultural workers).

While I have already mentioned the gender bias (or outright conservatism) of sociographers such as Sulyok, Ember or Mátyus, where working-class girls can basically choose between prostitution (and moral decay) and a good marriage, cultural workers and officials were likewise not free of these biases. In this paper I cannot undertake an in-depth analysis of gender at the hostels; I only cite one example, which demonstrates this bias. The cultural worker of the women’s hostel at Fehérvári út is described as a role model of the profession; her highly positive evaluation is all the more striking in the light of the overall criticism of other cultural workers. At the hostel she found room for an athletic club, she sold books and theatre tickets for the residents, she organized an evening course for those, who wanted to finish primary school, and she strongly encouraged the girls to finish her missing studies during personal talk. The report describes her merits at length and he concludes with the argument that “*it is a remarkable achievement from a female cultural worker.*”<sup>94</sup> We get further details of the internal hierarchy of the various ethnic groups of women, who lived at the hostel:

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<sup>91</sup> At the workers’ hostel at Bartók Béla street, for example, a beat music club was formed (mainly out of Roma youth) but eventually, there was a conflict between the members of this club and other young people (the club was invited to the festivals of ÉSZV, while other young people were not admitted to these events), which resulted in the dissolution of the Roma beat club. PIL. XII. 14/8. 119.ő.e. 157-158. 1986. május 21.

<sup>92</sup> It is worth mentioning that after the change of regimes we can observe a crucial difference in this respect between the former GDR and Hungary: whereas in East Germany we can observe the creation of hobby groups or other forms of communities even among the unemployed, in Hungary, people mainly relied on their immediate family for help (see: Utasi 2008, Bartha 2011).

<sup>93</sup> PIL. XII. 14/8. 120.ő.e. 42. 1985. december, ÉSZV Harmat utcai szálló; stress is mine.

<sup>94</sup> Stress is mine.

The admission of guests<sup>95</sup> is rather discriminative: Cuban girls<sup>96</sup> can receive guests at a separated place hall, whereas the *Hungarian and Roma women cannot*<sup>97</sup> unless the visitor is their husband. This forced the “other” visitors to gather at the street in front of the hostel where they ate their food from tin cans or chatted while sitting on the bare ground. Not even one bench can be found at the neighborhood. This is a fine example of the “cultivated reception of guests” as it is proposed by the house order of the hostel.<sup>98</sup>

Note again the distinction between the Hungarian and Roma women! “People of Roma ethnicity” was a favorite term of cultural workers; since they were usually associated with “trouble”, this suggests that an anti-Roma bias existed also in the contemporary cultural elite (or at least the lower strata of the intelligentsia).<sup>99</sup>

While writers of the reports were inclined to boast of reading Western sociologists, it is unlikely that they were sympathetic to the ideas of Western feminism. I have already observed that working-class girls even in the ethnographies of female authors could choose between moral decline or marriage. Now we learn that female cultural workers were in no better position. Another report namely discusses the private problems of the excellent female cultural worker:

Zsófi<sup>100</sup> has been working for ÉSZV for ten years. She, however, has only a small room of 8 nm<sup>2</sup>, which she rents from ÉSZV. Her unsolved housing situation and private life has been increasingly influencing her general mood.<sup>101</sup>

Later we learn that “private problems” mean that she is unmarried. It could be that the writer of the report was well-meaning and he wanted to urge the authorities to do something to solve Zsófi’s housing situation. However, while the only positive example of the cited ethnographies is a girl, who succeeds to get married, here we can see a similar conservative bias: Zsófi is an exemplary cultural worker as opposed to many of her co-workers, who have received a very unfavorable evaluation of the writers of the reports. In spite of the good will of the evaluators, however, the main justification of her proposed award is that 1) she needs encouragement because for ten years she could not manage to find a husband or buy a flat 2) her exceptional performance should be evaluated in the light of the fact that she is a woman. One might, indeed, assume that she devoted all her energy to the affairs of the hostel because she had no family to care about. I would not, of course, generalize this message; however, if one compares the tone of the reports with that of the sociography written 10-15 years before, we can argue that the project of female emancipation had mental obstacles even in the circle of the (lower) intelligentsia, and that marriage remained to be a determining factor of women’s lives and perspectives.

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<sup>95</sup> We know from other reports that the strict surveillance of guests and the police raids to catch uninvited guests were a frequent source of complaint at the men’s hostels as well.

<sup>96</sup> Out of the 1,000 residents 150 were from Cuba.

<sup>97</sup> Stress is mine.

<sup>98</sup> PIL XII. 14/8, 120. ő.e. 191-192, 1986. július 16.

<sup>99</sup> There is evidence that Roma women were also disadvantaged at the labor market. See Zimmermann (2010) and also Binder (2010).

<sup>100</sup> I changed the original name.

<sup>101</sup> PIL XII. 14/8, 120. ő.e. 191-192, 1986. július 16.

## *Conclusion*

In the introduction I promised to link the criticism of workers' hostels with a more general and far-reaching intellectual anti-systemic or at best critical discourse. Even though welfare dictatorships propagated the official Marxist-Leninist ideology, in fact, they sought to win over the masses with the promise of ever-increasing consumer levels. The generous social policy of the regime brought some short-term results: in countries such as the GDR, Czechoslovakia and Hungary we cannot speak of the formation of a substantial working-class resistance to the regime. In the long run, however, the results were ambiguous because it triggered a consumerist turn in the consciousness of the people, whose consumer needs could not be satisfied within the framework of a plan economy – at least not as much as developed capitalist countries such as West Germany could satisfy consumer needs. In Hungary, growing indebtedness and increasing economic difficulties forced the government to give further concessions to the West: in 1982 Hungary joined the IMF and in 1984 a substantial part of the second or informal economy was legalized.<sup>102</sup> Workers and other state employees received an opportunity to supplement their income from the second economy; thus – at the price of substantial overtime work – they could “constantly” increase their standard of living and acquire new and new consumer goods, which were considered to be status symbols. The products of the socialist industry were not, however, as much desired as the products of the advanced Western countries (the “admiration of the West” became a favorite slogan in Hungary) and shopping tourism (when it was allowed) rendered people realize that they cannot compete with the consumer levels of Austria and West Germany even in the “merriest barrack” of the socialist bloc – the nickname that Kádár’s Hungary earned from the West.

Honecker’s dictatorship was obviously far more rigid than Kádár’s “goulasch Communism”. In addition, the GDR was in a constant competition with West Germany and both Germanies were engaged in an extensive ideological and propaganda war. Even though Honecker did his best to isolate GDR citizens from West Germany, he could not block communication with the West: even though *Westfernsehen* (the watching of West German TV channels) was considered to be an offence against the “ideological watchfulness”, “behind the curtains” most East German families were familiar with the West German news. In the GDR – in spite of the persistent efforts of the functionaries to “fight for a satisfying provision of the people with all sorts of consumer goods”, even party members would criticize the long waiting time for cars and the lack of adequate car service. In the 1980s even in the GDR we can observe an increasing discontent with the shortage of various consumer goods and a disillusionment with the propaganda against West Germany.

Whereas discontent was silenced in the public forums of the GDR, in Hungary a critical intellectual discourse developed, which openly expressed the exhaustion of the ideological reserves of the regime and the crisis of the legitimacy based on increasing levels of consumption:

This workers’ hostel lost almost every bit of added value it had. There is no legal consultation, the youth club has no leader, there are no lectures on the history of rock music and the hobby group of photographers ceased to function. No new programmes were organized in their place. I almost forgot to mention: once a week the TV room is full when new or old horror films entertain the audience, who sit on the uncomfortable

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<sup>102</sup> On the social impacts of the second economy see Kolosi (1987). On the second economy see: Gábor – Galasi (1981); Ákos Róna-Tas (1997).

chairs and seek to forget where they are by the consumption of an impressive amount of alcohol.<sup>103</sup>

The writers of the reports sought to be part of this critical intellectual discourse by stressing the outdatedness of the “Marxism of the 1950s” and using Western sociologists as points of reference. Instead of propagating the noble goals of socialist education, they underlined the fact that at the majority of the hostels third-rate American movies and alcohol are the only source of public entertainment, which help people forget “where they are”. The failure of the standard-of-living policy essentially triggered a crisis of the legitimacy of the regime, whereas the dogmatic camp of “old Communists” effectively prevented the propagation of a viable left-wing alternative to the masses.<sup>104</sup> The criticism of the lack of self-governing groups and the failure of the hobby clubs can be interpreted as a more far-reaching criticism of the deeply rooted paternalism of the regime, which was not interested in the democratization of the masses, let alone the hierarchical apparatus of the Party. In the mid-1980s it became a fashion amongst the reformers to “diagnose” the crisis of the system. The reports from which I gave lengthy citations, fit in well with this critical discourse because they depict an essential *abnormality in the everyday life of the hostels*, which characterizes not only the young people, who “apathetically order their next beer” or “wander aimlessly at the prison-like corridors” and the cultural workers, the best of whom is likewise desperate because she is single and has been living for ten years in a tiny room but also wider society.

While in Hungary, thanks to the reformers, “discourses of deviance” have increasingly appeared in public forums, in the GDR ideological discipline was so harsh that some overzealous functionaries even recommended to “censor” the Soviet media. In 1989 the party committee of the factory informed the party leadership of the district that on the day of the Soviet cinema five movies were shown but the audience criticized that they displayed a “negative” image of the Soviet Union:

On the contrary, one gets the impression that the state cannot maintain law and order and society has been penetrated by anti-Semitism and alcoholism. *We therefore ask the comrades in charge not to show such movies in the future.*<sup>105</sup>

In the light of the above request it is worth re-evaluating the Hungarian situation, where in the mid -90s we can observe the rise of an openly critical and increasingly anti-Marxist intellectual discourse even among low level cadres of the regime. The regime did not collapse because it was officially recognized that “deviance” continued to exist under state socialism. It collapsed because it unintentionally encouraged the rise of a consumer culture and the formation of a relevant consciousness. The widening gap between the ideology of welfare dictatorships and the consumer levels that the system could provide for the masses increasingly undermined the legitimacy of the regime and paved the way for a full-scale restoration of capitalism. The disappointment with the welfare dictatorships triggered a

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<sup>103</sup> PIL. XII. 14/8. 120. ö.e. 198. 1986. szeptember,

<sup>104</sup> On the fight between the reformers and the orthodox Communists see Földes (1989).

<sup>105</sup> UACZ VA Nr. 4447. Information über die Bearbeitung der Eingabe der Gewerkschaftsgruppe „Dr. Richard Sorge“ aus dem Betrieb Entwicklung wissenschaftlich-technischer Ausrüstungen, 05.01.1989. Stress is mine.

radical rupture with Marxist thinking in Hungary and contributed to the anti-Communist mainstream intellectual climate after the change of regimes.

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