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JÓZSEF Ö. KOVÁCS

THE STRUGGLE FOR LAND: SOCIAL PRACTICES OF THE VEILED COMMUNIST DICTATOR- SHIP IN RURAL HUNGARY IN 1945

**“THE PRINCIPAL FRONT LINE OF THE GREAT BATTLE
FOR THE NEW DEMOCRACY IS THE VILLAGE!”¹**

In my opinion, the most important responsibility of historians is to render historical processes “explicit” by providing an account that not only explains events and the connections between them in context, but also corresponds to the experiences of contemporaries.² This is by no means a simple task, since the diversity of value systems, viewpoints and contexts affect our historical interpretation. This is particularly true in the case of the events of 1945, which have become symbolic as a result of the conflicting claims of institutionalized violence, pre-1990 policies of remembrance, and past memories of the experiences of contemporaries.³ To uncover the social and historical factors that could have influenced the past experiences and future visions of contemporaries in rural Hungary, I de-

¹ *Szabad Nép*, March 25, 1945, and Szakács 1964, 47.

² Connerton 1989, 7–15.

³ Judt 2005, 37; Pittaway 2004, 32–33. See Gyarmati 2013 on the emergence of enemy lists, which were a product of this era.

cided to use a conceptual framework that I believe is able to realistically capture contemporary events and explain the connections between them.

Regarding the struggles of rural Hungary, my first argument is that the year 1945 represented a *social historical event*, whose principal precedent was all those factors that shaped World War II.⁴ Why did the end of the war and Hungary's occupation by a new foreign power under the guise of liberation become a shocking, traumatic series of events? Why was this a collective experience, and why did it become a long-term factor of structural changes? I shall illustrate the three categories of traumatic, collective, and long-term events through a range of local, regional, and national case studies, which, unlike former distortions of communist historiography, represent authentic and decisive events in rural Hungary.⁵

My second argument, which also provides a conceptual and interpretive framework for the present study, is that the results of historical research should be reexamined in the light of the Hungarian totalitarian model,⁶ which was devised by intellectuals committed to democratic change during World War II. In spite of its controversial nature, this model is frequently used in international research. In their analysis, Carl Joachim Friedrich and Zbigniew K. Brzezinski claimed that dictatorships are characterized by the following elements: a comprehensive state ideology; a one-party system; organized political terrorism in the form of the political police; a monopoly on information; a monopoly on weapons, and a centrally controlled economy, though the latter two exist in non-dictatorial modern states as well.⁷ Regardless, it would be unwise to reject interpretations based on the totalitarian model, as they represent important starting points for historians, and are suitable for testing historical sources.

In light of the above, my research focused on two key issues, one of which was omitted from the present study in order to concentrate on the issue of (re) interpreting the 1945 land confiscation and land distribution in rural Hungary. Due to spatial constraints, I had to omit discussions of related phenomena, such as the everyday reality and political myths of "liberation", and other issues that are currently studied by the Rural History Workshop.

⁴ For theoretical issues regarding the concept of the social historical event, see Ö. Kovács 2012.

⁵ Due to spatial constraints, I shall not discuss these cases in detail in the present study.

⁶ Ö. Kovács 2012, 17–48.

⁷ Friedrich 1957, 19. Classical studies prior to Friedrich's study include Arendt 1992; Arendt 2000, 67–185; Steinbach 2002; Vollnhals 2006; Jarausch 1998, 33–36, and Hildebrand 1999.

ISSUES RELATED TO THE INTERPRETATION OF LAND CONFISCATION AND LAND DISTRIBUTION

In the twentieth century, due to the scarcity of available sources, land use became one of the principal problems of land distribution.⁸ When we consider what would be an ideal relationship between land policy and economic development, what we find in the case of Hungary is that agricultural land and land ownership were usually subordinate to contemporary structural changes.⁹

For the present discussion, it is imperative that we consider the historical correlations of agrarian reform programs. From a legal and pragmatic perspective, “land reform” was the reorganization of ownership and tenure relations, as well as land use, in accordance with political and economic objectives. The liberal land reform movements of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in particular sought to establish family-based holdings in order to reduce the number of large estates and to curb land speculation.¹⁰ In other words, these reforms attempted to solve social problems by terminating property monopoly. The second type of land reform movements were those informed by socialist and communist policies, which were implemented during the period of Soviet-inspired collectivization.¹¹

To this day, there is a lack of comprehensive research regarding the implementation and social practice of the Hungarian “land reform regulation” of 1945, as related publications are still politically motivated or based on Hungarian political history.¹² In this regard, ideological approaches and historically motivated

⁸ Ihrig 1941, 193.

⁹ Czettler 1946, 131–140; Müller and Bojincă 2010, 39.

¹⁰ Meyer-Renschhausen and Berger 1998. “Land reforms” were frequently used as an instrument of forming ethnically homogenous nation states. See also Krauss 2009; Móricz 1932; Czettler 1946, 31–55; Simon and Kovács 2008, and Gaučík 2012. We can also trace the Hungarian history of land confiscation and land distribution in 1945 from this development.

¹¹ It is worth noting that the European Court of Justice did not consider the distribution of large estates without compensation as a violation of human rights. Cordes et al. 2008, 627.

¹² The true meaning of “land reform” is usually revealed by social practice. For examples, see the following volumes, which still contain useful sections, despite the Marxist-Leninist historical interpretation their rhetoric is based upon. The majority of the following works discuss personal life histories, and issues related to Kádarian legitimacy politics: Orbán 1972; Donáth 1977, and Romány 1983. As stated previously, the coded language of these volumes has to be properly

bias often produce paradoxical results. I also argue that the long-term impact of the “land reform” on Hungarian politics of remembrance, despite the fact that the reform itself was never realized, is also evident in the general reluctance to examine the issue through the analysis of historical sources. Therefore, my primary task remains the analytic study and realistic portrayal of historical events based on historical sources.

Regarding the present subject, it might be fruitful to apply the perspectives of related disciplines to historical research, which would confirm that the contemporary ideological construct of the “land reform” did not meet the requirements of an actual reform program. A legitimate reform presupposes the assessment of the long-term economic and social impact of the reform, as well as a legitimate institutional background. In contrast, the ideological construct of the “land reform” of 1945 concealed the radical political objective of depriving previous social elites and the churches of their economic basis and social existence by dismantling their institutions.

“Democratic land reforms” are characterized by two commonly known principles. The first is that, in accordance with democratic values, they “abolish the separation of working structures and land ownership by restoring the unity of land use and land ownership through the transfer of land as an instrument of production to the producer”, while the second principle involves the implementation of a long-term agricultural and land policy to ensure the subsistence of the property owner.¹³ In contrast, the land distribution of 1945 created small holdings based on familiar labor, without the subsequent implementation of an agrarian reform.¹⁴

The land distribution of 1945 resulted in radical changes, yet could not satisfy contemporary demands for Hungarian land. The average size of dwarf holdings increased from 1.4 to 5.3 cadastral acres (ca),¹⁵ while the size of small holdings increased from 7.2 to 11.6 cadastral acres. Only 56,000 of approximately two million private properties were larger than 25 ca, a fact that later served to justify

decoded. I consider the work of former Stalinist philosopher Leszek Kolakowski (Kolakowski 1971) an essential guide for the interpretation of these volumes. See also Kocka 1977, and Révész 1983.

¹³ Tanka n.d., 148–149; Czettler 1947, 16–29.

¹⁴ Ihrig 1941, 209; Ihrig and Nagypataki 1946, 47–48; Kaposi 2013; Orbán 1972, 62; Závada 1986, 19; Réti 1991, 1148, and Pető 1998, 99.

¹⁵ 1 cadastral acre equals 1.75 hectares.

the subsequent “class struggle”.¹⁶ Land distribution was simply unable to satisfy the demand for land, as indicated by the fact that of a total of 730,000 applicants, 660,000 (90%) were deemed eligible for land. At the same time, 57% of the 350,000 applicants applying for building lots were denied on the basis of having obtained land grants.¹⁷ Moreover, the vast majority of available land was not allotted to farmers, since 40.8% of these properties consisted of forested areas,¹⁸ pastures, or marshlands – in other words, uncultivated land, which was not suitable for cultivation by smallholders. In the end, only 58% of the total allotment of 5.6 million cadastral acres was transferred to individual owners, while the remaining real estate was seized by state leadership.¹⁹

Based on the above, we may conclude that as early as 1945, Hungarian land distribution policies had a deep, negative impact on the elites of rural society, who were later labeled “kulaks”, then officially classified as “class enemies” by communist leadership.²⁰ From a social structural perspective, land distribution resulted in the emergence of a social group of smallholders – including artisans, merchants, and carriers –, which constituted 50% of the socioeconomic group of landholders. In principle, smallholders were an economically and politically favored group supported by the current political system. Compared to other Central Eastern European countries, Hungarian land distribution, similarly to Polish social practice, was the most hostile towards large estates (of course, in other Central Eastern European countries, land distributions had taken place much earlier.) Policies to terminate large estates and to deprive the social elite of economic and social influence basically went hand in hand with the politically motivated support of poor and landless peasants.²¹

¹⁶ Szakács 1998, 294, 312.

¹⁷ According to data for the year 1941, 52% of agricultural workers, 47% of agricultural servants, 44% of dwarf holders, and 75% of small holders did not receive any land. At this point, it is important to note that land distribution was closely linked to the expulsion of ethnic Germans. Of the property owned by 450,000 Germans, amounting to a total of 600,000 cadastral acres, at least 204,000 ca were appropriated by the state on account of their Volksbund membership. Pető-Szakács 1985, 38–39. For more details, see Tóth 2009, and Gonda 2014.

¹⁸ Forested areas were relegated to state management or to local management under state control.

¹⁹ Orbán 1972, 41.

²⁰ Nagy 2009, 8.

²¹ Réti 1991; Szakács 1998.

Hungarian historical research has yet to analyze the social impact of the land distribution of 1945 on the beneficiaries and victims, as the majority of publications reflects the contemporary views of the communist party. Research has also failed to critically examine the ideological construct of the “land reform”, and to assess its economic and social correlations. Instead, numerous studies and other publications emerged on the “land reform”, which presented partially “true stories” without any discussion of their social, economic, or political context. For example, publications mainly focused on the sites and scale of land distributions, or the difficulties faced by new land owners, but there are several problems with these simplified accounts. For one, none of them mention that the land policies of 1945 were not only a matter of agricultural history, but an important instrument of political power struggles during a period of war.²² Those involved might have been aware of this, but their greed and desire for land, the pressure for swift party decisions, the attack of communist propaganda on private property rights, and political violence were more decisive. We should also remember that the anti-Jewish laws of the era had already destabilized traditional legal and social norms.

My research is based on the assumption that, at the end of World War II, the most decisive instrument of Stalinist power politics in supporting the ideological project of communism that radically affected the entire Hungarian population was land confiscation and redistribution.²³ The issue of land ownership was clearly one of the most important, if not the most important question of Hungarian Communist Party (*Magyar Kommunista Párt*, MKP) power politics, since it promised radical social and political transformation. In other words, the land distribution of 1945 was a *social historical event* that served as the fundamental prerequisite of long-term communist leadership.²⁴ The land reform regulation was originally issued to counter the military and political strategies of the occu-

²² The period of provisional state administration continued until the elections of November 1945, by which time, the events discussed above had already taken place.

²³ According to the work of Gyula Kállai on the internal affairs of the communist party, the land reform was the “standard”. Kállai 1984, 155.

²⁴ The periodization of this process as defined by political history was slightly different. On this point, see Rainer M. 1998, 21, and Rainer M. 2011. The issue of land ownership featured prominently in other party programs as well, but the general “elaboration” of these policies, as well as their timeliness (some were delayed until late 1945) are instructive in and of themselves. See Balogh and Izsák 2004, 9–90.

pying forces,²⁵ but the resulting radical changes, and the implementation and social practice of land distribution suggest other, alternative avenues of interpretation and research.²⁶

Evidently, the objective of the Hungarian Communist Party, as directed by Moscow leadership, was to substantially weaken or control its political opposition in order to ensure its swift rise to political power.²⁷ Their methods and practices were handed down from the Soviet Union, but their experiences were not disclosed to the general public. The political opposition to be terminated was, on the one hand, private landowners, and on the other, the churches, which were deeply entrenched in rural society.²⁸

A careful review of the contents of the land reform regulation issued on March 15, 1945, as well as the events related to its implementation, will confirm that the land confiscation and distribution disguised as “land reform” basically served to implement a comprehensive social plan that, combined with the continuous presence of the Red Army, was sufficient for the establishment of communist party dictatorship. With the elimination of large estates, the aristocracy was practically erased from Hungarian collective memory.²⁹ However, this still leaves the question of how such a radical transfer of property, hastily implemented in the last few days before the conclusion of hostilities in April, can be considered a land reform. What were the aims of the Allied Control Commission, and by extension, of Soviet leadership exercising control over Hungary in the occupied territories? According to their rationale, the practical solution was to secure the new political system and their monopoly of key positions (from government, ministerial, and law enforcement positions, to the communist he-

²⁵ Nagy 1990, 143–145. See also Vas 1982, 88–89. On the subject of why Voroshilov forced Hungarian leadership to turn the original bill into a land reform regulation, see Korom 1996, 123–124.

²⁶ “When... the explanation of a social phenomenon is undertaken, we must seek separately the efficient cause which produces it and the function it fulfills.” Durkheim 1978, 113–114.

²⁷ The works of Orlando Figes illustrate this process with acute examples. Of course, I do not mean that in countries occupied by the Red Army, that is, under different social and cultural conditions, this process would have taken place in the same manner as it did in the Soviet Union. Figes 1996, 745; Figes and Kolonitskii 1999, 3, 32, 127. The communist party even attacked those who were *not* supporters of the Germans, such as Prince Pál Esterházy, one the most prominent landowners of the country, who was condemned at a political trial and sentenced to imprisonment. Kaposi 2009, 140.

²⁸ Rugg 1978, 50–54; Wittenberg 2006, 40–41.

²⁹ Gudenus and Szentirmay 1989, 107–109; Ispán 2007.

gemony practiced by land claims committees) through the control of basic economic resources.

The “land reform” devised in Moscow was based on “Soviet law”, which, having originated from Russian law, did not include Roman property law. Based on these Soviet principles, Rákosi’s government, which acted as the executor of Soviet directives, established a broadly conceived economic dictatorship in Hungary.³⁰ Their purpose was to ensure that the economic life of residents of “the new Hungary” would depend on their ability to loyally serve or properly adapt to communist structures of power.³¹

The “land reform” of 1945 with its confiscation of land and the resulting arbitrary classification of “privileged” landowners, shook the very foundations of Hungarian noble society, the middle classes committed to liberal values, the remaining aristocracy, and the network of churches actively engaged in all settlements across Hungary. According to contemporary legal principles of civil society, these land confiscations without compensation constituted “illegal confiscation of property by an illegitimate power”.³² The fact that these actions were motivated strictly by political interest is confirmed by the practice of transferring all claims of private businesses to the state, which refused to acknowledge or settle these claims.³³ Leadership also ignored the idea that the blatant violation of legal principles had an impact on the development of Hungarian society.

The Hungarian land distribution directed by Moscow also served as the basis and enforcement of collective loyalty to the communist party. Georgi Dimitrov’s “humorous remark”, that local communists were now in a position to distribute the land as their spoils of war, is confirmed by various local accounts of the distribution campaign,³⁴ during which communist leadership confiscated, then redistributed land with the active participation of “local forces”. This practice, similarly to other propaganda practices of modern dictatorships, served to “socialize” the dictatorship. In this context, “socialization” entails the encourage-

³⁰ For a contemporary account, see Kárász 1990, 80; M. Kiss 2006, 49–50.

³¹ With the practice of confiscating public goods and services as private property, and exercising state control over the accumulation of property, Sovietized dictatorships promoted forms of symbolic and material political capital. Bourdieu 2002a, 27.

³² Beliznay et al. 1997, 197–198; Bognár 2010. The principle of the protection of private property has existed since the emergence of the earliest human societies. Siegrist and Sugarmann 1999.

³³ Beliznay et al. 1997, 198.

³⁴ Mevius 2005, 108.

ment and enforcement of social participation by communist leadership, which contributed to increased societal approval of leadership policies.³⁵

During the land distribution campaign of 1945, the hunger for property, the desire for land acquisition, and a thirst for revenge – all products of the terrible legacy of World War II and the previous system – were undeniably formative elements of the historical and social changes of the era. Former injustices then engendered new forms of injustice, conflict, and trauma, such as the collective expulsion of the stigmatized German minority,³⁶ disregard of the provisions of the land reform regulation, coercions, violence, and the forced eviction of house and land owners during the process of land (re)distribution. Due to the fact that these events were an integral part of everyday reality, we must interpret them in the context of local histories.

LAND CONFISCATION AND LAND DISTRIBUTION AS INSTRUMENTS OF POWER POLITICS AND SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION

However, the best way to crush sabotage is by quick action, and the creation of absolute facts. [...] Potential mistakes made by the land claims committees can be corrected later, they can be appealed against at the county and national bodies, but the appellant should appeal outside of possession.³⁷

In issuing decisions on the confiscation of land, the land claims committees are not bound by judicial decisions of the people's courts or by any confirmative committee decisions. They are authorized to declare, solely on the basis of their personal judgment or their sense of legal principle,

³⁵ Ö. Kovács 2012.

³⁶ The issue of the expulsion of ethnic Germans dates back to the 1930's. Gonda 2014, 43. The allegation quoted above was not supported by any investigations on "nationality loyalty". Gonda 2014, 48–49.

³⁷ District secretarial meeting of the Jászberény section of the Hungarian Communist Party, April 4, 1945. Csöngö 2005, 182.

whom they consider a traitor, a war criminal, or the enemy of the people in their respective settlements.³⁸

The chairman of the committee, miner János Bessenyei, declared repeatedly that he would only grant land to those who possessed a red booklet.³⁹

István Földi, a former agricultural servant of Kisújszállás, region Jászság, who was appointed as the local secretary of the communist party, and government commissioner for land distribution in October 1944, recalled the following events from the spring of 1945, the beginning of the “land reform”:

At the Szolnok airport, another Soviet officer and an interpreter were waiting for me. We got into the military jeep and headed towards the villages of Jászság. In each village, we visited the village authorities to contact the judge and the chief notary. I identified myself, then gave the following instructions: by the time we return in two or three days, at the specified time, the authorities are to call an assembly of the village residents for the purpose of announcing the land distribution and electing the members the land distribution committee. While I was speaking, the Soviet lieutenant placed his pistol on the table, and when I finished, he picked it up, tapped it against his palm, and then told them through the interpreter that if they failed to assemble at the arranged time, he would come to the village hall and shoot both the judge and the chief notary. After that, everything took place as planned...⁴⁰

In the process of land distribution, Red Army officers and Hungarian agents simply followed the instructions they received in Soviet party schools, and implemented the same policies Soviet leadership used to liquidate the Czarist agrarian

³⁸ Directives of the Central Committee of the Hungarian Communist Party for party organizations concerning the implementation of the land reform. Debrecen, March 22, 1945. (Published in the supplements of the newspaper *Néplap* on March 27, 1945.) Rákosi and Szabó 1967, 69.

³⁹ National Archives of Hungary (*Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár Országos Levéltára*, henceforth: MNL OL), XIX-K-1-y. Box 948, FM 1950. 8123, F/23. For example, in Somogy County, local communist leadership “also printed a leaflet [as a supplement to the printed text of the land form regulation], which contained an application for party membership”. Kanyar 1964, 73.

⁴⁰ Csöngö 2011, 413–414.

system. In accordance with the detailed program outlined by Lenin, they first reduced the size, then the number of private farms and holdings. According to the Leninist program, one of the most important measures of the “socialist revolution” was the confiscation of private holdings, and the subsequent allocation of property to the “proletarian state”.⁴¹ The peasantry played a key role in this transformation, firstly because its involvement in national church networks represented a political threat, and secondly because its production potential (in terms of food, industrial work, and capital) was indispensable for the operation of the communist system.⁴²

The orders of communist party activists, who arrived to land distribution sites on Soviet military vehicles, were comprehensive and absolute. As a rule, following the logic of military operations, verbal and symbolic actions were usually sufficient to ensure the implementation of land distribution policies directed by Soviet military commanders in the prescribed manner and within the prescribed period of time.⁴³ In the course of land confiscations, commanders often justified their actions by stating that there were no Hungarian laws, and the policies of the Soviet Union were supreme.⁴⁴

The leadership of the Hungarian Communist Party, both during their years in Moscow, and upon their return under the direct control of Voroshilov, made conscious (and traceable) efforts to create the political myth of “the democratic land reform”, and instill the idea that it was the great achievement of the communist party.⁴⁵ From the very beginning, the Central Committee of the Hungarian Communist Party directed the campaign for land distribution by publishing all related directives for the implementation of the “land reform” in the Hungarian press, including instructions “strictly for party members only” that

⁴¹ Paffrath 2004, 51–59.

⁴² Rugg 1978, 54.

⁴³ “Speed is of the essence in dislodging the landowner class.” District secretary meeting of the Jászberény section of the Hungarian Communist Party, April 4, 1945. Csöngö 2005, 180.

⁴⁴ Report of the notary of the settlement of Andornaktálya to the chief notary of the district of Mezőkövesd concerning the land distribution implemented according to the directives of Russian Command. MNL OL, XIX-K-11-a. General Documents. Box 1, 108/1945; Kanyar 1964, 149.

⁴⁵ For the creation of political myths in modern history, see Cassirer 1997. The Communist Party made conscious efforts to emphasize the historic role of the Hungarian Communist Party in the “new conquest” of the Hungarian homeland, and the key role of Imre Nagy as “the minister who gave land to the masses”. Izsák and Kun 1994, 11–16, 58–61; Rainer M. 1996, 266–267; and Mevius 2005, 108. On the subject of land distribution as a weapon against the church, see Vincze 2007.

listed all objectives, instruments, and methods of the land distribution process. Photographs of the “festive assemblies” of 1945 were basically local variations of centrally directed propaganda.⁴⁶ Leadership even adopted the Soviet method of visual propaganda in holding „elaborate festivities” in local “castles or noble mansions” for the impressionable land holders, so that “the rural population would be made aware of the changing times, and feel like they are the ones in charge now”.⁴⁷

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

At the end of World War II, Soviet agrarian policies played a decisive role in the radical transformation of property relations and traditional society in Central Eastern Europe. These policies also had a major impact on the value system of rural Hungarian society.⁴⁸ From a historic perspective, land policy and the process of post-war agrarian change in Hungary can only be described as a paradox. During the land distribution of 1945, one decisive factor was the peasantry’s eagerness to acquire land, but within a few years, the possession of land became a general problem due to the process of forced collectivization. The land reform regulation was a product of the pressures of war, and primarily a political and military issue, which was then radicalized and implemented by the communist party with the support of the Red Army,⁴⁹ in a manner that resulted in further social conflict.

⁴⁶ Bourdieu’s comment, that a “class on paper” will only be turned into a “real class” if its members are politically mobilized in pursuit of a specific objective, might be relevant to this historic situation. Bourdieu 2002b, 22.

⁴⁷ Directives of the Central Committee of the Hungarian Communist Party for party organizations concerning the implementation of the land reform. Debrecen, March 22, 1945. (Published in the supplement of the newspaper *Néplap* [‘People’s Paper’], March 27, 1945.) Rákosi and Szabó 1967, 71. The communist party accomplished the political mobilization of the population by preying on genuine and deep-seated passions. See also Dessewffy 1999, 60–62.

⁴⁸ Réti 1991; Sundhaussen 2009; Gaučík 2012.

⁴⁹ The same process took place in East Germany as well. From the perspective of rural economic development, this type of land distribution did not solve anything. Technically, all economists

From 1945 onwards, the newly arisen and fundamentally different political situation also transformed traditional forms of strict social control in rural Hungary, turning it into a placeholder for the communist party's political and agrarian policies, but it is important to distinguish between the objectives and methods of hegemonic communist agrarian policies. The first objective was to secure a state income and agricultural provisions for the population by implementing intensive production methods while regularly issuing reparation deliveries to the Soviet Union. Secondly, there was the somewhat utopian objective of reducing the differences between rural and urban areas, which involved the repression of the traditional elite. Thirdly, their ideological goal was to strengthen the alliance between the working class and the peasantry, which formed the basis of the communist system. However, above all these objectives, the supreme goal was to advance the building of "socialism" in rural society by socializing instruments of production, and the forced transformation of property and ownership structures. Basically, these objectives determined the strategies and methods of the communist dictatorship.

The strategy of the Communist Party was based on traditional methods for acquiring and maintaining its political power, one of which was providing "rewards" for political support. In 1945, this "reward" was the distribution of land, but even at the time, it was merely an instrument of future enforced collectivization, which was temporarily postponed for tactical reasons.⁵⁰

Regarding social reactions in Hungary to the distribution of land, the responses of local society differed according to region, and the local structures of agrarian society. In villages with strong social ties, there was reluctance in accepting confiscated properties.⁵¹ However, we may presume that the properties of groups labeled "enemies of the people", such as the aristocracy and German ethnic groups, were taken without hesitation.⁵²

agreed that it would cause more harm than good. Naimark 1999, 171–172.

⁵⁰ Mevius 2005, 28, 48–53; Bauerkämper 1999, 131; Merl 1999, 157; Beliznay et al. 1997, 199.

⁵¹ Janicki, 2010, 110–111; Siegrist and Sugarmann 1999.

⁵² Schoeck 2007, 427; Székely 2003, 238; Püski 2013, 442. On the reactions of the population to receiving confiscated property, ranging from "uncertainty" to "greedy approval", see the report of Ministerial Commissioner Károly Nagy to the Ministry of Agriculture. Pestszenterzsébet, April 1945. Archive of the Institute of Political History (*Politikátörténeti Intézet Levéltára*), fond 274: Papers of the Central Committee of the Hungarian Communist Party. Section 13, storage unit 19, 152.

The repression of the traditional Hungarian elite, which naturally resulted from the land confiscation campaign, can be explained by the continued internal power conflicts following World War II, the bloodiest conflict in world history.⁵³ Land confiscation and (re)distribution basically ended these conflicts by consolidating the communist dictatorship. As early as 1945, the communist party's aggressive acquisition of positions of power and political activism established their political hegemony, which would pave the way towards the radical Sovietization of Hungary. On the local and regional levels, the factors of the totalitarian model discussed in the introduction, itself deserving of further scholarly scrutiny, fundamentally affected and determined, in historically traceable ways, the events that ultimately disrupted Hungarian rural society.

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