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The Communist Movement in Hungary, 1918-1944*

The Communist movement in Hungary was continuously under the influence of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. Through its agent, the Comintern, and through the so-called Moscow committee of the Hungarian Communist Party the Soviet party set down the ideological and tactical line of the Hungarian Communist Party, assumed responsibility for its organization and reorganization, and at critical periods even chose its leaders. The Soviet party took these actions without particular regard for the political and social conditions in Hungary or, indeed, for the opinions of Hungarian party leaders. Such behavior suggests disdain for a party that was weak and rent by factionalism, a condition which simply reinforced its dependence on the Soviet party. It is therefore remarkable that Hungarian Communists on occasion resisted the implementation of Comintern directives.

The development of the Communist movement in Hungary may be divided into three periods. The first, from the founding of the party in November 1918 through the fourth months' existence of the Hungarian Soviet Republic in the spring and summer of 1919, proved to be the high point of the movement. During the second period, from 1919 to the early 1930s, the party sought to establish itself on a solid structural foundation and become a significant force in Hungarian political life by following its revolutionary, Bolshevik legacy. The third and final period was shaped by the party's attempts to join socialist and other parties and groups in the latter 1930s in forming an anti-fascist popular front and during the Second World War in creating a broad-based "independence and liberation" movement. Although official historiography accords the Hungarian Communist Party a prominent role in these coalitions, the party in fact had few members and only the skeleton of an organization. It did not become an important player in Hungarian politics until after the arrival of Soviet occupation forces in 1945.

1. *Historiography: Sources and Secondary Works*

The Communist movement in Hungary received little scholarly attention until after the Second World War. It was illegal, and since it was thus forced to operate mainly underground, its role in public affairs was marginal. In the 1920s and 1930s the attention of historians and social thinkers was directed primarily toward issues of national identity and national self-fulfilment and Hungary's political and intellectual relations with Central and Western Europe. Although they by no means ignored the urban working class as an appropriate subject of study,¹ the peasantry received far more attention, and although Marxist philosophical and social thought was hardly absent, broad European currents and those focusing specifically on Hungarian thought prevailed.²

The systematic study of the Communist movement in Hungary dates from the founding of the Institute for the Workers Movement in Hungary (*Magyar Munkásmozgalmi Intézet*) in 1948, which came to be known after 1956 as the Institute for Party History (*Párttörténeti Intézet*). Since one of its chief responsibilities was to support the party's propaganda activities and since it was directly responsible to the party's central committee, many of its publications, particularly in the early years, lacked objectivity and were intended to serve other than scholarly aims. Nonetheless, the Institute's considerable output of monographs and published sources for over

* I wish to thank Gábor Székely for letting me read material he had prepared on the subject of this paper.

¹ For example, a representative selection of articles analyzing various aspects of living and working conditions in urban areas in the interwar period may be found in György Litván (ed.), *Magyar munkásszociográfiák, 1888-1945* (Budapest, 1974), pp. 243-372.

² For an overview of the first half of the twentieth century one may consult Pál Sándor, *A magyar filozófia története, 1900-1945*, 2 Vols. (Budapest, 1973). *A magyar filozófiai gondolkodás a két világháború között* (Budapest, 1983) emphasizes the importance of Marxist thought.

four decades is essential for the study of the Communist movement in the interwar period.³ The Institute's journal, *Párttörténeti Közlemények*, published quarterly since 1955, has served as a barometer of political and ideological change and has provided an overview of current research and publication.

Although a comprehensive bibliography of the Hungarian Communist movement is lacking, a number of general bibliographies of Hungarian history provide a valuable guide to the main publications.⁴ The Institute for Party History possesses the most extensive archive on the Hungarian Communist movement.

The Institute for Party History had published three collections of sources, which together cover the period between 1919 and 1945. They must be used with caution, since the materials they contain are intended to show the Communist Party in the most favorable light possible and tend to reflect the party's ideological stance at the time of publication. In these collections excerpts from the contemporary Communist press abound, but Communist pamphlets, the minutes of party meetings, and official government documents are also represented. Particularly comprehensive are three volumes covering the period between the founding of the Hungarian Communist Party and the collapse of the Hungarian Soviet Republic.⁵ Two other collections cover the interwar period. The first⁶ reflects the political atmosphere of the early 1950s: Mátyás Rákosi (1892-1971), the leader of the Hungarian Communist Party in the decade after the Second World War, and Stalin are significant presences, but Béla Kun (1886-1939), the most prominent Hungarian Communist in the interwar period, is largely ignored; the Communist Party is accorded leadership of the working-class and the anti-fascist and war-time resistance movements, while the Social Democrats are denigrated as collaborators with the government; and there is only praise for the Soviet Communist Party, while its dominance of the Hungarian party is passed over in silence. The second collection offers a somewhat more balanced treatment of men and events.⁷ Useful supplements to these collections are volumes of documents on the organization and activities of Communists at the county level, which, unintentionally, reveal the relative insignificance of the Communist Party.⁸

There is no biographical dictionary of Hungarian Communists, but the Institute for Party History has

³ For a description of the activities of the Institute for Party History see Henrik Vass, "A Párttörténeti Intézet tudományos munkájáról", *Párttörténeti Közlemények* (henceforth, *PtK*), Vol. 22, No. 3 (1976), pp. 3-35. On the historiography of the Communist and working-class movement there is Tibor Erényi, "A munkásmozgalom története kutatásának negyedszázada", *PtK*, Vol. 19, No. 3 (1973), pp. 3-18. To be consulted also because it places the historiography of the Communist movement in the broad context of historical writing after the Second World War is Holger Fischer, *Politik und Geschichtswissenschaft in Ungarn. Die ungarische Geschichte von 1918 bis zur Gegenwart in der Historiographie seit 1956* (Munich, 1982).

⁴ *A magyar történettudomány válogatott bibliográfiája, 1945-1968* (Budapest, 1971), pp. 497-498, 512-513, 574-579; *Études Historiques Hongroises 1985*, Vol. 3: *Bibliographie choisie de la science historique hongroise 1974-1984* (Budapest, 1985), pp. 128-131, 145-148. Since Budapest was the main center of the Communist movement, especially useful are: József Zoltán (ed.), *Budapest munkásmozgalma 1919-1945. Bibliográfia*, 3 Vols. (Budapest, 1959), and *Budapest munkásmozgalmának válogatott irodalma, 1919 augusztus 1-1945 február 13* (Budapest, 1965).

⁵ *A magyar munkásmozgalom történetének válogatott dokumentumai* (henceforth, *MMTVD*), Vol. 5: *1917 november 7-1919 március 21* (Budapest, 1956); Vol. 6, part 1: *1919 március 21-1919 június 11* (Budapest, 1959); Vol. 6, part 2: *1919 június 11-1919 augusztus 1* (Budapest, 1960).

⁶ *Dokumentumok a magyar párttörténet tanulmányozásához*, Vol. 2: *1917 november-1919 augusztus* (Budapest, 1954); Vol. 3: *1919 augusztusától 1929 őszéig* (Budapest, 1954); Vol. 4: *1929 októberétől 1939 szeptemberéig* (Budapest, 1955); Vol. 5: *1939 szeptemberétől 1945 áprilisáig* (Budapest, 1955).

⁷ *Dokumentumok a magyar forradalmi munkásmozgalom történetéből*, Vol. 1: *1919-1929*, Vol. 2: *1929-1935*, Vol. 3: *1935-1945* (Budapest, 1964).

⁸ See, for example, *Válogatott dokumentumok a Győr-Sopron megyei munkásmozgalom történetéből (1929-1945)* (Győr, 1982). Much of the material consists of police reports and excerpts from the local press.

published a historical dictionary of the world working-class movement, which is an indispensable reference tool for the study of the Hungarian Communist movement.⁹ It contains entries on leading and secondary figures, institutions and organizations, and newspapers and periodicals. Monographs and anthologies of writings and speeches of a number of Communist leaders during the period of the Hungarian Soviet Republic of 1919 and in the interwar period have been published in the past quarter-century. Béla Kun, following his rehabilitation after 1956, has received most attention. Two biographical studies, one centered on his leadership of the Soviet Republic¹⁰ and the other a general account of his career,¹¹ reveal his strengths and shortcomings as a political strategist and organizer. He has also been the subject of a bitter-sweet memoir by his wife.¹² There are two anthologies of his writings and speeches during the Soviet Republic,¹³ another covering the period 1913 to 1936,¹⁴ and, most recently, an exhaustive bibliography of his works.¹⁵ There are also useful studies and anthologies of writings of a number of other prominent Communists: Jenő Landler (1875-1928),¹⁶ a Social Democrat before 1918, a proponent of the fusion of the Social Democratic Party of Hungary (*Magyarországi Szociáldemokrata Párt*; MSZDP) and the Hungarian Communist Party in 1919, and in the 1920s the main challenger to Béla Kun's leadership of the Communist Party; Tibor Szamuely (1890-1919),¹⁷ one of the most extreme proponents of Bolshevik-style revolution in the Hungarian Soviet Republic; Gyula Alpári (1882-1944),¹⁸ another Social Democrat who joined the Communist Party in 1919 and took an active part in the international Communist movement in the 1920s and 1930s; and Ferenc Rózsa (1906-1942),¹⁹ a party activist in the 1930s and secretary of the central committee in Hungary in 1941.

One of the chief means which the Communist Party used to spread its message and mobilize its supporters was the newspaper and periodical press. A comprehensive history of the Hungarian Communist press has yet to be written, but a useful introduction to the subject, describing publications, editors, and ideological currents in Hungary and abroad, was published in 1975.²⁰ It may be supplemented by studies and anthologies of individual newspapers: *Dolgozók Lapja* (The Workers' Paper), which was published in Prague between April

⁹ *Munkásmozgalomtörténeti lexikon* (Budapest, 1972).

¹⁰ Rudolf L. Tőkés, *Béla Kun and the Hungarian Soviet Republic* (Stanford and New York, 1967).

¹¹ György Borsányi, *Kun Béla. Politikai életrajz* (Budapest, 1979).

¹² Mrs. Béla Kun, *Kun Béla (Emlékezések)* (2nd enlarged edition, Budapest, 1969).

¹³ Béla Kun, *A Magyar Tanácsköztársaságról* (Budapest, 1958); Béla Kun, *Szocialista forradalom Magyarországon* (Budapest, 1979).

¹⁴ Béla Kun, *Válogatott írások és beszédek*, 2 Vols. (Budapest, 1966).

¹⁵ Zoltán Ripp and Mrs. István Varga (eds.), *Kun Béla műveinek bibliográfiája* (Budapest, 1986).

¹⁶ Ágnes Szabó, *Landler Jenő* (Budapest, 1974); Jenő Landler, *Válogatott beszédek és írások*, edited by Béla Gadanez and Ágnes Szabó (Budapest, 1960).

¹⁷ Mrs. Sándor Gábor, *Szamuely Tibor* (Budapest, 1974); Tibor Szamuely, *Összegyűjtött írások és beszédek* (Budapest, 1975).

¹⁸ Gyula Alpári, *Válogatott írásai* (Budapest, 1960).

¹⁹ István Pintér, *Rózsa Ferenc. Életrajz és dokumentumok* (Budapest, 1981).

²⁰ György Máté, *Új március hírnöke. A tiltott magyar párt-sajtó története, 1917-1945* (Budapest, 1975).

1937 and June 1938,²¹ and *Szabad Nép* (Free People),²² four issues of which appeared in Budapest between February and May 1942 under the editorship of Ferenc Rózsa.

Although no comprehensive, critical history of the Communist Party between 1919 and 1944 exists, a survey has been published by the Institut for Party History²³ which divides the history of the party into five periods: the "reorganization" of the party during the early years of the "counterrevolutionary regime" (1919-1923); the "revolutionary struggle" during the consolidation of the conservative Bethlen government (1924-1929); the party's efforts to achieve a "revolutionary solution" to the problems caused in Hungary by the world economic crisis (1929-1933); the struggle against fascism and for a popular front (1934-1941); and the party's leadership of the movement to extricate Hungary from the war against the Soviet Union and to achieve "national independence and democracy" (1941-1944). As these headings suggest, the authors overestimate the importance of the Communist Party. The eight volume of the ten-volume history of Hungary published under the auspices of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences²⁴ provides a corrective by devoting a relatively small number of pages to the Communist Party, thus placing it in a proper historical context. Two general histories of the Hungarian Communist Party by Hungarian émigrés provide ample coverage of the interwar and wartime periods.²⁵ They are more critical of the party's policies and activities and of its leaders and deal more openly with such delicate issues as the party's relations with the Soviet Communist Party and the Comintern than their colleagues in Hungary. Serious local histories of the working-class movement, such as the monograph on the southern Tisza region,²⁶ also allow the reader to judge the modest influence of the Communist Party outside Budapest and to compare its role with that of the MSZDP. Since Budapest had a paramount role in political and economic life, it was the center of the Communist movement and has received special attention.²⁷

2. The Founding of the Hungarian Communist Party

According to most accounts of its history, the origins of the Hungarian Communist Party are to be sought in two sources: first, the working-class and socialist movement, which had its beginnings in the 1860s, and second, small groups of radical social thinkers, who came to the fore in intellectual life after 1900. The left wing of the Social Democratic Party, which had been founded in 1890, especially the anarcho-syndicalist faction led by Ervin Szabó (1877-1918), the party's leading theorist, provided the Communist Party with numerous adherents. So did the most influential of the radical intellectual societies, the Galileo Circle (*Galilei Kör*), which had been formed in 1908.²⁸ Yet, despite this indigenous heritage and, in particular, the disillusionment of left socialists and

²¹ Mrs. István Friss and Mrs. Lajos Márton (eds.), *Dolgozók Lapja. A Kommunisták Magyarországi Pártja (a Kommunista Internacionálé szekciójá) központi lapja (1937-1938)* (Budapest, 1955). A facsimile edition was recently published: *Dolgozók Lapja 1937-1938* (Budapest, 1988).

²² László Svéd (ed.), *Az illegális Szabad Nép* (Budapest, 1954).

²³ *A magyar forradalmi munkásmozgalom története*, Vol. 2 (Budapest, 1967).

²⁴ *Magyarország története*, Vol. 8: 1918-1919, 1919-1945, edited by György Ránki (Budapest, 1976).

²⁵ Bennett Kovrig, *Communism in Hungary. From Kun to Kádár* (Stanford, 1979), pp. 21-149; Miklós Molnár, *De Béla Kun à János Kádár. Soixante-dix ans de communisme hongrois* (Paris, 1987), pp. 26-125.

²⁶ Ferenc Bárány, *A vihaszarki munkásmozgalom az ellenforradalmi rendszer első évtizedében* (Budapest, 1982).

²⁷ Ede Gerelyes, *Budapest munkásmozgalma 1919-1945* (Budapest, 1982).

²⁸ On the Social Democratic Party before the First World War see Keith Hitchins, "Hungary", in Marcel van der Linden and Jürgen Rojahn (eds.), *The Formation of Labour Movements, 1870-1914*, Vol. 1 (Leiden, 1990), pp. 347-366. On the radical intellectuals in general consult György Fukász, *A Magyarországi polgári radikalizmus történetéhez 1900-1918* (Budapest, 1960), especially the chapter on radicalism and socialism, pp. 216-296, and on the Galileo Circle in particular, Zsigmond Kende, *A Galilei Kör megalakulása*

radical intellectuals with the middle-of-the-road leadership of the MSZDP, the Hungarian Communist Party did not come into being as the result of a split within the socialist movement in Hungary, as had happened in other European countries.

The principal initiative for the creation of the Hungarian Communist Party came from among the numerous Hungarian prisoners of war in Russia. Before and especially after the October 1917 Revolution the Bolsheviks assiduously recruited Hungarians for their cause and converted a significant number to their theory of revolutionary social change. Impressed by the military and organizational contributions which the Hungarians were making to the consolidation of their regime, the Bolsheviks were persuaded that not only Germany but Hungary, too, would become a focal point of the impending European-wide proletarian revolution.²⁹ On March 24, 1918 in Moscow these "internationalist" recruits created a central organization, the Hungarian Group of the Communist Party (Bolshevik) of Russia (*Oroszországi Kommunista [bolsevik] Párt Magyar Csoportja*), whose primary task was to coordinate the activities of all Hungarian Communists in Russia. In May the Group became a member of the International Federation of Foreign Groups of the Communist Party (Bolshevik) of Russia, which was charged with recruiting foreign members and bringing them into the projected Third, or Communist, International.

Béla Kun played a key role in all these activities. As a prisoner of war in Tomsk in 1917 he became increasingly disenchanted with the lack of revolutionary fervor on the part of the MSZDP at home and was gradually won over to Leninist theories of revolution.³⁰ His commitment to revolution was noted by his Bolshevik mentors, who brought him to Petrograd in December 1917 where he worked in the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs. Aided by Szamuely and others, he took the lead in recruiting Hungarians for the Bolshevik cause and in coordinating the activities of various prisoner-of-war groups, services which earned him the presidency of the International Federation of Foreign Groups. During this period, the spring and summer of 1918, his faith in the imminence of a European-wide revolution hardened,³¹ and his stock with the Central Committee of the Bolshevik Party rose accordingly.

The Hungarian Communist Group in Moscow took the lead in founding the Hungarian Communist Party.³² It held a preliminary meeting on October 25, at which Kun, the group's chief ideologist, insisted upon immediate action.³³ He was now certain that as the war ground to an end violent change was inevitable, since the bourgeoisie would cling to power at all cost and the proletariat would respond by arming itself, seizing power, and forming a dictatorship, and then carry the socialist revolution to completion. He had no doubt that events in Western Europe and Hungary would follow the same course as in Russia. Thus, he argued, the creation of a Communist Party based on the Bolshevik model was imperative if Hungarian revolutionaries were to take

(Budapest, 1974). On the left socialists and radical intellectuals in 1917 and 1918 see György Milei, *A Kommunista Magyarországi Pártjának megalakításáról* (Budapest, 1962), pp. 6-49.

²⁹ The extent of the participation of Hungarian Communists in revolution and civil war in Russia between 1917 and 1922 is revealed in a comprehensive collection of documents assembled by a joint Soviet-Hungarian team of editors: *Vengerskie internatsionalisty v Oktiabr'skoi Revoliutsii i grazhdanskoi voine v SSSR*, 2 Vols. (Moscow, 1968). See also Antal Józsa and György Milei, *A rendíthetetlen százezer. Magyarok a nagy októberi szocialista forradalomban és a polgárháborúban* (Budapest, 1968).

³⁰ György Milei, "A leninizmushoz vezető út kezdetén. Kun Béla az oroszországi forradalmakban 1917-1918", *PtK*, Vol. 33, No. 3 (1987), pp. 58-100.

³¹ His own writings are revealing: Kun, *Válogatott írások és beszédek*, Vol. 1, pp. 67-175. A selection of Kun's articles which appeared originally in *Pravda*, in Moscow, between April 26 and July 24, 1918 were published in English translation by the British Socialist Party: Bela Kun, *Revolutionary Essays* (London, n.d.). Several of these pieces are absent from the above Hungarian edition of his works.

³² The activities of the group are described in György Milei, "Bor'ba vengerskoi gruppii Rossiiskoi Kommunisticheskoi Partii (Bol'shevikov) v 1918 godu za obrazovanie Kommunisticheskoi Partii Vengrii", in *Velikaia Oktiabr'skaia Sotsialisticheskaia Revoliutsiia i Vengriia* (Budapest, 1959; = *Studia Historica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae*, 17), pp. 67-85.

³³ Kun, *A Magyar Tanácsköztársaságról*, pp. 132-133.

advantage of the opportunity that lay open before them.³⁴ The group held a second meeting in Moscow on November 4 at which they proclaimed the establishment of the Hungarian Party of Communists (*A Kommunisták Magyarországi Pártja*; KMP), a designation intended to emphasize the fact that the new party was a branch of the international Communist movement.³⁵ The new party chose a nine-man provisional central committee and elected an External Bureau (*Külföldi Iroda*), which was to remain in Moscow to serve as a link between the Bolsheviks and Hungarian Communists in Russia and the Communists in Hungary.³⁶

Two to three hundred Communists returned forthwith to Budapest, where they played a crucial role in organizing their new party. Kun, who arrived on November 17, used all his powers of persuasion and the enormous prestige which he and his colleagues had acquired through their association with the victorious Bolsheviks, to bring radical intellectuals and disgruntled socialists into the provisional central committee. A series of hastily convened meetings resulted in a union of the various factions and the election of an enlarged central committee on November 24, the generally accepted date for the founding of the KMP.³⁷ The group from Moscow, led by Kun, who was the chairman of the new central committee, was primarily responsible for the speedy organization of the new party, but it had, nonetheless, to rely upon the support of two groups: the radical intellectuals of the Galileo Circle, among whom were Ottó Korvin (1894-1919), the notorious chief of security during the Hungarian Soviet Republic, and Imre Sallai (1897-1932), a Communist activist in Moscow and Hungary in the 1920s who was executed by Hungarian authorities, and the left Social Democrats, notably the disciples of Ervin Szabó, one of whom, József Révai (1898-1959), became a leading party theorist during the interwar period.³⁸ Kun was convinced that only with the support of such groups could he create a party committed to immediate revolution, for he had given up all hope of gaining control of the regular MSZDP organization. His contempt for its leadership and their moderate policies were to remain with him throughout his career and weighed heavily in his opposition to a popular front in the 1930s.

In the next four months the central committee worked feverishly to organize the new party and attract new members.³⁹ Conditions seemed ideal: Austria-Hungary had collapsed; a new Hungarian government headed by Mihály Károlyi had been installed in Budapest on October 31; and rapid political and social change had created general confusion and uncertainty. In such a heady, revolutionary atmosphere Kun eagerly promoted his own conception of the ideal party - a highly centralized body with a membership limited to committed revolutionaries. But the central committee found it impossible to build party membership upon such a narrow, "Bolshevik" foundation. Even though Communist recruiters gave special attention to organized workers in Budapest and major provincial industrial centers, they had only modest success, for they could not overcome the Social Democratic leadership of the trade unions. They were also active among young workers and students and succeeded in taking over direction of the National Association of Young Workers (*Ifjú munkások Országos Szövetsége*), which had been founded on November 30 under Social Democratic auspices. They also gained a few adherents among radical intellectuals such as the philosopher George Lukács, who joined the party in

³⁴ "Jegyzőkönyvi kivonat a Magyar Kommunista Csoport 1918 október 25-1 és november 4-1 értekezletéről", *Társadalmi Szemle*, Vol. 13, No. 11 (1958), pp. 92-93.

³⁵ György Milei, "Az OK(b) Magyar Csoportja a KMP megalakulásáért (1918 október-november)", *PtK*, Vol. 10, No. 2 (1964), pp. 160-171.

³⁶ Kun, *A Magyar Tanácsköztársaságról*, pp. 133-136.

³⁷ György Milei, "Mikor alakult meg a KMP?", *PtK*, Vol. 11, No. 3 (1965), pp. 124-141. Béla Kun's own account of the founding meeting, which he wrote in 1926, is published in "Összehívjuk az alakuló ülést", *Társadalmi Szemle*, Vol. 13, No. 11 (1958), pp. 96-98.

³⁸ On the contributions of these two groups to the establishment of the KMP see György Milei, "K istorii sozdaniia Vengerskoi Kommunisticheskoi Partii", *Acta Historica*, Vol. 7, No. 3-4 (1961), pp. 321-354.

³⁹ A succinct account is Mrs. Sándor Gábor, "A Kommunisták Magyarországi Pártjának megalakulása", in Tibor Erényi and Sándor Rákosi (eds.), *Legyőzhetetlen erő* (Budapest, 1968), pp. 13-26. For contemporary sources see *MMTVD*, Vol. 5, pp. 349-363, 415-437, 466-484.

December 1918.⁴⁰ But some likely candidates resisted conversion. Despite their enthusiasm for revolution, Lajos Kassák (1887-1967), the avantgarde poet, and the contributors to his review, *Ma* (Today), found the ideology and discipline of Communist practice incompatible with artistic creativity. The Communists enjoyed significant financial support from the Russian Bolsheviks, with whom they were linked by a regular courier service between Moscow and Budapest.⁴¹ As a result of all these efforts the membership of the party rose from about 10,000 in January 1919 to between 30,000 and 40,000 in March 1919.⁴²

The KMP was intent from the beginning upon seizing power, if necessary, by the violent overthrow of the Károlyi government. The first issues of the party organ, *Vörös Újság* (The Red Gazette), on December 7 and 11, 1918 made these intentions manifest by declaring Hungary ripe for revolution and by summoning the working class to build a network of councils, or soviets, in preparation for the seizure of power.⁴³ Using propaganda and organizational techniques they had learned in Russia, the Communists sought to undermine the government and weaken the MSZDP and thereby arrogate to themselves leadership of the dissatisfied and disenfranchised. But when the party tried to seize power in February the Károlyi government responded vigorously by arresting some fifty Communists, including Kun. Yet, Kun and his colleagues were treated as political prisoners, a status which allowed them to continue their organizational activities from prison.

3. The Hungarian Soviet Republic

On March 20, 1919 the Károlyi government collapsed under the weight of growing internal discontent and pressure from the Western Allies, who were engaged in making peace in Paris, to accept a demarcation line with Rumania unfavorable to Hungary. The interests of the majority of Social Democratic leaders, fearing the descent of the country into anarchy, and of the Communists, buoyed up by the prospect of immediate revolution, momentarily converged, and they agreed to unite and share power. Yet, their commitment to one another was far from wholehearted. Negotiations had been going on in prison for some ten days between Kun and representatives of the MSZDP and had been marked by acrimony and the refusal of both sides to compromise. Kun demanded acceptance of the Communist interpretation of history and the application of his party's extreme political and economic program,⁴⁴ a challenge which led the moderate Social Democratic leaders to denounce Communist negotiators as "adventurers" and their followers as a "tiny rabble".⁴⁵ Although the moderate Social Democrats expressed a readiness to form a government by themselves, they came to realize that it would probably not last for long without Communist support. But Kun seems not to have budged from his earlier uncompromising position because, encouraged by expectations of Russian financial and military support, he thought that the Social Democrats needed him more than he needed them. In any case, his meeting with the left Social Democrat Jenő Landler on March 21 proved to be crucial, for out of it came not just cooperation between two parties, as the moderate Social Democrats had proposed, but fusion, which Kun wanted. As he explained later, had this agreement not been made, the whole revolution would have collapsed.⁴⁶ The united party which thus came into being on March 21 took the provisional name of Socialist Party of Hungary (*Magyarországi Szocialista Párt*) and adopted in essentials the Communist Party program: adherence to the Third International

⁴⁰ Károly Urbán, "Lukács György a magyar munkásmozgalomban (1918-1930)", *PtK*, Vol. 31, No. 1 (1985), pp. 51-54.

⁴¹ Mrs. Gábor, "A Kommunista Magyarországi Pártjának megalakulása", p. 17.

⁴² Molnár, *De Béla Kun à János Kádár*, p. 32.

⁴³ *MMTVD*, Vol. 5, pp. 403-405.

⁴⁴ Kun, *Válogatott írások és beszédek*, Vol. 1, pp. 190-197; Letter to Ignác Bogár, March 11, 1919.

⁴⁵ On the course of the negotiations between March 13 and 20 see Tibor Hajdu, *Az 1918-as magyarországi polgári demokratikus forradalom* (Budapest, 1968), pp. 344-359.

⁴⁶ Kun, *Válogatott írások és beszédek*, Vol. 2, p. 75. The negotiations on March 21 are described in Tibor Hajdu, *A Magyarországi Tanácsköztársaság* (Budapest, 1969), pp. 30-45.

and an alliance with Soviet Russia, state control of the means of productions, the seizure of power by the proletariat, and the creation of a new type of government based upon the Bolshevik model of workers, peasants, and soldiers soviets.⁴⁷ Immediately after their union the two parties proclaimed a Soviet Republic (*Tanácsköztársaság*, or Republic of Councils). For the next four months, until August 1, the evolution of the KMP was intertwined with the fortunes of the Soviet Republic.⁴⁸

The partnership between the Communists and the Social Democrats was uneasy from the beginning. Kun and his associates yielded the administration of the united party to the latter, but they acquired a strong and, as time passed, a predominant role in the new government. The Communists and Social Democrats agreed to share power in the newly created Revolutionary Governing Council (*Forradalmi Kormányzótanács*) under the chairmanship of the Social Democrat Sándor Garbai (1879-1947), and they established a rough parity in the allotment of ministries or people's commissariats. Although only two out of fifteen were headed by Communists - Kun in foreign affairs and Károly Vántus (1879-1927), the secretary of the Hungarian Group of the Russian Communist Party in 1918, one of the four commissars for agriculture - many were left socialists inclined to cooperate with the Communists, such as Landler in interior and Jenő Varga (1879-1964), an economist, in finance, while ten of thirteen deputy commissars were Communists, including Szamuely for defense and Lukács for culture. The first, and only, congress of the united party, which was held in Budapest on June 12-13, reinforced the position of the Communists: five of the thirteen members of the new central committee were Communists, and one or two others belonged to the socialist left. In conducting the day-to-day affairs of the party and government, the Communists and the center Social Democrats tended to neutralize one another, thus allowing the left Social Democrats to hold the balance of power. Since the latter usually sided with the Communists, Kun and his supporters were generally able to formulate the policies of the Soviet Republic to suit their own revolutionary theories.

Besides the left Social Democrats, Kun also counted upon the material and moral support of the Russian Bolsheviks in order to bring the proletarian revolution in Hungary to fruition.⁴⁹ His faith in Russia's patronage of the international revolution was unshakable, and he saw himself as its leader in Central Europe. Conscious that the merger with the Social Democratic Party might appear as a grave deviation from Communist orthodoxy, he repeatedly assured Lenin that the left and center Social Democrats had accepted the platform drafted by the Communists, which, he insisted, was based upon Lenin's own program for revolution. He also boasted that his own personal influence over the Revolutionary Governing Council and among the mass of the population was so great that the success of the dictatorship of the proletariat was assured.⁵⁰

Lenin and his associates in Moscow judged the events in Hungary to be of crucial importance for the success of revolution throughout Central Europe, and they treated the proclamation of the Hungarian Soviet Republic as an encouraging sign that world revolution was imminent. Lenin asked Kun pointed questions about the nature of the Soviet Republic and whether the alliance with the Social Democrats had diluted the Hungarian party's commitment to revolution. He and other Bolshevik leaders kept a constant watch on events in Hungary, and during the life of the Soviet Republic over 200 messages were exchanged by telegraph mainly between Kun and Lenin and Georgi Chicherin, the Commissar for Foreign Affairs. These telegrams reveal much about the concerns of the Bolsheviks and how they dealt with their Hungarian comrades.⁵¹

⁴⁷ Molnár, *De Béla Kun à János Kádár*, pp. 35-36.

⁴⁸ General accounts of the Soviet Republic are the works by Tőkés, *Béla Kun and the Hungarian Soviet Republic*, and Hajdu, *A Magyarországi Tanácsköztársaság*, already cited, and a shortened English version of the latter, Tibor Hajdu, *The Hungarian Soviet Republic* (Budapest, 1979; = *Studia Historica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae*, 131).

⁴⁹ The views of Kun and his associates on the regime in Soviet Russia are described by Ishtvan Dolmanosh [István Dolmányos], "Sovetskaia respublika Vengrii o Sovetskoi Rossii", *Annales Universitatis Scientiarum Budapestinensis de Rolando Eötvös nominatae, Sectio Historica*, Vol. 21 (1981), pp. 259-289.

⁵⁰ László Réti, *Lenin és a magyar munkásmozgalom* (Budapest, 1970), pp. 130-131.

⁵¹ The texts have been published in *Budapest-Moszkva. Szovjet-Oroszország és a Magyarországi Tanácsköztársaság kapcsolatai táviratok tükrében*, edited by Magda Imre and Imre Szerényi (Budapest, 1979). See also Réti, *Lenin*, pp. 136-181.

Kun strove with all the means at his command to transform Hungary into a proletarian state and society. He took as his starting-point the agreement which the KMP had reached with the Social Democrats on March 21, and thus his program was more Bolshevik than social democratic. He and his supporters wasted no time in putting their theory of the dictatorship of the proletariat to the test. Between March 25 and April 5 they issued a series of decrees intended to mobilize all human and material resources for the rapid building of a new society. To assure security for the new regime the country's military forces were to be reorganized into a Red Army, a Red Guard was formed to take over the maintenance of public order from the regular police, and new, revolutionary tribunals dominated by non-professional judges loyal to the Communist Party replaced the old court system. As for the economy, industrial enterprises with over twenty employees, mines, and transport facilities were nationalized, and banks and other financial institutions were brought under state control. A drastic land reform provided for the confiscation of large and medium-sized estates, including almost all the properties belonging to churches. But these properties were not turned over to peasants to be inefficient and unproductive. Rather, they became agricultural cooperatives subject to the control of local people's councils.⁵² Education, too, had a role to play in the new society. All elementary and secondary schools became the property of the state, and plans were made to reform universities in accordance with the new proletarian spirit. The government also undertook long neglected social reforms - an end to child labor, increases in wages, equal opportunities for women in the work place, and a campaign to eliminate illiteracy. To give the new regime legitimacy the Revolutionary Governing Council organized elections on April 7-10 for urban and rural soviets, which were to serve as executors of the Council's decrees. Since only one set of candidates was offered voters, the results of the balloting were never in doubt.⁵³

Whatever success Kun was to have in carrying out such a radical program depended more than he was willing to admit upon the support of moderate Social Democrats. Despite his dynamism and his paramount role in the Revolutionary Governing Council, at every step he had to take into account the suspicions and waverings of these Social Democrats and sometimes had to modify his policies accordingly in order to ensure their acquiescence.

The alliance between the two parties had always been on shaky ground, for purists on both sides - Szamuely and Révai among the Communists and many Social Democrats - opposed concessions to one another. The ideological gulf separating the two partners was strikingly evident in the press. *Népszava* (The People's Voice), the Social Democrat paper before the merger of the parties and afterwards nominally the united party's official morning organ, pursued a moderate line, whereas *Vörös Újság*, the Communist daily and after March 21 the afternoon organ of the united party, demanded the immediate and unconditional fulfillment of the Communists' revolutionary program. Control of the trade unions was another issue which divided Communists and Social Democrats. The latter wanted to preserve the traditional relationship between the party and the unions, which provided for automatic membership of trade unionists in the party. They had the support of the trade union leadership, which shunned revolution and revolutionaries. The Communists, on the other hand, were anxious to enlist labor in the revolutionary struggle, but insisted upon subordinating it to the disciplined, elite vanguard of the proletariat. A few Communists went so far as to urge the abolition of unions altogether and their replacement by workers' soviets.⁵⁴

Divergences within the united party came to a head at its congress in mid-June. Bitter disputes broke out over a whole range of issues. On a change of the party's name Kun, upholding the view of the recently formed Comintern, insisted that it be called the Hungarian Party of Communists, but the majority of Social Democrats argued that such a designation in the popular mind would signify atheism and terrorism. A compromise was finally reached, and the name, Hungarian Party of Socialist-Communist Workers (*Szocialista-Kommunista Munkások Magyarországi Pártja*), was adopted. As for the character of the dictatorship, Kun would

⁵² For a critique of the Soviet Republic's agrarian program and its longer-term significance see Rózsa Csonka, *Agrárproblémák, parasztmozgalmak és a Kommunista Internacionálé agrárpolitikája (1919-1929)* (Budapest, 1974), pp. 105-121.

⁵³ Hajdu, *A Magyarországi Tanácsköztársaság*, pp. 81-134, 360-407.

⁵⁴ József Révai, *Válogatott történelmi írások*, Vol. 1 (Budapest, 1966), pp. 60-62: "Szakszervezet a proletárdiktatúrában". For a recent discussion of these differences see Péter Sipos, *Die Sozialdemokratische Partei Ungarns und die Gewerkschaften 1890-1944* (Budapest, 1991; = *Studia Historica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae*, 193), pp. 40-45.

hear of no softening of the campaign against all its enemies, while the Social Democrats urged tolerance.⁵⁵ Although the Communists maintained their position in the party and government, they had thoroughly alienated two powerful constituencies - the majority of the Social Democrats and the leaders of the trade unions - and had thus jeopardized their leadership of the Soviet Republic.

The collapse of the Hungarian Soviet Republic came on August 1 when the Revolutionary Governing Council resigned and was replaced by several short-lived governments until the installation of a right-wing, nationalist regime under Nicholas Horthy in the fall of 1919. The Soviet Republic had fallen victim to the growing discontent of almost every segment of society, including workers and other groups which had initially supported the dictatorship, to the refusal of the majority of Social Democrats to continue their support of what they had come to see as a purely Communist enterprise, to the hostility of the Western Allies toward the Republic, and to the immediate danger at the end of July of a Rumanian occupation of the country. These and other causes of failure became the subject of much soul-searching and acrimony among Communist leaders in the following decade.⁵⁶ From exile in Moscow Kun wrote extensively on the subject partly to answer the harsh criticism levelled at him and his colleagues by Lenin and partly to influence the future policies and tactics of the Hungarian Communist Party. He insisted that the Soviet Republic had not been formed prematurely because in March 1919 the bourgeoisie had proved itself incapable of governing and the Social Democrats had refused to govern. He also pointed out that Hungarian Communists had been anxious to help the Bolsheviks in Russia and to spur revolution in Central Europe. He found the underlying cause of the Soviet Republic's collapse in the Communists' merger with the Social Democratic Party, which, he claimed, "circumstances" had forced upon them before they had formed a strong party of their own. Thus, he argued, the Communists had become junior partners in a reform party and had been thwarted in their efforts to carry out the socialist revolution.⁵⁷ Yet, the legacy of the Soviet Republic which weighed most heavily upon Hungarian Communists was not its collapse but rather the heights of revolutionary experience, however brief, which it had opened to them.

4. Hungary between the World Wars

The fortunes of the Hungarian Communist Party in the quarter-century following the collapse of the Soviet Republic depended in great measure upon prevailing social and political conditions and the mental climate. The First World War remained a powerful, and unhappy, presence throughout the period. The Treaty of Trianon, signed in June 1920 between the Allies and Hungary, reduced Hungary's territory to one-third its pre-war size and population (excluding Croatia) from 18 million to 8 million. As a consequence, Hungary lost almost all her hydro-electric and forest resources and mineral deposits, except coal, and suffered a disruption of the economic growth and balance achieved as a partner in the Dual Monarchy after 1867. Deeply felt human losses also occurred. The peace treaty had, in a sense, settled the long-standing nationality problem in Hungary, since, except for the Germans, the country no longer possessed significant ethnic minorities. Yet, nearly 3 million Magyars had been incorporated into the successor states, notably Rumania and Czechoslovakia. These "orphaned" Magyars, the "amputations" of territory, and the "wounds" inflicted on the national psyche by the destruction of historical Hungary were burning issues for Hungarians of all social classes throughout the interwar period and nourished intense national feeling and demands for revision of the "unjust and humiliating" peace treaty.

The Hungarian economy and society thus had to adjust to greatly altered possibilities for development. In 1920 roughly 55% (in 1930 52%) of the population earned its living primarily from agriculture. Although modest land reform took place after the war, the rural economy continued to be marked by striking contrasts of

⁵⁵ Hajdu, *A Magyarországi Tanácsköztársaság*, pp. 247-268. The debates and the program and statutes adopted by the congress are in *MMTVD*, Vol. 6, part 2, pp. 7-58.

⁵⁶ Ágnes Szabó, *A Kommunizták Magyarországi Pártjának újjaszervezése 1919-1925* (Budapest, 1970), pp. 45-64.

⁵⁷ Kun set forth his views in such pieces as "Forradalomról forradalomra" (1920) and "Mit kell az ifjúságnak a magyar proletárforradalomról tanulnia?" (1924), in Kun, *Szocialista forradalom Magyarországon*, pp. 366-405, 421-428. On the general debate about the failure of the Soviet Republic among Hungarian Communist exiles see Ágnes Szabó, "Politikai, elméleti kérdések a magyar kommunista emigrációban (1919-1920)", *Történelmi Szemle*, Vol. 9, No. 3-4 (1966), pp. 368-396.

wealth and poverty. Agricultural production was dominated by some 10,000 landowners who together possessed about half the arable land, pastures, and forests of the country (1,000 landowners had more than 500 hectares each and formed the magnate class). At the other end of the scale were 3 million poor peasants, about two-thirds of them agricultural laborers possessing no more than half a hectare of land and the other one-third working one-half to three hectares. Between the rich and the poor was a small stratum of middle-sized peasants, who were too few in number to serve as an innovative, entrepreneurial rural bourgeoisie. The remaining roughly 50% of the population (in 1930) were engaged in manufacturing, mining, transportation, and commerce (30%), or belonged to the growing contingent of white-collar employees and civil servants and to the liberal professions.

Urbanization made slow progress in the interwar period. In 1920 35% (in 1930 36%) of the population lived in cities. Budapest with one million inhabitants in 1930 was by far the largest city with 16.6% of the total population of the country and 46 of urban dwellers; Szeged and Debrecen were next with about 100,000 inhabitants each. Budapest dominated both political life as the seat of government and economic life as the chief industrial, commercial, and financial center of the country. It was from here that the upper bourgeoisie, assisted by the provincial gentry who filled the ranks of the professional army and the civil service, administered the country's affairs. But the provinces remained strongly attached to tradition, and the modernization of society and mentalities evident in Budapest was limited to isolated places, mainly cities. At the bottom of the urban social scale was the proletariat, which experienced steady growth, from 886,000 in 1920 to 1,160,000 (660,000 of whom were engaged in industry and mining) in 1930, or roughly 30% of all wage-earners. Working conditions were poor and the standard of living low for the majority of workers, who often could not provide even the essentials of life for their families.

Interwar Hungary had a parliamentary system similar to that of Western European democracies in form, but in practice it was anti-liberal and authoritarian and rested upon a limited franchise and other electoral practices which enabled the government party to dominate the legislature, the executive, and the judiciary. Under such a system the bureaucracy and the police exercised broad discretionary powers, and the political opposition, which was relatively small, could have little hope of changing existing conditions. Nicholas Horthy, who bore the title of Regent and exercised the powers of head of state between 1920 and 1944, presided over the system, and his prime ministers - István Bethlen (1921-1931), who favored the conservative-aristocratic ideas and institutions of the pre-war era and who brought order after the turmoil of the Soviet Republic, and Gyula Gömbös (1932-1935), a nationalist and an authoritarian under whom the extreme right rose to prominence - saw its proper functioning. The classes who stood behind the system and who sought to benefit from it were the aristocracy, which regained much of the influence it had enjoyed before the Soviet Republic, and the native Magyar middle class, seconded by the gentry, which sought to solidify its economic and political position at the expense of the aristocracy and the Jewish middle-class. Besides national sentiment, anti-Semitism, which was directed particularly against Jewish predominance in many branches of industry, banking, and commerce and in the liberal professions, notably law and medicine, also exerted a strong influence on public life.

The political system and the economic and social structure of interwar Hungary were thus antithetical to the collectivist and internationalist goals proclaimed by the KMP. When the pursuit of Communists associated with the Soviet Republic had subsided, the KMP was formally outlawed in 1921, and subsequently no Hungarian government tolerated its organizing and propaganda activities. The party's primary constituency - the industrial working class - was relatively small and, except in Budapest and a few other centers, lacked discipline and class consciousness. The majority of peasants, no matter what their economic status, sought land and continued to be influenced by the traditional practices and mentality of their rural communities, and thus few reacted sympathetically to Communist solutions to the agrarian problem. But both urban workers and peasants were responsive to appeals to Hungarian patriotism and shared with other classes a sense of national community, which helped to insulate them from Communist exhortations to proletarian solidarity.

5. The Organizational Structure of the Hungarian Communist Party

Following the resignation of the Revolutionary Governing Council on August 1, 1919 Kun, Landler, and a number of their colleagues fled to Austria, where they were granted political asylum. At home the government pursued Communists and their sympathizers with relentless efficiency. Repression and the subsequent outlawing of the Communist Party had a decisive influence on its organization and tactics. Throughout the interwar period it was forced to carry on much of its work abroad, and at home it functioned essentially as an underground organization in order to protect its members from arrest and prevent their ranks from being infiltrated by informers. As a consequence, its contacts with the public were severely limited, and even groups of activists

were often isolated from one another.

The persecution of Communists and others who had supported the Hungarian Soviet Republic began in earnest in the fall of 1919. During the so-called "white terror" some 1,000 to 5,000 opponents of the new regime were killed and many more thousands were imprisoned. It is difficult to say precisely how many of them were Communists. The situation became so desperate that a number of Communists, including George Lukács, who had stayed behind in Budapest to preserve at least the semblance of an organization, left the country. The government carried out new and massive waves of arrests in 1926 and 1927, when some 550 Communists and sympathizers were picked up, and it staged public trials for the more important figures, notably Mátyás Rákosi.⁵⁸ In the 1930s, as the political right in Hungary became stronger, the government intensified its efforts to destroy the Communist Party. It proclaimed martial law in 1931 and imposed the death sentence on Communists for the first time since the end of the white terror. Two members of the "home secretariat" in Budapest, Imre Sallai and Sándor Fürst (1903-1932), were executed in 1932, despite an international campaign to save them.⁵⁹ When activists were dispatched to Budapest from abroad as replacements they, too, were usually arrested. After Hungary joined the German invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941 yet another major wave of repression struck the party. Under such conditions it was impossible to maintain organizational continuity. Membership figures for Hungary - only approximations are possible - must have been discouraging to party leaders. They indicate perhaps 250 activists in 1922,⁶⁰ about 1,000 in 1929,⁶¹ and 300 or 400 in 1942.⁶² In April and May 1942 almost its entire leadership was arrested, and some 200 Communists were imprisoned. As a result, the party was practically destroyed and did not recover until after the war.

All this time the exiled Communists tried to reestablish the organizational structure of the party and instil in its members both at home and abroad a sense of mission.⁶³ A constant hindrance to the efficient management of party affairs was the lack of a single administrative center. During the interwar period there were at least five such centers, and occasionally three were functioning at the same time. In the 1920s Vienna was headquarters for an important segment of the party's leadership. Kun and Landler took the lead in establishing a new central committee there, but, rather than uniting the disparate factions of the party, it became the center of the "moderates" led by Landler and opposed to Kun, who in 1920 established his base in Moscow. Moscow was always of prime importance because Hungarian party leaders there were in regular, direct contact with the Comintern and the Soviet Communist Party. Unfortunately, information about the organization and activities of the "Moscow Committee" is sparse.⁶⁴ For short periods Berlin in 1932 and Prague in 1936-1938 served as temporary homes for the party's so-called External Committee (*Külföldi Bizottság*).

The party leaders bore some of the responsibility for the dire straits in which they found themselves, because of their constant infighting. Kun served as a lightning rod for much of the controversy, since he was preeminent within the party and in general hued to a rigid line that discouraged any compromise with the revolutionary principles he had enunciated during the Hungarian Soviet Republic. The differences between him and Landler concerned mainly immediate questions of tactics and organization. For example, both groups agreed

⁵⁸ Documents on the Rákosi trial were published and its importance stressed in *Dokumentumok a magyar párttörténet tanulmányozásához*, Vol. 3, pp. 136-141. The event received less attention in publications appearing after Rákosi's forced departure from Hungary in 1956.

⁵⁹ *Dokumentumok a magyar forradalmi munkásmozgalom történetéből*, Vol. 2, pp. 196-209.

⁶⁰ Ágnes Szabó, "A KMP újjászervezése az illegálitás körülményei között. A kommunista szervezetek kiépülése (1919-1929)", in *Legyőzhetetlen erő*, pp. 56-57.

⁶¹ György Borsányi, "Kommunista szervezkedés a gazdasági világválság és a fasizmus előretörése idején (1929-1935)", in *Legyőzhetetlen erő*, pp. 79-82.

⁶² István Pintér, "A KMP az 1936-1944-es években", in *Legyőzhetetlen erő*, p. 135.

⁶³ For an overview of these activities down to the holding of the first Communist Party congress in 1925 see Szabó, *A Kommunizmus Magyarországi Pártjának újjászervezése*, pp. 7-190.

⁶⁴ Katalin Petrák, "Adalékok a magyarok részvételéhez a szocializmus építésében szovjet földön az 1922-36-os években", *PtK*, Vol. 32, No. 2 (1986), pp. 117-151.

on the need to combat the Horthy regime in order to prepare the way for a new revolution and another proletarian dictatorship, and they thought that they could skip the bourgeois-democratic revolution since, in their view, it had already occurred in 1918. But they differed sharply over the means to these desired ends.

Almost from the moment they began exile Kun and Landler disagreed on the imminence of revolution in Hungary and in Central Europe.⁶⁵ Kun sensed that it was near. Convinced that the successor states of Austria-Hungary could not survive, because of insurmountable economic and ethnic problems, he viewed them as peculiarly ripe for revolution. As for Hungary, in particular, he denied that the new political system had consolidated itself. He was thus certain that vigorous revolutionary activity would be effective, and he insisted that the KMP intensify its struggle within the country in order to prepare its members and the working class in general to exercise their revolutionary responsibilities. Such ideas lay behind his proposals to make Hungary the center of the party's activities and to create there a mass, but still secret, party separate from all other parties and committed to immediate revolution. Landler and the majority of his colleagues in Vienna, however, took a more moderate and, to them, more realistic approach to party organization and agitation. They argued that the Horthy regime had firmly established itself in power and, hence, the party had to adapt its program and tactics to the requirements of long-term struggle. They were convinced that to make Hungary the main focus of this struggle and to recruit and maintain a mass organization there was to risk the wholesale arrest of activists and the disruption of all worthwhile activity. They urged, instead, that Communists infiltrate legal organizations such as the MSZDP and the trade unions and use them to achieve the party's goals.⁶⁶ The Kun and Landler factions thus enunciated the fundamental policy dilemma that rent the party until the mid-1930s: to indulge in messianism, that is, to follow a "pure and hard", or dogmatic and sectarian, struggle leading to the creation of a second Hungarian Soviet Republic and a dictatorship of the proletariat, or to accept existing political realities and aim, first of all, at the possible - the democratic transformation of the country.

The ideological high point of the controversy came in late 1928 when George Lukács submitted a position paper on goals and tactics to the party leadership to be debated in preparation for the second party congress. Since leaving Hungary in the fall of 1919 Lukács had lived in Vienna, where he had been a member of the party's external committee.⁶⁷ He had written extensively on Marxism, publishing one of his master works, *Geschichte und Klassenbewußtsein*, in 1923, and he had become deeply involved in the polemics between the Kun and Landler factions. His paper in 1928 thus formed part of the on-going debate within the KMP over its role in the international Communist movement. But Lukács also tried to take into account the shifting ideological stances of the Comintern, particularly the resolutions of its Sixth Congress in June 1928, which inaugurated a left turn of the class struggle and an intensification of attacks on the Social Democrats as social fascists.

Writing under the pseudonym, Blum, Lukács set forth a number of "theses" in which he tried to reconcile the hard line assumed by the Comintern and supported by the Kun faction, and the moderate, "realist" line represented by the Landler faction.⁶⁸ Thus, on the one hand, he approved of the Hungarian party's efforts

⁶⁵ The debate over this issue among Hungarian Communists is described in Béla Kirschner, *A KMP stratégiai irányvonalának alakulása (1919-1921)* (Budapest, 1980; = *Értekezések a Történelmi Tudományok Köréből*, 89), pp. 23-74.

⁶⁶ Szabó, *Landler Jenő*, pp. 203-210. None of Landler's polemics with Kun appear in his *Válogatott beszédek és írások*, cited above.

⁶⁷ On Lukács's activities during the 1920s see Michael Löwy, *Georg Lukács - From Romanticism to Bolshevism* (London, 1979), pp. 145-201; Károly Urbán, "Lukács György a magyar munkásmozgalomban (1918-1930)", *PtK*, Vol. 31, No. 1 (1985), pp. 65-85; and Ferenc L. Lendvai, "A messianisztikus szektásság jegyében (Lukács György 1918/19-1930)", in *A magyar filozófiai gondolkodás a két világháború között*, pp. 48-81.

⁶⁸ Excerpts from the "Blum theses" have been published in Georg Lukács, *Schriften zur Ideologie und Politik* (Neuwied and Berlin, 1967), pp. 290-322, which represent a translation of the Hungarian text published in *PtK*, Vol. 2, No. 3 (1956), pp. 75-94, under the title: "Téziservezet a magyar politikai és gazdasági helyzetről és a KMP feladatairól". The complete text in Hungarian was published by Ágnes Szabó, "A Blum-tézisek", *PtK*, Vol. 21, No. 4 (1975), pp. 154-207. See the analysis of the "Blum theses" by Miklós Lackó, *Válságok-választások. Történelmi tanulmányok a két háború közötti Magyarországról* (Budapest, 1975),

to establish a second proletarian dictatorship and endorsed the struggle of "class against class", but, on the other hand, he made his central thesis the creation of a "democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry" within the framework of bourgeois society. As he saw it, the primary goal of this dictatorship was to replace the quasi-fascist Horthy regime by a type of democracy that would leave the bourgeoisie in possession of the means of production, but would grant a part of its political power to the working class.⁶⁹ Not surprisingly, this contradictory stance brought Lukács into conflict with Kun and the Comintern and left him almost completely alone. He recanted, and although he participated in the second congress of the KMP in 1930, he withdrew from active party work.

Party congresses were intended primarily to reorganize and rejuvenate the party, but in fact they accomplished neither task. The first congress met in Vienna on August 18-21, 1925 with twenty-two delegates present.⁷⁰ It approved a new organizational structure for the party and tried to draw its scattered units closer together by making the central committee responsible for managing all party affairs between congresses and by mandating the appointment of party officials from the top, but factionalism persisted and party authority remained dispersed. The thirty-two delegates to the second congress,⁷¹ which met in Aprilovka, some 150 kilometers from Moscow, on February 25-28, 1930, adopted yet another elaborate organizational blueprint and spoke hopefully about the party's future. But in the following year the Comintern abruptly replaced the entire central committee which the congress had chosen and in 1936 simply dissolved the party.

Throughout the interwar period the organizational structure of the KMP rested on anything but solid foundations. Formidable on paper, in practice it functioned inefficiently and fitfully. In order to overcome the disruption of its activities caused by government repression and to widen its influence in public affairs party leaders tried to establish a viable legal political organization. At first, in accordance with shifts in the position of the Comintern,⁷² they decided to infiltrate the left wing of the MSZDP and transform it into a separate party.⁷³ In the spring of 1923 Jenő Landler sent several activists from Vienna to Budapest to mobilize Communists and gain converts among Social Democrats for the new initiative. A small secret organization emerged, and at the congress of the MSZDP in April 1924 its adherents put forward a program which challenged the very foundations of democratic socialism. Social Democratic leaders reacted immediately and undertook to neutralize and remove the interlopers.

A number of left Social Democrats finally seceded from their party in April 1925 and formed the Socialist Workers' Party of Hungary (*Magyarországi Szocialista Munkáspárt*; MSZMP).⁷⁴ Although it presented itself as independent, it was in fact created and maintained by the KMP, in accordance with directives from the Comintern that Communists must formulate its program and direct its activities. The new party, which had about 1,500 members in June 1925 and about 9,500 a year later, tried to gain a significant place in political life by running candidates in elections, by cooperating with the MSZDP, by seeking recognition at the congress of the Second International at Marseille, and by intensive recruiting in factories and in rural areas.⁷⁵ But these efforts were to little avail, as its Communist affiliation was well known to both the MSZDP, which rejected all overtures at cooperation, and the government, which subjected its members to harassment and arrest. The trial and imprisonment of party leaders in February 1927 brought a practical end to its existence as the only legal Com-

pp. 171-193.

⁶⁹ Lukács, *Schriften zur Ideologie und Politik*, pp. 305-319.

⁷⁰ The documents have been published by Ágnes Szabó and Magda Imre (eds.), *A KMP első kongresszusa* (Budapest, 1975), pp. 47-196.

⁷¹ Mrs. Zoltán Horváth, *A KMP második kongresszusa* (Budapest, 1964), pp. 36-69.

⁷² Béla Kirschner, *A KMP stratégiai vonalának alakulása 1919. augusztus-1925. augusztus* (Budapest, 1985), pp. 159-176.

⁷³ Mrs. Ervin Liptai, *A Magyarországi Szocialista Munkáspárt 1925-1928* (Budapest, 1971), pp. 5-49.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 67-95.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 96-150, 178-185.

unist party in the interwar period.

The Social Democratic Party maintained its predominance in the organized labor movement.⁷⁶ The KMP failed to establish a permanent and significant trade-union movement of its own. The causes were many: besides government persecution and the opposition of trade-union leaders, the shifting policies of the Comintern, and ambivalent attitudes within the KMP itself toward the organization of separate, "Red" trade unions and their role in the revolutionary movement.⁷⁷ Especially striking was the Communists' inability to take advantage of the severe economic crisis in Hungary in 1929-1933,⁷⁸ even though they made special efforts to organize the unemployed. For example, toward the end of 1929 they formed the National Unity Committee of the Unemployed (*Munkanélküliek Országos Egységbizottsága*), which held street demonstrations and other protest meetings, the largest of which drew a crowd of 3,000 in Budapest in January 1930. But the Communists could not maintain momentum under constant police pressure, and the committee was dissolved. In the fall of 1931 the KMP brought together a number of militant labor factions under an umbrella organization, the United Trade Union Opposition (*Egyesült Szakszervezeti Ellenzék; ESZE*), which made numerous demands on behalf of the workers, but could attract no more than 200 or 300 members during its short existence. It also served the Communist Party in the latter's attempts in 1934 to interest Social Democrats in creating a unified workers movement to combat the Gömbös regime.⁷⁹ But in the following year ESZE ceased to exist when the Comintern changed its policy of supporting separate Communist trade unions, and the KMP, in keeping with Comintern directives to form a popular front with broadly democratic forces, largely abandoned its own organizing activities and sought cooperation with Social Democratic trade unions.

The KMP proved unable to develop a clear and consistent policy toward the peasantry mainly because its leaders could not decide on what place the peasantry should occupy in the revolutionary struggle and the proletarian dictatorship.⁸⁰ Consequently, the party's recruitment and organizing activities in the countryside were sporadic, and whatever successes it achieved were short-lived.⁸¹ For example, in the early 1930s, during the height of the depression, Communist tried to establish a union of agricultural laborers in the region between the Danube and the Tisza, but activists quickly became discouraged with the meager results of their campaign. Party leaders also debated the merits of forming a legal party in order to enhance their appeal in the rural areas, but they dropped the idea. A wave of arrests in 1933 almost completely destroyed the few fragile peasant

⁷⁶ Péter Sipos, *Die Sozialdemokratische Partei Ungarns und die Gewerkschaften 1890-1944*, pp. 44-45, 50-51, 74-76, 104. The same conclusion may be drawn from an overview favorable to the KMP and critical of the Social Democrats by Á. Szabó and I. Pintér, *Legal and Underground Labour Movement in Hungary 1919-1945* (Budapest, 1980; = *Studia Historica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae*, 168).

⁷⁷ For a discussion of these issues see Kálmán Szakács, "The Trade-Union Politics of the Hungarian Party of Communists (August 1919-October 1944)", in E. Kabos and A. Zsilák (eds.), *Studies on the History of the Hungarian Trade-Union Movement* (Budapest, 1977), pp. 96-122.

⁷⁸ The Communist Party's activities are presented in a favorable light by György Borsányi, "A KMP a munkanélküliek követeléseiről a gazdasági világválság éveiben (1929-1933)", *PtK*, Vol. 10, No. 2 (1964), pp. 29-55. But the same author has little to say about the Communists in a later piece, György Borsányi, "The Great Depression and the Organized Working Class in Hungary 1929-1933", in Kabos and Zsilák, *Studies on the History of the Hungarian Trade-Union Movement*, pp. 153-181.

⁷⁹ Piroška Ördögh, *A szakszervezetek antifasiszta tevékenység a Gömbös-kormány idején* (Budapest, 1977), pp. 112-137.

⁸⁰ Béla Kirschner, "Stellungnahme der Kommunistischen Partei Ungarns zu der Frage der demokratischen Diktatur der Arbeiter und Bauern zwischen 1924-1927", *Annales Universitatis Scientiarum Budapestinensis de Rolando Eötvös nominatae, Sectio Historica*, Vol. 5 (1963), pp. 207-251.

⁸¹ Kálmán Szakács, *A Kommunista Párt agrárpolitikája, 1920-1930* (Budapest, 1961), pp. 109-118, 144-154.

organizations the party had managed to create.⁸²

Hungarian Communists in Moscow were also concerned with the agrarian question. In 1935 the matter came up in discussions of the party's new interest in creating a broad political alliance of democratic forces and how the peasantry might be included in it. Those who rejected simple agrarian reform and favored an agrarian revolution subordinate to the proletarian revolution carried the day,⁸³ but they showed little understanding of the aspirations of the majority of peasants.

Intellectuals represented another potential constituency for the KMP. Yet, party leaders never succeeded in reconciling the aesthetics of literary creativity with the practical requirements of political struggle. On the whole, the party's approach to literature in the interwar period followed the same narrow, sectarian line which Kun and his faction represented in party affairs in general. The influence of the proletarian cultural current emanating from Moscow, which would later be known as socialist realism, exercised a decisive influence on Hungarian writers in exile, for they were anxious to formulate a new conception of literature that would reconcile the national tradition with a literature subordinate to a socialist ideology.⁸⁴ The debate became particularly animated during the economic depression of the early 1930s when a number of writers and editors were moved to question the value of "pure literature" divorced from "social realities".⁸⁵ Such reviews as *100%*, a legal Communist cultural and literary monthly published in Budapest (1927-1930),⁸⁶ and *Gondolat* (Thought; Budapest, 1935-1937)⁸⁷ offered a more open forum for the expression of opinion than *Sarló és Kalapács* (Sickle and Hammer), which was published monthly in Moscow (1929-1937) and promoted ideologically-charged assessments of literary currents and writers.⁸⁸ In the final analysis, Communist Party leaders failed to appreciate the nature of individual creativity. Instead, they persisted in judging literature primarily as a weapon in the class struggle. Such an attitude helps to explain why the gifted poet Attila József (1905-1937), who felt a genuine sympathy for the workers and joined the KMP in 1930 to promote their cause, was alienated by the harsh criticism of his work by party officials.⁸⁹

In the mid-1930s pressure increased on the party to form a popular front with the Social Democrats as a means of combatting the advance of fascism in Europe. But the KMP was ill-equipped to pursue the popular front in the latter 1930s because after the Comintern's dissolution of the party in 1936 it had no organization in Hungary until 1939, when Ferenc Rózsa, at the behest of the Prague secretariat, formed a committee to

⁸² Relatively little attention has been given to this problem, but see Kálmán Szakács, "A KMP falusi szervezeti tevékenységéről a 2. kongresszustól 1933 májusáig", *PtK*, Vol. 14, No. 3 (1968), pp. 78-108.

⁸³ Kálmán Szakács, "Vita a KMP-ban a népfrontpolitika néhány kérdéséről a Komintern 7. kongresszusát megelőző hetekben", *PtK*, Vol. 10, No. 1 (1964), pp. 67-98.

⁸⁴ Magda K. Nagy, "Irodalmi hagyományaink az 1920-as évek Kommunista publicisztikájában", *PtK*, Vol. 18, No. 2 (1972), pp. 84-122.

⁸⁵ Magda K. Nagy, "Viták, vélemények az irodalom és a politika kapcsolatáról. A szocialista irodalom elvi követelményeiről (1929-1933)", *PtK*, Vol. 22, No. 4 (1976), pp. 44-89.

⁸⁶ A history of the review and an anthology of articles are presented by Aladár Tamás, *A 100%. A KMP legális folyóirata 1927-1930* (Budapest, 1977).

⁸⁷ Ernő Gondos, "A 'Gondolat'-ról", in Miklós Szabolcsi and László Illés (eds.), *"Jöjj el, Szabadság!"* (Budapest, 1967), pp. 440-471.

⁸⁸ Ferenc Botka, "A *Sarló és Kalapács* (1929-1937)", in Szabolcsi and Illés (eds.), *"Jöjj el, Szabadság!"*, pp. 250-302.

⁸⁹ József's relations with the KMP between 1931 and 1937, particularly the question of his expulsion from the party, are discussed by György Vertés, *József Attila és az illegális Kommunista Párt* (Budapest, 1964). See also Miklós Szabolcsi, "József Attila és az illegális Kommunista Párt viszonyának kérdéséhez", *PtK*, Vol. 11, No. 4 (1965), pp. 30-46.

coordinate party activities in Hungary.⁹⁰ Its effectiveness was severely limited, because of government persecution, which intensified after Hungary's entrance into the war against the Soviet Union in June 1941. For the next three years the organizational history of the KMP became intertwined with the attempts by opponents of the Horthy regime and the war to create a united front.

6. *The Role of the Comintern*

Hungarian Communists took an active part in the work of the Comintern. At its congresses they were often at the center of debates over ideology and tactics. At the Third Congress in 1921, for example, they even found themselves taking opposite sides on the issue of how best to achieve Communist objectives and gain adherents. Kun urged "purity" and militancy, whereas Landler and Lukács favored a gradual campaign to win over the working class and cooperation with such potential allies as the poor peasantry.⁹¹ Hungarian Communists also performed a variety of tasks for the Comintern.⁹² For example, Landler undertook missions in Western and Central Europe, and Jenő Varga was a leading economic adviser to the Comintern. The most prominent Hungarian in the Comintern was Kun, who, despite his occasional flashes of independence, enjoyed great prestige in the Comintern and the Soviet party as the "historic leader" of the Hungarian proletarian revolution of 1919. After holding a number of posts on the Comintern apparatus, he reached the high point of his career in the international Communist movement in 1928 when the Sixth Congress of the Comintern elected him a member of its executive committee alongside Stalin and Bukharin. But Kun also owed his downfall, at least in some measure, to his deep involvement in Comintern politics, for he had allied himself with Grigori Zinoviev, who was to perish in the Stalin purges in 1936.

The Comintern intervened continuously in every area of KMP affairs from its organizational structure to its ideological stand on critical issues. Examples abound. A committee of the Comintern supervised the revival of the KMP in 1924 and arranged the holding of its first congress in 1925, and another committee, headed by Dmitri Manuilsky, the secretary of the Comintern's executive committee, oversaw preparations for the second congress in 1930. As for specific policies of the KMP, the Comintern sought, for example, to use its stand on irredentism and the nationality question in a way that would benefit the Soviet Union and the international Communist movement. Thus, in the late 1920s the KMP, heeding Comintern directives, instructed its activists to make certain that they linked workers' calls for a revision of the Treaty of Trianon and self-determination for Hungarians in the successor states to the need to defend the Soviet Unions from the imperialist powers.⁹³ A decade later the party clarified its position on the nationality question in accordance with new directives from the Seventh Congress of the Comintern on the urgent need for all Communist parties to create an anti-fascist popular front. It thus abandoned its previous revolutionary or "proletarian revisionist" policy on Hungarian and other minorities, and in 1937 it asserted their right to self-determination.⁹⁴ Subsequently, it refused to recognize the territorial gains made by Hungary between 1938 and 1941 with the aid of Nazi Germany and reiterated its commitment to self-determination, including secession, for Hungary's now large Rumanian, Slovak, and Ruthenian minorities, a position it maintained throughout the Second World War.⁹⁵ This stand on revisionism flew in the face of strong Hungarian national feeling and undoubtedly cost the party support among Hungarians of all social classes.

A constant source of concern to Comintern leaders was the bitter factionalism within the KMP, which, in their view, prevented it from taking full advantage of its revolutionary opportunities. After its own Third

⁹⁰ Pintér, *Rózsa Ferenc*, pp. 82-118.

⁹¹ Kirschner, *A KMP stratégiai vonalának alakulása*, pp. 107-117.

⁹² Kovrig, *Communism in Hungary*, pp. 113-114.

⁹³ László Kővágó, *A magyar Kommunisták és a nemzetiségi kérdés* (Budapest, 1985), pp. 195-204.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 216-225.

⁹⁵ László Kővágó, "A KMP a revízióról és a nemzetiségi kérdéstről, 1936-1942", *PtK*, Vol. 28, No. 2 (1982), pp. 48-80.

Congress the Comintern sought to reconcile the Kun and Landler factions and to set a united, reinvigorated party on an ideological clear path. When its admonitions continued to be ignored, it took drastic action in the spring of 1922, appointing on its own authority a new central committee for the Hungarian party which excluded both Kun and Landler.⁹⁶ But the strife continued. The Comintern felt obliged in the fall of 1929 to enter the controversy over the "Blum theses". At its behest Kun and József Révai drafted a new statement of principle which provided the substance for the Comintern's "Open Letter to the Members of the Party of Communists of Hungary". Declaring the goal of the Party to be the dictatorship of the proletariat, rejecting the notion of a democratic transition to socialism, denouncing the Social Democrats as social fascists, and urging the creation of separate, Communist trade unions, it roundly condemned the "Blum theses".⁹⁷ The "Open Letter" fitted in with the left turn taken by the Sixth Congress of the Comintern and the tenth plenum of its executive committee in the summer of 1929 and thus signalled the triumph of the hard line long advocated by Kun. In order to put an end to dissidence in the party's leadership and thus ensure compliance with its directives the Comintern itself selected the members of the party's new central committee after its second congress in 1930.

In the early 1930s the immediate cause of tension within the KMP and the issue which brought it into conflict with the Comintern was the creation of a popular front. First of all, the Comintern's repeated calls for a united struggle against fascism by all proletarian parties required Hungarian Communists to embrace the Social Democrats, whom they had regularly denounced as the sworn enemies of Communism. Such cooperation also required a series of ideological and tactical adjustments, which for Kun and his supporters especially were not only distasteful but incomprehensible. In a sense, the party was captive to its past. It had already experienced the dictatorship of the proletariat in 1919 in the Soviet Republic and could not now accept a political tactic which had as its goal a democratic republic, for that signified a retreat.

The conflict between the Social Democratic and Communist parties was rooted in their divergent attitudes toward the prevailing political order in Hungary and their bitter competition for support among the working class. During the 1920s and early 1930s the Communist Party repeatedly condemned the Social Democrats for their accommodation with Bethlen and his successors⁹⁸ and urged all-out combat against their leaders.⁹⁹ The latter replied in kind. Furthermore, they avoided cooperation with the KMP out of concern that any association with Communists might jeopardize the legal status of their own party and thus curtail its ability to influence public opinion and government policy through the press and parliament.

Nonetheless, by 1933 pressure on the KMP for a more flexible approach to the Social Democrats had begun to build. In March the Comintern instructed member parties to create united anti-fascist fronts with other proletarian parties and to cease forming separate Communist trade unions and, instead, begin working within legal (in effect, Social Democratic) organizations. At the same time within the KMP itself the rift widened between the proponents of a hard line and moderates.¹⁰⁰ The majority of party leaders held to the idea that the recommendations and the experiences of the international Communist movement could not be applied to Hungary, because of the special conditions prevailing there.¹⁰¹ Yet, a counter-current advocating cooperation with the Social Democrats gained strength. Its adherents helped to found a new journal, *Új Harcos* (The New Militant), which appeared briefly in Budapest in 1933 and had as its primary goal the creation of a political and ideological atmosphere necessary for a united struggle against fascism. It was here that Attila József published his article "Az egységfront körül" (About the United Front), in which he urged the two parties to set aside their opposing strategic goals in the interest of mobilizing the workers to combat their common enemy - fascism. The

⁹⁶ Borsányi, *Kun Béla*, pp. 262-263.

⁹⁷ Mrs. Horváth, *A KMP második kongresszusa*, pp. 33-36.

⁹⁸ Béla Kirschner, "A Komintern IV. kongresszusa és a KMP stratégiai vonala", *PtK*, Vol. 26, No. 2 (1980), pp. 12-22.

⁹⁹ István Pintér, "A KMP 1932. májusi plénum előzményei és határozatai", *PtK*, vol. 31, No. 3 (1985), pp. 27-55.

¹⁰⁰ István Pintér, "A munkásegység körüli vita a KMP-ban 1933 első felében", *PtK*, Vol. 32, No. 1 (1986), pp. 18-47.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 23-24.

KMP rejected his ideas and subjected him to harsh criticism. In the summer of 1934 Kun insisted that no change in the Communists' policy toward the MSZDP was necessary, except perhaps the elimination of the epithet, "social-fascist", from their propaganda. The spirited debate within the KMP over whether genuine unity of action was possible between a legal party and an illegal one operating in secret continued without a consensus being reached, and in the first six months of 1935 relations with the Social Democrats deteriorated further.¹⁰²

The decisions taken at the Seventh Congress of the Comintern in July and August 1935 about the need to defend the working class and, in effect, even bourgeois democracy against the tide of fascism by political alliances with the Social Democrats had a powerful influence on the KMP's attitude toward the popular front. But Kun and his associates conformed only reluctantly. The Comintern applied more pressure, and in January 1936 Kun finally acknowledged errors in dealing with the Social Democrats, and the central committee urged all party members to do their utmost to bring about an anti-fascist alliance.¹⁰³ But the conflict within the party could not be assuaged, and in the spring of 1936 it had become so acute that the central committee was unable to carry out the policy dictated by the Comintern.¹⁰⁴ The Comintern, thoroughly exasperated by the delay, dismissed the entire central committee of the KMP and instructed Zoltán Szántó, an associate of the Comintern's executive committee, to form a provisional secretariat, which would then carry out the new tactic and arrange for the holding of a congress to reorganize the party and elect a new central committee. At the same time it ordered the dissolution of the party in Hungary and the closing of the Vienna office. No congress could be held with the party in such disarray, and a provisional secretariat established itself in Prague later in 1936 and became a provisional central committee committed to carrying out the popular front directives of the Comintern.

These sweeping organizational changes coincided with the beginning of the great purges in the Soviet Union, which decimated the ranks of Hungarian Communists. Many of the party's founders and the leaders of the Hungarian Soviet Republic perished. The most prominent victim was Béla Kun, who was arrested in 1937 and executed in 1939.¹⁰⁵

The Comintern's position on the popular front also contributed to a change in the KMP's attitude toward the Populists, whom it had denounced with almost as much fervor as the Social Democrats. For Communists, the great sin committed by the Populists was to deny the inevitability of capitalism and socialism and to insist upon the viability of a "third way" of development based upon indigenous, agrarian traditions. But after 1936 Communist interpretations of Populist doctrine became more moderate. The writings of József Révai, one of the principal theoreticians of Hungarian Communism alongside Kun and Lukács and in 1937 and 1938 a member of the provisional central committee in Prague,¹⁰⁶ were characteristic of the new mood. In *Marxizmus és népiesség* (Marxism and Populism), which he wrote in 1938 in Prag, he displayed a subtle understanding of Populism, and when speaking of Hungarian society after the overthrow of fascism, he predicted that it would be neither bourgeois-democratic nor completely socialist.¹⁰⁷

The fragile rapprochement between Communists and Populists assumed an institutional form through the creation of the so-called March Front (*Márciusi Front*) in 1937. University students and young intellectuals, especially in Debrecen, many of them new recruits to the KMP or sympathetic to it, served as the link between

¹⁰² István Pintér, "Útkeresés és megtorpanás a KPM-ban 1934 második felében", *PtK*, Vol. 32, No. 3 (1986), pp. 35-75; István Pintér, "A KMP egységfront-politikájának problémái a Komintern VII. kongresszusa előestéjén", *PtK*, Vol. 33, No. 1 (1987), pp. 3-46.

¹⁰³ Bálint Szabó, "A kommunista párt politikai irányvonalának alakulása a KI 7. kongresszusa után és a második világháború éveiben", *PtK*, Vol. 10, No. 1 (1964), pp. 41-42.

¹⁰⁴ István Pintér, "A KMP-n belüli küzdelem a népfrentpolitika elfogadásáért 1935-1936 fordulóján", *PtK*, Vol. 33, No. 4 (1987), pp. 27-79.

¹⁰⁵ Mrs. Kun, *Kun Béla*, pp. 488-494.

¹⁰⁶ On Révai's career and writings during the interwar period see Pál Sándor, *A magyar filozófia története 1900-1945*, Vol. 2, pp. 332-351; Miklós Lackó, *Válságok-választások*, pp. 194-297; and *A magyar filozófiai gondolkodás a két világháború között*, pp. 373-418.

¹⁰⁷ József Révai, *Marxizmus, népiesség, magyarság* (4th edition, Budapest, 1955), pp. 297-466.

Communists and Populists.¹⁰⁸ Their activities represented one of the more successful undertakings of the Hungarian Communist Young Workers Association (*Kommunista Ifjúság Magyarországi Szövetsége*; KIMSZ), which had its beginnings during the period of the Soviet Republic¹⁰⁹ and suffered from the same vagaries as the parent party until it was dissolved by the Comintern in 1937 as part of its drastic reorganization of the KMP.¹¹⁰

The initiative for the founding of the March Front belonged to Populist writers and left-wing students in Debrecen who used the annual commemoration of the poet Sándor Petőfi and other heroes of the Hungarian Revolution of 1848 to issue a twelve-point program for democratic political and social reforms. They were soon joined by a number of Communist intellectuals, notably Ferenc Donáth (b. 1913), who had joined the party in 1934 and had been one of the leaders of the tuition-reform movement in the universities.¹¹¹ The Communists were eager to turn the Front into an organized, disciplined political party, but the Populists preferred a "spiritual movement". Never more than a loose coalition of intellectuals and lacking ideological unity and, hence, a clear direction, the Front dissolved itself in 1938.

The KMP in Hungary continued to seek alliances with democratic parties and groups during the Second World War. But it had difficulty following the twists and turns of Soviet foreign policy and carrying out Comintern directives.¹¹² At first, between 1939 and the spring of 1941, the party's popular front strategy was primarily anti-capitalist. Although the Soviet-German pact of August 1939 had been a shock to many Hungarian Communists, they nonetheless generally refrained from overt attacks on Nazi Germany as long as the best interests of the Soviet Union required such forbearance. But as relations between the two countries deteriorated and especially after the German invasion of the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941 Communist leaders placed increasing emphasis upon appeals to Hungarian patriotism as a means of attracting support for its popular front policy. It eventually adopted the watchword, "national independence" and sought to enter into an alliance with all parties and groups who were hostile to Nazi Germany. Accordingly, in 1942 it participated in the annual March 15 celebration of the heroes of 1848, which had been organized by the Hungarian Historical Memorial Committee (*Magyar Történelmi Emlékbizottság*), an umbrella group representing diverse political parties and cultural groups. The main purpose of this year's demonstration was to awaken the consciousness of the public at large to past struggles for independence and in this way to arouse a new surge of patriotic feeling to oppose German domination of the country. The Communists sought to turn the Historical Memorial Committee into a political alliance that would organize and direct the independence and anti-war movement, but a new wave of

¹⁰⁸ István Pintér, "Haladó egyetemi diákmozgalmak és a Márciusi Front (1935-1938)", in *A haladó egyetemi ifjúság mozgalmi Magyarországon, 1918-1945*, edited by Henrik Vass (Budapest, 1978), pp. 259-352; Péter Pál Tóth, "A debreceni egyetemi hallgatók baloldali kommunista szervezkedése, 1930-1938", *PtK*, Vol. 26, No. 1 (1980), pp. 111-131.

¹⁰⁹ László Svéd, "A Magyar Kommunista Ifjúsági mozgalom kezdetei", *PtK*, Vol. 24, No. 4 (1978), pp. 3-48.

¹¹⁰ A comprehensive history of KIMSZ has yet to be written. University students have received particular attention. The association's activities in universities in the 1930s is well covered in Péter Sipos, "Kommunista szervezkedés a magyarországi egyetemeken az 1930-as évek első felében", in *A haladó egyetemi ifjúság mozgalmi Magyarországon, 1918-1945*, pp. 201-257. But three articles on the 1920s in the same volume have little to say about KIMSZ, an omission which suggests a weak organization and relative inactivity.

¹¹¹ István Pintér, "A KMP és a Márciusi Front", *PtK*, Vol. 22, No. 4 (1976), pp. 3-43, argues that the Communists played a major role in the formation of the March Front. Balanced and detailed is the study by Konrad Salamon, *A Márciusi Front* (Budapest, 1980; = *Értekezések a Történelmi Tudományok Köréből*, 92).

¹¹² A useful collection of sources, selected to emphasize the leading role of the Communist Party, is contained in *A magyar népfront története. Dokumentumok (1935-1976)*, Vol. 1 (Budapest, 1977), pp. 251-481. There are two works by István Pintér: *Magyar Kommunisták a Hitler-ellenes nemzeti egységért* (Budapest, 1968), which covers the period from June 1941 to March 1944, and *Magyar antifasizmus és ellenállás* (Budapest, 1975), which incorporates the first volume and adds chapters on the period between March and the fall of 1944. A shortened version of the latter has appeared in English: *Hungarian Anti-Fascism and Resistance, 1941-1945* (Budapest, 1986).

arrests carried out by the government caused the Committee to disperse.¹¹³ All these activities emphasizing patriotic solidarity fitted in with the current strategy of the Soviet Communist Party and the Comintern to rally support for the war against Germany. Although Hungarian historians have emphasized the KMP's role in such undertakings, it is doubtful that its would-be partners considered the Communists as significant players. The party had no more than several hundred members and lacked a viable political structure and strong trade-union and youth organizations.

The influence of the Comintern on Hungarian party affairs during these years seems to have been slight because the war had severed direct communication with Moscow.¹¹⁴ Nonetheless, the Comintern was important to Hungarian Communists as the strategic center of the international Communist movement. Thus, its dissolution by Stalin in May 1943 was a severe blow to their morale and led them to question their future role in the international Communist movement. They declared their party dissolved, and a few weeks later, in June, they announced the formation of the Peace Party (*Békepárt*).¹¹⁵ Thirteen years after the event János Kádár, who in 1943 had been secretary of the party's central committee, wrote that the party had not in fact been dissolved and that the announcement to that effect and the change of name had been intended to give the party time to consider new ways of carrying on its work.¹¹⁶ Such an explanation has some merit. Because of the party's utter disarray and failure to establish regular links with leftist and democratic parties, Kádár and his colleagues may have hoped that a de-emphasis of the Communist character of their party might persuade others that they were ready for genuine cooperation.

The Communists and other parties did not begin serious collaboration until after the occupation of Hungary by the German army in March 1944. In May Communists joined other parties and groups in proclaiming the creation of a united Hungarian Front (*Magyar Front*) to coordinate their opposition movement with the advancing Soviet armies.¹¹⁷ As the latter drew closer to Hungary Communist leaders in September announced the revival of their party under its old name and declared their immediate goal to be a "democratic" Hungary and their ultimate objective "socialism".¹¹⁸ They also prepared to rejoin the international Communist movement under Soviet patronage.

¹¹³ Pintér, *Magyar antifasizmus és ellenállás*, pp. 62-91.

¹¹⁴ Monographs and published collections of sources have little to say about relations between the Soviet and Hungarian parties between 1941 and the fall of 1944.

¹¹⁵ Pintér, *Magyar antifasizmus és ellenállás*, pp. 193-196. A few documents are available in *A Magyar Front*, edited by Gyula Kállai, István Pintér, and Attila Sipos (Budapest, 1984), pp. 98-103.

¹¹⁶ János Kádár, "A Kommunista Magyarországi Pártja feloszlata körülményeinek és a Békepárt munkájának néhány kérdéséről (1943. június-1944. szeptember)", *PtK*, Vol. 2, No. 3 (1956), pp. 20-26.

¹¹⁷ *A Magyar Front*, pp. 190-195.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 212-224.