

Party Leadership and Parliamentary Elections (1949–1988)

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The results of the nine parliamentary elections between 1949 and 1988 were different from the ones before. Similar to other socialist countries, the rate of participation and the number of affirmative votes reached never before seen heights. Apart from the 1949 and 1985 elections, the rate of participation was never less than 97 percent. Within that percentage, the rate of affirmative votes given to the nominees of the Magyar Függetlenségi Népfront (Hungarian Independent Popular Front) was—most of the time—more than 99 percent. In the literature we find different opinions regarding what these numbers mean, as well as in contemporary political evaluations. It is certain that they did not represent the political differentiation of the society. On the contrary, they served as tools to obscure the emergence of political plurality and to legitimise power with the illusion of national unity. With the elections coming up the national thought was emphasised again and again, that is, the necessity of unity in the great, common goal, the creation of socialist Hungary. This thought was embodied by the enormous mass organisation, the Popular Front, that seemed to dominate the elections completely, and by the “House of Codification,” the Hungarian Parliament after the elections.

If we compare the results of the 1945 and 1947 elections with the numbers of the 1949 elections, we wonder if these election results mean anything or are just artificial numbers

that were presented to society arbitrarily by the uncontrolled power. The question is reasonable all the more so as the verifiability of the elections and the control of the authenticity of the election results ceased to exist in 1949 with the expansion of the monopoly of the Magyar Dolgozók Pártja (Hungarian Workers' Party).

The election law was not changed generally either before the 1949 or the 1953 parliamentary elections.¹ Though the Administrative Court was dismissed at the beginning of 1949, the legal institution of the Election Court still remained in place. The seats of the administrative judges were taken over by the judges of the Budapest High Court of Justice. The most interesting thing in the 1949 modifications was a tiny name change: instead the Hungarian National Commission now the Hungarian Independent Popular Front National Council appeared.² The new political clustering, the Independent Popular Front was established on February 1, 1949, by realising the January 20 vision of the Hungarian Workers' Party Political Committee. The essence of this vision was to create a political organisation that carries the objectives of the communist party and puts the idea of national unity in the place of "outdated" party rivalry. In accordance with this the members of the Popular Front abode all decisions of the National Committee by giving up their political sovereignty.³ The Hungarian Workers' Party controlled the National Commission and also the local organisations of the Popular Front. Based on the election law the National Commission was in charge of deciding which organisations could run for election. The minister of the interior confirmed the right of the local Popular Front organisations of appointing the members of the polling and election committees. Since only the parties that were in the Independent Popular Front applied to run for elections and the National Committee solely gave permission to these parties,⁴ only the Popular Front parties could nominate tickets. These were approved by the election committees appointed by the

Popular Front. The circle has closed: both the election authority and the federal and social organisations, that were controlling the election authority, were submitted to the power of the Hungarian Workers' Party.

After 1953, the situation has changed: the National Election Committee was appointed by the Presidential Council, and the local committees were appointed by the executive boards of councils which had totally reliable leadership.⁵ The committees of the Popular Front now degraded to only propose bodies did not consist of the same members as in 1949. On the contrary, they were fully reorganised. Besides serving the will of the Hungarian Workers' Party, a kind of representative role was given to bodies synthesising the political boards of members and non-members of the party. It was the same in 1958 and after that, when the purity of the election results was "ensured" by the elected Parliament.⁶ With that the system became similar to that of the general practice of the socialist countries.

The possibility for election fraud was there, but because of the perfect fitting of the cogwheels, the fact and the type of a colossal corruption could not even be detected, because we do not have the original ballots. We are almost certain that one of the tools used in 1947, the manipulation of the register of voters, was utilised in 1949 as well. In 1947, a few days before the elections, 400,000 people were left out and deprived of their voting rights. At first the preparation of the register of voters "was not a question of war." Based on the intentions of party leaders István Tömpe, head of department at the Ministry of the Interior, described the correction of the registers of voters as an important public benefit in his February 22, 1949 instructions. He also required that administrative authorities take the neglectful execution of this as a first-degree disciplinary offence.⁷ From that time on, the goal was to create lists containing all names of Hungarian citizens who have the right to vote. On April 11, 1949 at the meeting of

the Operative Election Board of the Hungarian Workers' Party, István Szirmai noted that in Sopron county there had been 84,000 people eligible for voting, but now there were 108,000 people listed in the register of voters. It meant that there were people on the 1949 list, who had not been allowed to vote two years earlier. In his answer Sándor Zöld, understanding the sharpness of the comment, admitted that the organs compiling the registers of voters were not instructed to leave out those who had been left out in 1947. He made a promise to revise the lists and indicated that the number of six million people eligible for voting will be "reduced."⁸ As later only 5.7 million people were found eligible to vote, the "reduction act" affected about 200,000 people, that is almost 3.3 percent of all voters. We also know that preceding the 1953 elections the Ministry of the Interior had to prepare an exclusive report stating that the number of voters became higher only because of the new generations that were then eligible for voting. Political selection remained, but was made easier by the fact that the persons interned or under police surveillance were not allowed to vote. The same happened in 1958, not to mention the fact that more than 200,000 people left the country between 1956 and 1957.

The question was whether it was necessary for the Rákosi regime or after 1956 for the Kádár regime to use more drastic measurements. The answer to this question is not explicit in the case of every election. Not only in the 1949 elections was the participation rate more than 95 percent, but also in the following ones, and a rather big percentage of the voters voted for the candidates of the Popular Front. During the elections in the sixties, seventies and eighties political sociology counted fear as one motive for participating in the elections, the other reason was to follow the norm. If we took the 1949 and the consecutive elections as frauds, or just playing around with numbers, there is no point to talk about it more. But it is not without reason that the 1949 election results, except for some small swindling,

more or less represent reality. This can be confirmed by the biggest election fraud known to us.

On February 15, 1967 the Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt (MSZMP, Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party) Central Committee gave special attention to the preparation of the upcoming elections in March.⁹ As it was typical for all the Central Committee meetings during the entire era, only János Kádár commented on the report given by the presenter of the agenda. Among other things he said: "The results look promising. Hopefully you will not misunderstand me if I mention—and please do not let us win this way!—that we have altered the results of the recent elections a little here at the headquarters. When the results came, it turned out that we had won by 102 percent. We changed this result, we cut 6 percent off, but please let this be our secret. There are several reasons why we ended up with this number. We prepared the register of voters. That is basically all right, but it is never a 100 percent right. There are always people travelling, moving. They naturally do not want to be left off of the list, but still some are left off. Then, as it is also known by the organisers of the elections, everybody gets a certificate, sometimes even those persons who are not eligible to vote."

Therefore the numbers of participation and the results were correct, take or leave a few percent, even at the very worst.¹⁰ That means that we cannot avoid facing the—social psychological—question of how the leaders of MDP and later of MSZMP could achieve that most people in the country would vote and, with that, legitimise their power? From this point of view we have to separate the 1949, 1953 and 1958 elections and also the elections after 1958. On one hand the 1949 elections are the genesis of the latter parliamentary elections of the state socialist system, on the other hand it is characteristically independent in its aspects.

The Rákosi system

On May 15, 1949 the elections ran their course under rather peculiar political circumstances. Although in 1948 the MDP ensured a monopoly, the multi-party system and the parliamentary institutions remained mostly unchanged. From the beginning of 1948 Mátyás Rákosi and his immediate coworkers tried to eliminate this system democratically and introduce the soviet form of the dictatorship of the proletariat. By mid-1949 the answer to the problem shaped up as follows:

1. Parliamentary elections should be initiated as soon as possible.
2. It should be ensured that only the allied parties enter the elections.
3. The parties should set up a joint list on which 70 percent of the candidates are MDP-members and the majority of the remaining 30 percent should also be selected from people who are close to the policy of the Hungarian Workers' Party.
4. Thus, four fifth of the projected, nearly 340-member new legislation follows the instructions of the party.
5. With this body a new constitution that sanctions the council and the one-party system, could be accomplished.

During the second half of 1948, in order to execute the above plan, tens of thousands of people were expelled from the smallholders' and the peasants' parties, and social organisations were reorganised. At the beginning of 1949 the Christian Women's Camp was disbanded by administrative measures. The Democratic People's Party was forced to voluntarily disband after the emigration of István Barankovics. The remaining four parties were united into the newly assembled Hungarian Independent Popular Front in which they were forced to serve the interest of MDP.

The election campaign, starting in April 1949, was controlled by the Popular Front and by MDP. Only the Popular Front, under communist control, had an election office. The 12.5 million forints to be used for the campaign were handled by the "Popular Front committee," which

consisted of the members of the Economic Department of the Hungarian Workers' Party's Central Directorate.¹¹ Only the Popular Front, MDP and their social organisations were allowed to have their own identity, gatherings, advertisements and political activities. According to the March 30, 1949 decision of the secretariat of the Hungarian Workers' Party's Central Directorate, the following was decided: "In order to have better control, the activists of the other party should not be conducted by their own centres. They should be drawn into work by local Popular Front organs."¹² Occasionally, here and there the allied parties were allowed to hold gatherings, but in the villages only the Popular Front and MDP could have rallies. At certain places, where the opposition party won in 1947, it was assured that with the MDP-speaker, smallholders' or the peasant party-members could also be present, but they made sure that the MDP representative was the dominant one. The same applied to central rallies. On May 1 and during the last week of the campaign, however, even the Popular Front could not have a part as the Hungarian Workers' Party propaganda dominated everything.

At the selection of the candidates, even though they have listened to the requests of the other parties, and there were multiple rounds of negotiations, the decisive words were of the Secretariat and Political Committee of MDP. With this, the "desirable" composition of the new legislation was assured.¹³ Now the only thing to do was to have the voters go to the polls and have them vote for the Popular Front. Rákosi and his circle thought the support of the allied parties to be insufficient. Foremost they tried to break and win all the churches, especially the Catholics who put up a resistance. The crucial step toward this goal was the anti-Mindszenty political campaign and his trial, and the growing political repression that followed. By the beginning of 1949 the open protests against the anticlerical retortions ceased and the division and unsettlement of the Catholic clergy and congregation increased. More and more mem-

bers of the Catholic leadership and lower clergy urged to bring about an agreement between the state and the Church. Those in power found a way to break basic community resistance by inducing a psychological war, which was supported by the media and went on for many months basically in every settlement in the country, reaching the lower clergy and the Catholic congregations.

However, Rákosi's people understood that results could not be accomplished by using unconcealed police terror just before the elections. Therefore, in April 1949 they adopted less drastic means of force. They tried to persuade ministers, parish-priests, Church leaders, as many as possible, to speak positively about certain elements of the election programme and about the participation in the elections. Whoever was willing to participate in the campaign, had to make a spectacular appearance. Based on the April 11, 1949 decision of the Operative Election Committee of the MDP, the lord-lieutenants, the sub-lieutenants, the town clerks, the municipal health officers and the schoolmasters had to take part in this work. According to the central instructions, where fair and soft words were ineffective, blackmailing and means of corruption had to be used. If none of the above had any effects than they tried neutralisation. The results were not diminishable. The declaration of the episcopacy, published for the May 5, 1949 conference encouraged the congregations to practice suffrage and free election based on their conscience. The episcopacy who aspired for a consensus with the authorities endorsed this with similar-minded memorandums. Although in a confidential instruction the episcopacy called the ministers' attention to stay away from any political activity, this resulted only in adopting passive attitudes, well suited to the purpose of the authorities. On May 8, 1949, 122 Catholic Church and lay public figures exhorted the congregation in summons to vote for the Popular Front as part of their Christian obligation.¹⁴ With this, all difficulties were brushed aside for the congregations to participate in the elections.

After the Grósz trial in 1953, the wave of terror against the convents and the clergy, and making religious instruction almost impossible at schools, there were no “problems” to face.

MDP accomplished a smaller, but similar achievement with its anti-kulak campaign starting in 1948. The tactics were similar. To gain the votes of the farmers, Rákosi and his secretariat sent a confidential directive to the county and district secretaries and, through the competent ministry, to the administrative apparatus in April of 1949. In this directive he strictly forbade, out of accordance with the previous practice, assaults against the kulaks. On top of that, through the Central Supervisory Committee and the Ministry of the Interior, he initiated disciplinary actions to retaliate the ostensive violation of law and arbitrary actions. The majority of the kulaks, because of the above reasons and because of their legitimate fear of punishment, turned a deaf ear to the thought of passive resistance, coming from Margit Schlachta. Moreover, most of them hoped that their haunt would end if they expressed their loyalty in an obvious manner. (In 1953 the leaders of MDP played the same game with the peasantry.)

Mátyás Rákosi was fully aware that in 1949 a referendum, not a multi-party election had to be conducted. In case of the 1949–1985 elections this expression got later both into political science and political phraseology, even though apart from the 1949 elections we can use the expression “referendum” only when talking about the formal equivalence of dictatorial and democratic relations. Was the case in 1949 also functional similarity as it was later? My opinion is that 1949 was a transition. First of all, the leaders of MDP have chosen the questions of the “three yes referendum” very well. They thought that people would prefer to say yes to the results of the past years, to the grandiose concept of the five-year plan, and to peace. They were right. The contemporary media and the hundreds of thousands of educators transmitted a kind of

reasoning toward the people that was confirmed by their everyday experiences. With regard to this there was a decisive difference between the 1949 and 1953 elections and, to a certain extent, the 1958 elections. The agrarian reforms, the rebuilding, the stabilisation, the normalisation of traffic conditions, the disappearance of starvation, the improvement of the number of births, the gradual elimination of unemployment, and the completion of the three-year plan in two and a half years, were undisputable facts. As was the strengthening of the socialist camp, let us think about China. Those in power slickly exploited peoples' wish for peace and their fear of war, of the NATO that represented a new threat, of the armed conflict between Yugoslavia and Hungary, and of the atomic bomb. Actually, it did not even occur to the people that the fiery speeches which turned up in the peace program were opposing pacifism and already preparing the predetermined militarisation of the economy. Nor did they know that col-farm agitation, the stopping of the assaults against the kulaks, and the actions affecting the general climate adversely were temporary and that the unexpected improvements in the meat, cooking fat and other food supplies would last only a few weeks. The directive that the ministries had to concentrate all possible means of boosting the morale for the last two weeks of the election campaign was also not made public. According to the words of the agitators all these belonged to the endless horizon the five-year plan symbolised, during which the economy of the country and the life of the people would go through a spectacular change. The improvements were not only drafted in general but for every village and every district, broken down even to companies, it was told what was going to be built, who would "get what," and how rich people would get. Only Ernő Gerő, Mátyás Rákosi and Mihály Farkas knew that the aims of the five-year plan, which were accepted by the Central Directorate of the Hungarian Workers' Party in April 1949 and were used as the election program, were not real.¹⁵

Nonetheless, during the election campaign the base of the Popular Front has grown, in spite of the regularisation of the production norms. After 1947 thousands of workers became factory directors, got into high positions in administration or went to universities and colleges. Women could work, too, social inequality diminished, alongside with His Excellencies. The formalities of genteel society were thrown on the junk-heap. The people and politicians greeted and addressed each other differently. The ethos of equality fluttered everywhere. The leader of the country was called simply “pal” by the children.

But the next four years disillusioned everyone. In 1953 the success-propaganda, flowing from everywhere was nothing more but lies. It was not accidental that in the campaign a lot was spoken about the damage caused by the undermining work of the enemy and about the essential increasing of alertness. Even the “1949 campaign chief” turned out to be unreliable. At the Central Directorate meeting of MDP on February 26, 1953, István Kovács was summoned back from the Political Committee and his other duties by a unanimous vote. In the background intense work was going on on the preparation of the Hungarian Zionist lawsuit. The Secretariate of the Central Directorate of MDP ordered a new and full re-examination of the country’s leading cadres.

Mátyás Rákosi and his fellow leaders did not want to take any chances. In order to succeed, both in 1949 and in 1953, they needed the total mobilisation of society. In order to accomplish it, they used every means. They felt that the “usual” methods, the monopoly of media, the rallies, the hand-outs, the posters, etc. were not good enough. It was necessary that every person felt that s/he was being watched, known about, kept count of, and were watched whether s/he voted or not. The people had to feel that it was important what stood next to their names in the register of voters. In 1949 the Hungarian Workers’ Party, with the active participation of mass organisations, had

organised 200,000 agitators and trained them for individual election work. This number was doubled in 1953, which means that there was an “educationist” for every 10–15 workers. In 1949 not only MDP and its allies, but the whole apparatus of mass organisations were lined up to win the elections.

Even this was not enough for Rákosi and his people. They decided that the Ministry of Public Welfare, the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Defense, the Ministry of Religion and Education, the Ministry of Housing and Public Construction, the Ministry of Finance, the National Sport Bureau, the Red Cross and the Cultural Council had to prepare independent election work plans. They made the co-operative meetings work for the election, too. Not to mention the Ministry of the Interior which drew the whole administrative apparatus and the police into the mass agitations. In 1949 the army served the campaign with around ten thousand officers, privates and cadets, not to mention its artist groups. The Ministry of Religion and Education, besides the educational apparatus, mobilised the entire Hungarian educational and cultural world. At schools a personal file had to be kept and sent to the ministry about every teacher’s participation in the elections. According to these files, in convincing the parents 20 percent of the teachers did well, 55 percent moderately, 20 percent was passive and 5 percent hostile. In 1953 this was expanded with the mobilisation of pioneer troops and through them with the mobilisation of children. During the last two weeks of the campaign the central regulations day by day dictated the children’s tasks: guarding and making posters, writing letters to factories and cooperatives, and to their parents to remind them not to forget about their electoral commitments. On the day of the election the children had to participate in the aubades (group games, clattering on the main roads and in front of the polling stations), in the greetings of voters and in encouraging people to vote.¹⁶ For the 1953 campaign they brought back

methods used between the two world wars: triumphal arches and banderols welcoming the speakers of the meetings and committees bringing gifts to them. They also held big banquets after the rallies.

The theatres, the film distributing companies, the artists' unions, and the state authorities made sure that during the weeks prior to the elections, culture campaigns, never seen before, took place in the country. In 1953 all this was expanded with work competitions called "electoral peace rallies." By that time they could not get on by promises, therefore they created the project-centric campaign which had to boost enthusiasm, discipline, readiness for action and most of all alertness at the same time. Rákosi and his people wanted to have a euphoric mood by all means. The festivities followed one after another. The culmination was the day of the election: aubades, people going to vote in groups with flags, singing, and street festivals lasting for three days. In 1949 it had the expected effect on people. However, in 1953 the overflowing success-propaganda was not successful, especially not in the villages that were suffering from terror and economic exploitation. By then everyone knew what the leader of the campaign had put as follows: "It has to be told, it should be brought to the attention of the people, that we know who did not vote, who our enemies are and they should blame no one but themselves when we shall 'repay that'."¹⁷ The deliberate, whispering propaganda was given credit, as well: the election slips were marked, and there was a secret number assigned to each one. In 1953 above all that, the election committees were ordered to count all votes, that were not definitely against, as "for". They also organised the voting of the sick and made sure that the agitators got an updated list every two hours about those who had not appeared at the polls until then. These persons were visited continuously at their homes from nine in the morning and were talked into coming to the polls. According to the directive of the Secretariate, "the councils assured the voting of the kulaks and other class-alien elements."¹⁸

By 1953 the last element was also put in place to guarantee the “success” of the elections. Although the election committees all consisted of “approved communists,” the Minister of the Interior ordered a special apparatus, headed by the so-called teller of votes, alongside with the county election committees. (Actually he was delegated by the MDP center.) He had to sum up the district results and then forward it to Lajos Ács (MDP Party and Mass Organisation Department), straight away. He had to report to Mátyás Rákosi immediately. If everything was in order, Ács gave permission to the teller of votes to report the result to the head of the Election Committee, who had to inform the head of the county committee. “The final vote count was made at the Party and Mass Organisation Department of the Central Directorate, at a separate division,” can be read in the notes of the secretary general of the party.¹⁹ No doubt, Mátyás Rákosi deserved credit for achieving such wonderful results in 1953.

Reform, revolution—failure

After the 1953 elections only one question remained unclear: what should the leadership of the party do with the Parliament? The number of MPs has already been reduced from 402 to less than 300, but all those people still had to be occupied somehow, since they all were reliable communist comrades, selected on the principle of the cadre-management policy. This could not be solved by a few short and formal parliamentary sessions. The fluctuation was quite big. Not only most of the Smallholders’ Party, Peasants’ Party and ex-social democratic members of the 1949 election were omitted from the new legislation, but also quite a few MDP members. The latter were left out either because they fell victims to violations of the law, or they proved “incapable of development.” Solving the problem was assigned to József Révai. He left the political forefront

on the July 15 session of MDP's Political Committee in 1953. They did not have to wait long for the proposition, and on September 30, 1953 the committee already adopted a decision about the MPs' employment outside the Parliament.²⁰ The idea perfectly fitted in the antiparliamentary sentiment of the era. According to this the MPs, instead of dealing with legislation, had to make people accept the policy of the party and mobilise them to execute this policy. The place of the MPs was among the electors, not in Parliament. They had to listen to the private problems of the voters and be spokesmen "without lobbying for them." The only thing that was new in this decision was that it wanted to make this type of activity regular by employing strict regulations. All MPs received their regional assignment, had to report about their work in writing every third month, and their work had to be checked and guided by the Parliament leaders and by the county party committees.

The system fell flat in six months. Until mid-March 1954 only 39 reports arrived instead of 92, even though all MPs had to sign a letter of understanding. Neither the county councils, or the party committees, nor the local papers were concerned with the MPs, but the flood of complaints surpassed even their wildest imaginations, and most of the time, neither the local authorities nor the MPs could help. This might have influenced the fact that in 1954 Imre Nagy tried to re-evaluate the positioning and the role of the Parliament by introducing an overall reform of the political institutional system. They wanted to put the control of the councils within the competence of the Parliament and the Presidential Council, and reorganise the Popular Front as well. But the reform of the Parliament came too late.²¹ The political counterattack of Mátyás Rákosi at the end of 1954 and the removal of Imre Nagy from the top of the administration frustrated all renewal efforts.

The question popped up only after the 20th congress of the Soviet Communist Party, at the end of February in

1956, in front of the highest political leadership. The prime minister in charge then had to realise that the 1953 “employment conception” by Révai was a complete failure. During the previous year neither the local bodies nor the leadership of the Parliament dealt much with the MPs. Now András Hegedűs urged the revision of the Parliament’s work and the modification of suffrage, but for action they had to wait until the July 18–21 meeting of the Central Leadership of MDP. After that during its July 30–August 3, 1956 session the Parliament adopted new rules of procedure and decisions about the MPs’ work. This basically meant the accomplishment of the 1954 vision. Decision no. 1 of 1956 of the Parliament prescribed the broadening of statutory level judicial regulations; the discussion of national problems in Parliament; the regular accounts by the Presidential Council, by the Cabinet, by the chief justice, and by the attorney general; the multiplying of the numbers of sessions, and the increasing of their duration; the creation of groups of MPs at county level; the reorganisation of committees within the Parliament, and the assuring of interpellations and the opportunity for preparing the topics. The decision instead of public and party organisations, entrusted the Popular Front—the political institution that appoints the representatives—with the task of assisting the MPs when working among the voters.²²

After that, between August and October 1956, the work of the Parliament changed remarkably. The Government Committee of Constitutional Law and Administrative Law of the Ministry of Justice outlined the principles of the modification of the election law. May 1957 seemed to be the month of election. The draft used the decision of July 1956 of the Central Leadership of MDP, according to which the system of “list ticket” had to be changed to a system of constituencies. This modification had already been discussed by the party’s leaders before the 1953 elections. On December 24, 1952 a secretariat decision was

made, but it was revised by the Political Committee on January 22, 1953.²³ Starting from the system of constituencies, the Government Committee suggested the renewal of the system of nomination; the nominees would be accepted by the local election committees, not by the National Election Committee. The right to nominate would go to the workers' organisations and to the workers' meetings that were held in election districts or at work places. At the same time the decision wanted to keep the opportunity for the authorities to intervene in the mechanism of vote count. Even though in each electoral district an election committee had to be formed, the proposal makers wanted to preserve the county committees in order to keep the party control of counties. Appointing the members of the election committees still belonged to the Popular Front. According to the suggestion the election committees would have had a role, as the local bodies of the Popular Front, in the employment of the representatives, in the preparation of by-elections, in practicing the right of recall between two elections. The recall could have been initiated either by the local committees of the Popular Front or by one fourth of the electors, after which the district voters could decide by secret ballot. The draft contained another novelty: the legislative bill had to be discussed by the people. The suggestion was considered by the Department of the Council of the Executive Committee of the Cabinet. It did not agree with the withdrawal of the right of the Popular Front to nominate though, nor did it accept that the legislative bill should be put up for social debate. They did not agree with the latter one, because it would have drawn attention to the multiparty system and to the questions of nomination and modes of election. It "would not help to decide, quite on the contrary, it would cause a kind of disturbance."²⁴ Both documents were brought in front of the Political Committee of MDP on October 19, 1956, but from the archival material available for us it is not quite clear whether the committee has made a decision.²⁵

In fact it was not important any more. On the evening of October 22, 1956, during the MEFESZ (Association of Hungarian College Students) meeting held at the Technical University of Budapest, something very different came up. One point of the declaration requested general, equal, secret elections, with the participation of several parties. In response the Parliament leaders postponed the October 29 plenary session. They did not even want to defend their legitimacy. Anyway, before it could have been seriously attacked, the National Government led by Imre Nagy decided reinstating the multiparty system and having the elections called and run. The latter one was announced by Zoltán Tildy right after the allocution of Imre Nagy in the radio in the afternoon of October 30.²⁶ All parties agreed that the Parliament elected in 1953 should not govern the country during the interim period until the forthcoming elections. István Bibó stated that “in the eye of the Hungarian people and for generations to come, it has no authority and no moral accreditation, because it is empowered a constitution, that is associated forever with the one party system, the formal election comedies, the name of Rákosi, the hangman trials staged by Rákosi.”²⁷ That means that the continuity of the constitutional law was valid only starting from the 1947 elections, from the 1945 elections or from the 1946 republic. This was completed with the legitimacy of the 1956 revolution. The 1949 election and constitution were not suitable for creating a democratic Hungary. The peasant parties held onto this even after November 4, 1956, as did the other political powers forced into emigration.²⁸ At the same time there were parties and groups that questioned already at the end of October even the 1945 date of the continuity of Hungarian constitutionality, in part or in whole.

While after November 4, 1956 the politicians of the Peasants' Party still wanted to have a new Parliament elected, which would function on civil democratic principles, as previously, the Great Budapest Central Workers'

Committee and the leadership of the labour union, on the other hand, preferred to create workers' self administration system. The labour union centre, lead by Sándor Gáspár, recommended the introduction of a bicameral legislature, which would consist of one house that is based principally on the traditional regional system and another, the Manufacturers' Council, that would be secretly elected by the economic communities, the employees. They wanted to build a comprehensive economic representative system based on self administrative companies and agricultural plants—into the freely elected multiparty parliament.²⁹ In December 1956 the Kádár administration at first opposed the independent self administrative system and then the multiparty system. The January 6, 1957 declaration of the Revolutionary Worker-Peasant Party stated the following: "Our first and most important duty was and will also be in the future to defend and strengthen the institutes and organisations of our social democratic worker-peasant state with all possible efforts. Only this state represents the power of the working class, united with the working peasantry, the dictatorship of the proletariat."³⁰ The discontinuity of the constitutionality got off the agenda. The government programme only spoke about restarting the work of the Parliament, but not about the preparations for the approaching May 1957 elections. From the end of January the examination of the MPs' behaviour started within the Parliament. After that they carefully restarted committee work. The suggestion of Zsigmond Kende to have by-elections, in the places falling vacant, got no response.³¹ It was clear that even circles outside the party were almost sure that the May 1957 elections would not be held. That is exactly what happened. János Kádár suggested the extension of the Parliament for another two years. It was accepted by the Parliament during the meetings starting on May 9, 1957. There were no large-scale purges, the political committee of MDP made only 28 representatives leave. Among them was the Imre Nagy

group (Zoltán Vas, György Lukács, Sándor Kopácsi, András Márton, Attila Szigethy, Rudolf Földvári) and the most exposed so-called Rákosists (Ernő Gerő, István Bata, András Hegedűs, István Kovács, Lajos Ács, István Hidas, Béla Szalai, etc.).

In 1957 János Kádár counted on the Parliament as an organisation which legalised the government and its most important measures. Its work became somewhat busier compared to the beginning of the fifties, but nobody thought about reforming it. By the autumn of 1957 all the arguments, deciding what role political institutions had, have closed. The purges were also coming to an end. The adherents of moderate reform had to leave from most positions. On September 17, 1957 the idea that the Popular Front should be a mass organisation built on individual memberships, that not only served and executed but also had political consultative right at the highest level, was defeated at the Political Committee meeting. That determined the direction of the decisions on voting rights. At the end of 1957 part of the judicature and the party apparatus, according to the July 1956 MDP Central Leadership decision, suggested the change to a constituency system to the Political Committee. At the February 11, 1958 board meeting³² even that was considered too much. Kádár wanted no complications during the elections. He made it clear that they needed a plebiscite that would approve of the politics continued. He was not even sure about the strength of the local organisations, anyway. He thought that in local election organisations the “enemy” got a better opportunity to move around, so the changes had to be minimal. Only István Friss reminded everyone of the promise made in July 1956 about the democratic nature of the individual regional system, the antagonism between the list tickets and the principle of the right to recall, that was recorded in the constitution, but without any effect. With the February 1958 decision the leaders of MSZMP held aloof even from the continuation of the attempts started

after the 20th congress of the Soviet Communist Party. The political institution system got back into the old routine.

The Kádár era

The elections of the sixties, seventies and eighties, altogether six, were in some sense different from the comedies choreographed by Rákosi. First of all the obsessive messianism disappeared, that treated the elections as the ball-lever of the revolutionary process that would reshape society within a short period of time. Its celebrations, accessories and ceremonies were only means of enhancing the commitment and swiftness to action. The methods have changed, too. The number of reprisals was reduced; the monstrous cultural campaigns and the annoying routs of educators vanished. The agitation periods got shorter and lower profiled, as if they were trying to express the puritanism of Kádár with that also. The circumstances were also different. With the onset of the age of mass media and broadcasting personal contacts were not required any longer. Politics started to move, more and more, from the homes to the work places, to schools, and that assured the framework for the manipulation of people.

The experience of the 1957 council by-elections, that affected more than one million people, and the 1958 parliamentary elections were important from the point of a style change. János Kádár and his fellow leaders realised that the risk was not big. The general tranquillity and stability were not endangered by anything; the results shall be reached, or if not, they could always be “delivered,” so there was no reason to bother. The political weight of the elections, except for the 1985 one, was less and less during this period. After all everyone knew, and got used to the fact that things were decided not in the parliament, but at party headquarters. The schedule of the election years prepared in 1962 also followed this pattern. It always started with a

party congress that evaluated the work of the previous four years, five if starting from 1975, and prepared the plans for the following years. This was then composed into an election program by the Popular Front. During the campaign the voters got familiarised with it in details and could “accept” it. From 1975, when the election period was changed from four years to five, according to the authorities the voters discussed five year plans. János Kádár thought that—as part of this process—the ideas of the party became accepted by the people. He believed that in this way, communists and the people outside the party could unite, become one. The decision mechanism of political questions on the elections also became routine-like from 1962. The most important platform, compared to the practice of Rákosi, was the Political Committee instead of the Secretariate. Kádár was very keen that neither during the process of the preparation, nor with the evaluation could the Central Committee be by-passed. The meetings of the Central Committee were rather formal. Usually János Kádár commented on the exposés of Béla Biszku and Mihály Korom, mostly because he was annoyed by the negligence of the Central Committee and the apparatus.

We do not have to explain the cause of indifference. Although all along this era, for more than twenty-five years, the modernisation of the election system was on the agenda, there was no chance for progress. The possibility of choosing between the political alternatives, except for some peripheral attempt made in 1985, was severely forbidden by the government. The so-called civil principle of the division of power was alternated by the “socialist” principle of the unity of power. This unbreakable position was first questioned in front of the Central Committee by Rezső Nyers during the February 28, 1980 committee meeting, when during the debate about single or multiple nomination already dragging on for two decades by then, he finally stated that the election reform had to move toward the direction of political alternatives, and the road MSZMP

was taking was a dead end street from the development of the socialist democracy point of view.³³ To see how strange all that sounded to the party leaders is shown well by the fact that the speaker, Mihály Korom, in his closing statements referred to the mandatory multiple nomination system in Cuba that became common practice, with such scepticism that it equalled in a rejection itself.

Has indeed nothing worth mentioning happened between 1958-1985 at the Central Committee meetings that were held by the dozen and at the Political Committee meetings, held even more frequently? This would naturally be an exaggeration. The elections and the preceding political arguments and decisions are exact imprints, if analysed from a given angle, of the change that took place in the thinking of the party leadership and in the political practice. The most convincing shift was noted by contemporary political law and political science literature as well. This is connected to the reform period of 1966 to 1970, when the leadership decided to change to the individual election district system and they stuck to that. They also made that consistent in the election methods, and in 1983 introduced the mandatory multiple election system. In the background there was the breaking-off with the hierarchical interest that builds on monolithic, overall community interest, and the emphasis on the principle of harmonising personal, group and community interests, a principal idea of the reform politics of the sixties. The intension of shifting toward modification and competition was most strongly felt in Kádár's personality during the preparation for the 1967 and 1971 elections. Kádár then, as the representative of reforms, was a step ahead of the Central Committee in spite of his tact, unlike at the end of the seventies and during the eighties, when he got disappointed and he could not believe without reservation in moving forward any more, as we can read in the committee reports. In 1985 as he could not really handle the attempts of the opposition nominees, he returned again and again to the basic requirements that

were set in 1957 in front of the Central Committee: nominees of the opposition cannot get into the Parliament. If it was possible for them to get in than there was a slip in the system. “Who will the voters support, if there are more nominees?”—he asked. “Suppose there are four nominees. What happens then? Everything is drifting with the current? Is this that so-called equal chance? The voters can choose whoever they wish? This was not really, completely thought over.”³⁴

After all, it was not among the most supported conceptions that the reforms of the sixties would also change the Parliament. It was always more important for the representatives to keep the overall, national interest in mind than the local one. From 1956 local MP groups were formed and operated. From 1967 the MPs coming from these local groups, started to support them. In theory, it was possible to recall these MPs, but it was more important that the nomination slowly but steadily slipped into the hands of county level authorities. (The election district had no mentionable role from this point of view.) There were not too many central nominees, “parachutists,” their number has fallen by time and also became an object of bargaining. Statistical regulations (ratio of workers, women, the young, etc.) were not insurmountable either. The fluctuation was always much bigger than expected by the headquarters, but no word of command could change this. Only the 1985 elections brought a change. Before then Kádár said, with a little exaggeration, almost with pride, that the Political Committee just looked at him and accepted the suggestions of Budapest and the counties. The counties and the party headquarter only fought about the so-called central nominees, as always. (Among the 714 Popular Front nominees their number did not reach forty.) Citing János Kádár again: “The chair of the Central Planning Board is usually nominated by half of the counties, the minister of railroad about by the fourth, the minister of defence by at least one third, because from him they can expect a lot of private

labour-power, the minister of finance... and so on, I do not wish to continue.”³⁵ Unlike in the Rákosi system, wangling, the representation of local interests, their organisation into groups and lobbying, and the interpellations in these matters belonged to the so-called “tolerated” category. This was enough, together with the growth of decision-preparation of the state administration, for the Parliament to become the—even if not the most important—representational area of regional and local groups. With that the selection of nominees became an important issue. Exactly this situation fuelled the hopes, especially after the 1983 election reform, that the development of governmental, and within that the parliamentary, system of representation and the separation of party and government, would gradually melt the party-centric behaviour of power and decrease its self-interest character.³⁶

The events partly go back to the reforms before October 1956, partly to the negative experiences of 1958 and the following years. The turn in 1958 was also motivated by the increasing demand for legitimacy. The Imre Nagy trial ruined the hopes for the regime’s international acceptance. At the same time, almost two years after the take-over, they still had to govern with the “Rákosi Parliament.” Kádár wanted his own legislation, at least with as many votes as in 1953. A legislation that stood solid behind him, even in hard times, not like the old one in October 1956. At the same time, he wanted a legislation that expressed certain political continuity, but also rehabilitated those in prison or who were shunted five years before and could not get into the legislation. On the other hand, he imagined an active Parliament with a political image, where people would listen when he made a speech. The election went as planned, but the success was still not complete. The work within the Parliament, even with the solid communist composition, returned to its usual formal activity. Just as in 1953, the patching has begun: sessions had to be held more often, the MPs had to have preparation time, selecting the

speakers in advance had to be stopped, the possibility for debates had to be built up, not the given committees, but the government had to introduce the bills, give reasonable explanations and had to answer the questions seriously, interpellation freedom had to be provided, etc. The MSZMP leaders were not able to renounce the close control of parliamentary work, especially the plenary sessions, because of their important propagandistic effects on domestic and foreign policy. At the same time they wanted to make their legitimacy more realistic.

After 1956 nine years had to pass until a theoretical decision regarding the modernisation of the political institutional system could be reached, and the elections and parliamentary reforms could begin. They fit into the particular political choreography of the February 24, 1963 elections. In November 1962, the 8th party congress wished to declare a new era: the foundations of socialism were laid down, and the development from the dictatorship of the proletariat to a universal democratic state was in progress. János Kádár timed the important actual steps for the opening session of the new Parliament. The election went in the old “approved” way, although the emphasis from individual agitation was shifted to group agitation. This was based basically on Kádár’s instructions, and meant giving up the pressure put directly on the people. The campaign was only one month long again, there were fewer ceremonies, and the rate of independent in the legislature grew from twenty percent to thirty. From the more than seven million voters even under such circumstances only two hundred thousand people stayed away from the polls and only seventy five thousand voted against the Popular Front. This time János Kádár gave an account of the election victory directly to the Parliament instead of the Central Committee after the meeting of the Political Committee. He rejuvenated the government and announced two political steps of great consequence: the government was going to propose a general amnesty to the Presidential Council, and (in his words)

“we have to use, and it can be used and generalised, the positive experiences, that we have gained at the local elections from having individual election districts and more nominees to one position, with more courage for the improvement of our election system and at the general elections.”³⁷ That is, he gave hope for the election reform. There is also another passage from his speech worth mentioning, the one that almost advances the somewhat more tolerant intellectual atmosphere of the sixties, and can be considered as one of the root ideas of the so-called 1965 ideological Central Committee resolution: “We have to be completely clear on the fact that the ideological battle of people representing the socialist idea is on for the victory of the idea, against the incorrect views, and for the people and not against them.”

The 1965 ideological decision opened up perspectives not simply for the reform, but also for the theoretical pursuit of finding new ways. “The party expects from those working with social sciences that they elaborate the way of progress in a constructive manner. They have to keep in mind that the theory of the socialist state and the social evolution has not been completed or closed.”³⁸ With that a new circle of people, legal experts, sociologists joined the decision elaboration and with that the scientific study of political institutions started. During the seventies, based on the decision of the Agit-Prop Committee of MSZMP, the studying of democracy has widened. It became the major path and the theme of more and more essays and conferences. The summary,³⁹ which was prepared by 1980, elevated it to scientific level that representation in a political system had to fulfil the role of interest-representation. Although the more daring reform thoughts were composed outside the official academic circles or remained in the intellectual workshops, their opinion still played a part in changing the views of decision makers, and in forming the commitment towards reforms in younger generations. For a while it seemed it could affect the behaviour of younger

politicians close to top political positions. At the time of the 1983 election reform the group of people within the party urging for more pronounced reforms of the political institutions had been already present. They were able to achieve the liberalisation of the mandatory dual nomination and the right to recall, have also succeeded in attaining the elimination of the districts and the formation of the Constitutional Council and that the Central People's Inspectoral Committee was no longer under governmental supervision. The suggestion for the establishment of the Audit Office, on the other hand, came up against unbreakable walls. On the October 11, 1982 meeting of the Central Committee Rezső Nyers represented the opinion of the group that felt the reforms were not coming along fast enough. This time the committee discussed the proposal in two turns. On July 6, 1983 the National Council of the Patriotic Popular Front made its final decision.⁴⁰ They did not change the election system, but the modernisation of the Parliament's work was still to be discussed. This topic came up not only at the meeting of the National Council of the Patriotic Popular Front, but it was also put in writing by Péter Veres, minister of commerce, Central Committee member. As he put it: "It would be good to have a Parliament which is more than just a production conference."⁴¹ So the option for progression was still there.

The Central Committee dealt with the modernisation of the Parliament only a year later, at the October 9 meeting in 1984. The leader of the preliminary works and the speaker was again Mihály Korom. In his introduction he rejected the suggestions pointing towards change. Neither the power of the Presidential Committee could be diminished to the favour of the Parliament, nor could the number of meetings grow. The political leadership rejected extending the exhaustive nature of laws, the minimal modernisation of the work of the parliamentary committees, i.e. creating professional sub-commissions, or having standing orders to attend the sessions on a regular

basis. It was out of the question that the answer given to the interpellation, which was not accepted, could be linked to the vote of confidence. The proposal that parliamentary work could be a full-time job was refused by Mihály Korom with the explanation that it would then become more difficult for the MPs to stay in touch with their voters. The leaders of MSZMP strictly refused changing the constitutional legal status of the Cabinet. Even Antal Apró, president of the parliament complained because the Political Committee insisted on having two-day sessions, when in the meantime even the competent committee of the Parliament was not able to discuss the merger of the ministries of economy into a Ministry of Industry, and even the smallest changes could not be made in the budget. He only asked for a tiny reserve from the budget to be able to expand the legislation. Rezső Nyers could only accomplish that the presidency of the Parliament was called upon to make specific suggestions, but it was difficult to make suggestions to nothing.

From MSZMP's point of view the 1985 elections were successful. In about 66 percent of the election districts the dual nomination of the Popular Front was accepted without any changes, suggestions were accepted in 97 percent (19 did not win out of 714). Out of the 174 recommended for nomination by voters 74 became nominees (39 percent). None of the nominees of the opposition got into the legislature. On the June 26 meeting of the Central Committee the speaker of the agenda was István Horváth instead of Mihály Korom. Because the elections brought better results than expected, the reservations toward the mandatory multiple nominations have eased, but they did not vanish. This was enough for defending the reform, but regarding the tasks to be done the situation was not as clear as that. The defeat of several old cadres and middle level leaders showed that distrust was growing toward the representatives of the power among the population. The resolution accepted after the debate about the development of

the election system and about utilising the experiences did not clarify in what direction the changes should go. However, the independent and scientific workshops, which were commissioned by the party, did not stay inactive. When they examined the multiple nomination that was combined with nomination by voters during the 1985 elections, they “discovered” radically new political elements. These were pointing toward a strengthening of the restriction of power, toward a competitive, value-oriented parliamentary election system.⁴² Based on these the experts suggested the elimination of the control of the party, the changing of the nomination system into a democratic one (the discontinuation of nomination meetings at workplaces, introducing recommendation slips, etc.). In 1987 another Central Committee decision was born about the continuation of the modernisation of political institutions. In the *Társadalmi Szemle* (Social Review) an argument evolved about the topic, in which more daring opinions—rated as extremities, but actually, moderate opinions, pointing to unmistakable directions—came to light. In 1988 new personalities appeared in the political arena. *Társadalmi szerződés* (Social Contract) had been already published, the 1987 meeting at Lakitelek had already been held, the Alliance of Young Democrats (Fidesz) had already been formed. Newer and newer political organisations were waiting for the opportunity to begin legal operation. After the national congress of MSZMP, the Central Committee held a session on June 23, 1988, where they discussed the election system. The speaker was György Fejti. About the political circumstances of the elections in 1990 and their consequences he stated: “We also have to take into consideration that the growing burden on the important social groups will cause tension and dissatisfaction... We cannot allow the groups that are antisocialist, or are against our constitutional order to use the election for a political headway or for base-enlargement.”⁴³ Fejti’s words showed what direction the Political Committee was going. The suggestions and deci-

sion were not motivated by the reform, they only wanted to save their power, regardless of what political or generational group they belonged to. Instead of progress they tried to strengthen the power guarantees. Accordingly, they wanted to abolish the freedom of nomination. Although anybody could make a suggestion, only the Nominatory Assembly could decide over the suggestions of the so-called Nomination Preparatory Committee. Based on the accepted plan the national list would have remained closed, and only the Patriotic Popular Front's National Council could have accepted people. No decision was made about the separation of the municipal and parliamentary elections in time. "Guarantees on the acceptance of the municipal and parliamentary nominations have to be strengthened by working out a concrete popular front programme with more specific, basic political requirements." "The basic norms of the acceptable behaviour of the nominee have to be fixed by law." The only thing that showed some form of progress in the Central Committee decision was the intent to reinstate the election jurisdiction.

The June 1988 decision of the Central Committee showed the limits of parliamentary representation within the system, and within that frame there was no room for free choice between political alternatives.⁴⁴ Of course, the suggestion did not become a law that would alter the election. By 1990, the Central Committee's ideas lost their political importance. Some months after the decision Péter Schmidt spoke about it as history when he stated the following: "Actually, the 1983 election reform became outdated by now. Originally, it was meant to increase the role of the voters, by maintaining a uniform political representation at the same time. The extension of the voter's role conflicted with the logic of uniform political representation (one-party system representation). The draft made in the autumn of 1988 wanted to resolve this contradiction by reducing the role of the voters."⁴⁵ This contradiction derived from the election reform of the sixties, therefore the

tension was one of the characteristics of the era. The Parliaments of the Rákosi and early Kádár eras were fundamentally different from that of the seventies when it assumed the role of a regional interest protection chamber. Nonetheless, none of them has the plural, but still overall community representative aspect that is important for the institutional and group ties, and interest relations, essential for legislation.

From this point of view the authorities of the late Kádár era moved in the same dead end street as their predecessors. After all, their selection and functional possibilities did not depend on the decisions of the party apparatus, representing a uniform attitude in the fundamental questions of politics. Even the 1985 legislation could not have real sovereignty, one that is limited by the election. The reason that its fate was not dissolution, but the passing of the regime-changing laws, is to be sought beyond the walls of the Parliament.

Translated by Ágnes Gyenes

NOTES

- ¹ As a matter of fact the amendment of the election law was decided by the KV Secretariat of the MDP in two steps. First it was discussed on February 9, 1949, then on March 2. The new regulation made it possible for public servants, professional soldiers and policemen to be elected MPs. (MOL 276. f. 54/29. and 54/32. ó. e.)
- ² Act IX of 1949 about the amendment of writs concerning the parliamentary elections. 8. (1) paragraph. *Törvények és rendeletek hivatalos gyűjteménye 1949* (Official body of laws and decrees), 31.
- ³ *Az MDP Politikai Bizottsága 1949. január 20-i ülésének jegyzőkönyve* (The minutes of the January 20, 1949 meeting of the Political Committee of the Hungarian Workers' Party) (MOL 276. f. 53/19. ó. e.) Details from the party regulations of the Hungarian Independent Popular Front (MFN): "The decisions of the council-board and the presidency are mandatory for both the political and social structures integrated into the Hungarian Independent Popular Front and for the

subordinate bodies of Independent Popular Front.” (*A magyar népfront története. Dokumentumok 1935–1976* [History of the Hungarian Popular Front. Documents 1935–1976] vol. II [Budapest: Kossuth, 1977], 170.)

- ⁴ On February 4, 1949 the directorate of the loyal opposition party, the Demokrata Néppárt (Democratic People’s Party), led by István Barankovics dismissed itself. (“The Democratic People’s Party was dismissed,” *Szabad Nép*, February 5, 1949.) At the same time the Catholic Women’s Camp, which had an otherwise insignificant influence on politics, was disbanded by administrative means.
- ⁵ See Act II of 1953 about the amendment of the parliamentary election law. *Törvények és rendeletek hivatalos gyűjteménye 1953* (Budapest), 3.
- ⁶ “In case of complaint the Parliament decides over the legality of the elections conducted in certain parliamentary election districts.” (*Rendelettar* [Body of Decrees] [Budapest, 1958], 20.) According to the explanation: “According to the basic structure of our socialist state system, only one organisation, the Parliament can decide over the legality of the election.” The Soviet, Romanian and Bulgarian acts stated even less about the control of the elections.
- ⁷ MOL 276. f. 106/9 ő. e.
- ⁸ Jegyzőkönyv az MDP Operatív Választási Bizottsága 1949. április 11-i üléséről (Record of the April 11, 1949 meeting of the Hungarian Worker’s Party’s Operative Election Committee (MOL 276. f. 106/11. ő. e.).
- ⁹ MOL 288. f. 4/86. ő. e.
- ¹⁰ On the July 26, 1985 meeting of the Central Committee, unlike the usual practice, dispute emerged about the evaluation of the election results. In his closing remarks, the speaker, István Horváth said, sustaining the importance of the results, that the 95% participation rate was achieved by minimum harassment. (PIL 288. f. 4/212. ő. e.)
- ¹¹ The decision about this was made on the April 6, 1949 meeting of the Secretariat of the Hungarian Worker Party’s Central Directorate. (MOL 276. f. 54/37. ő. e.)
- ¹² MOL 276. f. 54/36. ő. e.
- ¹³ In 1953, after the hearings of the leaders of the central and county apparatus of MDP, the mass organisations, the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of Defence, the State Defence Authority (ÁVH) and the State Office for Church Affairs, the Secretariat delegated a five-member committee, led by Mátyás Rákosi, to decide about the composition of the candidates. Its members were Ernő Gerő, Lajos Ács, Árpád Házi and Rudolf Földvári (MOL 274. f. 54/235. ő. e.).

The institution of the nominations meeting was introduced, but they were very cautious about it. It lasted for one and a half hours at most. The choreography was elaborated in an accurate manner. Rákosi had to be nominated at every meeting. Besides that, considering the aspects of protocol, there were four more extra nomination rallies organised for him with 1,500-2,000 people, and with an article on the title page of the *Szabad Nép*. Gerő, Farkas and Révai got 1000 people-rallies, with reports on the inner pages of the newspaper, the heads of the polls 500 people-rallies with a short report, and the rest 100-200 ones with local dispatches.

- ¹⁴ “Katolikus egyházi és világi közéleti személyiségek felhívása a Népfront-választás mellett” (An appeal of Catholic Church and lay public figures for voting for the Popular Front), *Szabad Nép*, May 8, 1949.
- ¹⁵ Pető, Iván and Sándor Szakács. *A hazai gazdaság négy évtizedének története* (The history of the four decades of the domestic economy), vol. I (Budapest: KJK, 1985), 152.
- ¹⁶ *Úttörőcsapatok választási feladatai* (Election duties of the pioneer troops) (Budapest: Publication of the Pioneer Department of the DISZ Central Leadership, 1953).
- ¹⁷ MOL 276. f. 106/11. ő. e.
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 54/241. ő. e.
- ¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 65/178. ő. e.
- ²⁰ MOL 276. f. 53/139. ő. e.
- ²¹ See Antal Apró’s letter to Sándor Rónai on November 30, 1954, in which Apró asked the opinion of Rónai about the proposed reform of the Parliament. (MOL XVIII-6-b 11. d.)
- ²² See also Pálmány, Béla. “A Parlament 1956-ban” (The Parliament in 1956), *Valóság* (Reality), no. 10 (1994).
- ²³ MOL 276. f. 53/113. ő. e. and 54/225. ő. e.
- ²⁴ MOL XIX-A-2-gg 32. d.
- ²⁵ MOL 276. f. 53/308. ő. e.
- ²⁶ *A forradalom hangja* (The voice of the revolution), Századvég Füzetek 3 (Budapest: Századvég, 1989), 227.
- ²⁷ Bibó, István. *Válogatott tanulmányok 1935–1979* (Selected essays), vol. IV (Budapest: Magvető, 1990), 161.
- ²⁸ See Izsák, Lajos. “Az 1956-os forradalom pártjai és programjaik” (The parties of the 1956 revolution and their programmes), *Múltunk*, nos. 2–3 (1992).
- ²⁹ See Feitl, István. “A magyar munkástanácsok és az öngazgatás 1956-ban (The Hungarian soviets and self-administration in 1956), *Eszmélet*, no 2.

- ³⁰ A Forradalmi Munkás-Paraszt kormány nyilatkozata a legfontosabb feladatokról (Statement of the Revolutionary Worker-Peasant Government about the most important tasks), *Népszabadság*, January 6, 1957.
- ³¹ MOL XIX-A-2-gg 48. d.
- ³² MOL 288. f. 5/66. ő. e.
- ³³ MOL 288. f. 4/168. ő. e.
- ³⁴ MOL 288. f. 4/207. ő. e.
- ³⁵ Ibid.
- ³⁶ Bihari, Mihály. *Politikai rendszer és szocialista demokrácia* (Political System and Socialist Democracy) (Budapest: ELTE ÁJTK, 1985), 216–226; Szoboszlai, György. *Államiság és politikai rendszer* (Statehood and political system) (Budapest: Kossuth, 1987), 186–191.
- ³⁷ *Népszabadság*, March 22, 1963.
- ³⁸ *A magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt határozatai és dokumentumai* (Decisions and documents of the Hungarian Workers' Party) (Budapest: Kossuth, 1978), 137.
- ³⁹ "Szocialista demokrácia" (Socialist Democracy), *Társadalmi Szemle* (Social Review), no. 7 (1980).
- ⁴⁰ MOL 288. f. 4/188. and 194. ő. e.
- ⁴¹ MOL 288. f. 4/194. ő. e.
- ⁴² Péter Schmidt in his book about the political experiences of the 1985 elections, evaluated the nomination by citizens and the multiple nomination as a challenge for the methods of the administrative preparation system, and emphasised the strengthening of the social supervisory function. György Szoboszlai also thought that the new system had greatly affected the behaviour of the preparatory political institutions and also some groups of the electors. He has also pointed out that being more active "does not necessary mean the change of the political content and cannot be considered overall." *Az 1985. évi országgyűlési választások politikai tapasztalatai (politikai szociológiai elemzés)* (The political experiences of the 1985 parliamentary elections [Political sociological analysis]) (Budapest: MSZMP KB Társadalomtudományi Intézet, 1988), 242.
- ⁴³ *Pártélet* (Party life), no. 12 (1988).
- ⁴⁴ With that, the acceleration of change could not be confined within the walls of the Parliament. István Kukorelli, in one of his analyses, believes that the interval after the June 1988 Central Committee Meeting to be the beginning of the turn in parliamentary politicising. He summarises the changes that occurred in Parliament in 1988 as follows:

- “1. The role of the Parliament has grown because of the expansion of the transparency of politics; the Parliament became an essential part of this process. (There was also a disadvantage of publicity for the Parliament, that is, the occasional ‘scenes’ within the Parliament got strong criticisms.)
2. The birth of civil society invigorated the Parliament: several MPs, corresponding to their original employment, transmitted the movements of the community; *politics appeared within the parliament, even though this Parliament was not yet a democratic representation.*
3. There has been a significant progress in the main parliamentary functions. First of all in the legislation and in the parliamentary control. The problems and abnormalities of the parliamentary practice showed the white spots where there should be progress as soon as possible, where certain establishments were needed (e.g. machine-controlled voting, parliamentary apparatuses, independent advisors or institutions, like the State Audit Office, etc.).
4. The responsibility of the parliamentary decision makers has grown, 1988 brought up the necessity of the introduction of professional representation.

1988 was the year of the beginning of parliamentary reform. Reform directions have been composed, institutional changes have started. The following years were the years of the new elections and conventions in Hungary.”

Kukorelli, István. “Parlament az egypártrendszer utolsó (?) évében” (Parliament in the last (?) Year of the One-Party System”), in *Magyarország politikai évkönyve 1988* (Political Yearbook of Hungary 1988), eds. Kurtán, Sándor, Péter Sándor, and László Vass (Budapest: R-Forma Kiadó Kft., 1989), 252.

- ⁴⁵ Schmidt, Péter. “A politikai rendszer és az államszervezet reformja” (The Reform of the Political System and the State Institution), *Társadalmi Szemle* (Social Review), no. 4 (1989).