

Lajos Kassák and the Hungarian Left Radical Milieu (1926–1934)

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In my study I would like to draft the intellectual, political atmosphere, in which the *Munka-kör* (Work-circle), bearing the stamp of Lajos Kassák, was founded and formulated. It was a leftist creative community, which through its numerous branches most impregnated the Hungarian labour movement at the end of the 1920s and the beginning of the next decade. Nevertheless, instead of “background” it seems more correct to talk about a kind of *milieu*, a huge political sphere from the left of social democracy to the most radical fractions and grouplets, namely the Hungarian versions of Trotskyism and council-communism (or, according to the terminology of the Communist Party of Hungary: the “too-leftists”). Sociologically the milieu consisted of students, young artists and a relatively huge number of young workers. Chronologically—although the milieu’s central organ, the *Munka* (Work) was published until 1939—I close my research with the year 1934, when the left radical milieu was mainly crumpled up due to both inner struggles and an anti-left police offensive. The *Munka-kör* was one of the centres of this feverish, whirling epoch, and a cradle for several movements and formations. Its followers and sympathisers were more numerous than the membership or halo of any other labour-oriented movement (except, of course, for social democracy), even of the Communist Party of Hungary (KMP) and the Association of Communist Young Workers

(KIMSZ). So one can conclude, that the milieu itself was the *background* of the Munka-kör for some short, but dizzy years.

However, in such a short study it is only possible to flash light on some interesting and maybe less-known elements of this broad milieu; mainly the ways in which—thanks to some members and followers of the Munka-kör—Marxist and communist based ideas arrived to the Hungarian labour movement, which nevertheless strongly criticised the Soviet model. The first newcomer was Trotskyism, later followed by council-communism and partially some forms of anarchism.

When Lajos Kassák moved home to Budapest for Vienna he had already arranged his arrival accurately. The previous year, he sent forward Aladár Tamás, the editor of the review 365, which was in fact the Hungarian successor of his former paper *Ma* (Today). Kassák planned to chime in the edition of this newspaper on arriving to Hungary, however Tamás already had some connections with the KMP, and realised clearly the figurehead-role Kassák wanted him to play, so he eventually broke with Kassák, and later became one of his most ardent political enemies—partly because of his personal pique. Some months after his arrival Kassák already published *Dokumentum* (Document), an organic sequence of *Ma* with an emphasis more on avant-garde art than social and political topics.

However, as Kassák later wrote, “the short lifetime of *Dokumentum* proved, that the preconditions of the continuation of the old-type movement had disappeared.”¹ Kassák himself, along with his co-workers arriving home from emigration—Tibor Déry, Gyula Illyés, József Nádass and Andor Németh—had to realise, that they had fallen into a kind of vacuum: the former audience of the avant-garde hardly existed, while possible new readers—and what was even more important for Kassák, possible new followers and pupils—dealt openly with politics and the practical problems of political struggle. Nevertheless direct politics

was clearly disapproved by the counter-revolutionary official power, and its facilities were not broad at all. But Kassák did not want to produce a badly stencilled, tiny illegal newspaper in wrecked cellars or slummy huts. “We were not allowed to do politics; but politics was essential for us; the question was the form of it. We were not allowed to do art; art was essential for us, the question was what kind of art we could make, and how to show it to the public. We had no audience; a paper needs readers to live; the question was where to find such readers. We were not allowed to organise, so we decided to organise; we had to create the form of it. [...] It became clear for us, that there was only one stratum worth fighting for: young workers and students. But we had to create a brand new language to build connections with them. Although there were some lonely intellectuals not exiled from the country, it was clear that the young could be the base of the new guard of *Munka*”—Kassák summarised the dilemma later.²

Kassák therefore ascertained the base of the potential background of his artistic and political activity in a rather simple and definite way, although he knew very well that he could bank upon only a tiny minority of this “youth”. A loud fraction of the young workers was demonstratively unsatisfied with the politics (and sometimes the canonised art) of the social democratic party, and sometimes it was possible to find some left radical elements among students as well, but several left grouplets and tendencies were fighting for these souls in the 1920s. One could say that demand was far beyond supply, furthermore in this buyer’s market the possible choices had multiplied virtually every day by the ruptures and disbands among left groups while there were fewer radical youngsters as the country’s political and economical situation was consolidating after the shocks of WWI and the following revolutions until the shocks of the Great Depression at the end of the decade.

Kassák envisioned a kind of unified counter-culture—a universe of lifestyle, morals, politics and art. But this

imaginary counter-culture itself was divided, and all of its fragments laid claim to similar universal means. On a level of abstraction a “communist” or “socialist” movement had apparently existed in Hungary. Indeed, it was the point of view of the detectives of the political investigation department of the police as well: they dealt with the Munka-kör as a left radical organisation. Nevertheless, in this broad milieu inner wars were normal, although sometimes inner ceasefires were made and some groups entered into temporary alliances.

For the second part of the 1920s the rates of labour movement had already been formulated more or less in Hungary. The social democratic party and its trade unions had an overwhelming majority: social democracy was the only mass-movement on the political stage, but it had to force back all kinds of radicalism and revolutionary activity to maintain its size and endangered legality. This dilemma was well known not only by the leaders of the party and the unions, but “old fellow workers” as well, who were on an eternal alert to canalise the anger and derring-do of their younger comrades into legal frameworks. The Hungarian Social Democratic Party (MSZDP) and its several organisations (cultural, sport, etc. associations) offered only a kind of infrastructural background to left radicalism, against the will of the leaders of course. The “official” communist movement—as the left radicals denounced the KMP, the KIMSZ and their cover- and satellite-organisations—was recovering rather slowly following the catastrophic defeat in 1919 and the inner struggles preceding it. The membership of the CP and the KIMSZ was around one-two hundred, and they had sympathisers no more than some few thousand—at least according to police records.³ But the labour movement had more than only two poles. For the end of the 1920s had internationally strengthened a kind of Marxist-based, Communist ideology that indeed was critical of or openly against the Soviet model. More and more disturbing news were arriving from the “huge

common homeland of the proletariat” and the backyards of the Communist International. The latter already appeared to be merely the tool of Soviet foreign policy. Bitter international disputes had risen around the isolation of the oppositions in the Soviet Union, the exiling of Trotsky, the so-called “Bolshevisation” of the western Communist parties, the birth of the personal cult. Several communist cadres and sympathisers travelled to the Soviet Union, and arriving home they gave accounts of their strange experiences, although the “big books of disillusionment”—for example the works of André Gide, Ante Ciliga, Arthur Koestler or the Hungarian Lajos Nagy—still had to be written.

1928, the year *Munka* was first published, was an important year of changes for the Hungarian Communist movements: Hungarian Socialist Worker’s Party (MSZMP), the legal cover party of the movement was disbanded by the state; Aladár Weisshaus, a former member of MSZMP started his famous seminars that soon became a nest for all kinds of left radicals. After the big arrests of 1927 KIMSZ were rather disorganised: thirty seceded young workers led by Iván Hartstein formed their group, the Marxist Opposition Front (MEF), the first real Trotskyist organisation in Hungary. In the beginning of 1928, the Hungarian branch of the American-based Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) was founded. The Hungarian General Workers’ Association (MÁMSZ) was rooted in “industrial unionism”, a kind of anarcho-syndicalism with some Marxist flavours. It had a legal charter, and not being as sectarian as the CP or the social democracy it was able to offer an alternative infrastructure to almost all of the left radical coteries, among others some dissidents of Munka-kör.

MÁMSZ was founded officially on 27 January, 1928 with around seventy members. Although it belonged to the worldwide net of IWW, it was not written in the charter because of legal matters. The majority of the members of

the parent organisation in the USA and Canada were migrant workers. IWW published a bilingual English-Hungarian weekly from 1912 (until 1954!) in Chicago, Cleveland and New York City under the title *Bérmunkás* (wage-worker)—*Hungarian Official Journal of the IWW*. In Hungary the organisation first appeared in 1920, when the Hungarian-American Woodcraft Ltd. “imported” foremen of Hungarian origin into the country, some of whom were members of the IWW. The case was similar in the neighbouring Czechoslovakia, where American co-owners of Slovakian mines employed “wobblies” from the States. Organisation began immediately, but while in the counter-revolutionary Hungary it had formed officially only years later, in the democratic Czechoslovakia the first Hungarian review was published already in January 1921 in Bratislava. The *Felszabadulás* (Liberation) contained a short Slovakian report as well, and was distributed not only in Czechoslovakia, but in Austria, Hungary, Romania, Yugoslavia and the USA as well. By 1922, IWW delegates had been working in five Slovakian towns.⁴

So in 1928 a legal labour organisation was founded in Hungary, with a programme more radical and “leftist” than the programme not only of MSZDMP, but also from several aspects even the program and politics of KMP. The membership of the Hungarian General Workers’ Association⁵ had quadrupled within a year, and at the general assembly in January 1929 the delegates represented more than 250 members.⁶ Characteristic of the functioning of the organisation, the leadership voluntarily resigned at the assembly, because they had been working as leaders of a smaller organisation, and new trades as well as new members needed to be represented. By then MÁMSZ had already collegiated workers of 29 trades. The first issue of *Bérmunkás* was published in May 1928, when the organisation already had its headquarters in Budapest, an official bureau with fixed calling hours, and association library. If the members asked for it, the Association bought books for

them, and later they could pay for it on easy terms. The system of fees was already worked out: men paid 1.5, women 1 pengő as a monthly fee. The income of the first year was 308 pengős, but next year it had grown to 2088 pengős—whereas the expenditures remained the same; the latter included not only trivial items such as post, renting, printing costs etc., but even 30 pengős for toys showing the living communal life of the MÁMSZ.

MÁMSZ became a receptacle of workers disillusioned by the boring routine of the official labour parties and trade unions, fired leftists, and radical youngsters. It was a rather open movement, and stayed out of the well-known sectarian struggles. Its leaders just as its members were workers; their self-educated ideologues sometimes talked and wrote in a surprisingly fresh and new manner.⁷

It is easy to understand why such an organisation was useful for the members of the several left radical groups. There they could find infrastructure, and could belong to a legal, registered organisation with a broad international background—and in return they only had to agree with some principles close to theirs. Anyway, some years later they became the cause of the fall of the Association. In the spring of 1932 the state power had seen its former error at last: since then they only had viewed MÁMSZ as an instrument to weaken the trade union basis of the biggest political enemy, MSZDP. The true radicalism of the Association was covered by its strange, American-born phraseology, rather unknown and incomprehensible for the experts of the Hungarian police. Indeed, MÁMSZ was talking about class struggle, strikes as well, but a huge part of its locution dealt with “brotherhood of men,” “enlightenment,” praise of learning and culture—for detectives at first it seemed to be more a kind of religious sect than a revolutionary organisation. The Association stated its non-political character in its charter, which was tranquilizing to the political police, since MÁMSZ did not want to take part in the elections, and was not open to the possible

entrism of KMP. Nevertheless, it became more and more evident that from several aspects MÁMSZ was more radical and bellicose than not only MSZDP and its trade unions, but even KMP. After all, MÁMSZ rejected trade unions: István Tóth, the publisher of *Bérmunkás* compared them to a “gallery rifle,” which is enough only to “shooting sparrows”.⁸ But the organisation was eager to stand in the forefront of strike struggles, like the huge miner-strikes of Christmas 1928, and was ardently against any compromise with the “blokes” as well as the intentions of the trade unions to calm down the striking fever.

The quasi-Trotskyist Iván Hartstein became a member of the MÁMSZ leadership in the fall of 1931. He led lectures and seminars, and soon became a gravity point to the “radical elements” of the group. In the following spring the police attacked the organisation condemning it as a “bunch of Bolshevik agitators”. During the raids a lot of printed material was confiscated, and some members, including Hartstein, were arrested. The situation of the MÁMSZ became dire after the liquidation of the already council-communist Hartstein group in 1933. The decrepit MÁMSZ in 1934 merged with the “national communist” movement of Aladár Weissshaus. This movement was stronger than before, although the police recorded just the opposite.⁹ During 1934 Weissshaus was trying to have some firm organisational background to his tendency. After unsuccessful negotiations with MSZDP leadership he turned towards KMP, although in March MSZDP, a month later KMP forbade its members the distribution of *Új Szó* (New Word), the paper of Weissshaus.¹⁰ According to police files, Weissshaus, “who belongs to the Fourth Internationalists, and regards Trotsky as his spiritual leader, is negotiating with the leaders of KMP about a fusion.” The leadership of KMP would have liked to see the good writer and skilled agitator inside the party again, but he wanted a leading position in return. Nevertheless, the Political Secretary of the Comintern did not absolve the

former expelling verdict against Weissshaus, so even repeated negotiations proved to be unsuccessful.¹¹ In turn Weissshaus tried to have connections with the populist-rightist Hungarian Radical Party (MRP), even wanted to establish a Hungarian Radical Workers' Party according to police files. Although he won some new members from the backyards of awakening Hungarian fascism, the leader of MRP, Endre Bajcsy-Zsilinszky—following police “advice”—dehorted the “communists”.¹² This was the moment when Weissshaus turned towards the MÁMSZ. Fusion revived both organisations, and for a while even the former IWW positions had survived it, especially on the trade union question. In the headquarters of the MÁMSZ the *Bérmunkás* from Cleveland was distributed together with the *Új Szó*. But Weissshaus and his followers adapted soon the Association, and MÁMSZ declined its original aims; it became a mere framework of the Weissshaus-movement. In 1936 the Hungarian *Bérmunkás* reappeared, but its aims and content changed almost completely.

During 1928 a more or less anarcho-syndicalist group began to formulate around József Rézner who tried to create a kind of synthesis between anarchism and Marxism. Even this short overview illustrates the ample choice—or huge chaos from the point of view of official labour leaders—inside the labour movements situated left from social democracy, or even the Communist Party. Within two short years Kassák was able to collect a relatively large camp around himself: hundreds in 1928, but in 1931—after the split of *Munka-kör*—a police file recorded 1000–1200 followers and sympathisers. Of course, it was enough to be classified as such if detectives found an issue of *Munka* in somebody's baggage or flat during a raid.¹³

This broad variety was a breeding-ground of sectarian politics as well as new fusions and regroupings. Even the highly hierarchic KMP and KIMSZ had been touched: the cause of the strict party judgements, expels, the aspersions of the KIMSZ paper *Ifjú Proletár* (Young Proletarian), the

“beagle-almanac”—with names, jobs, addresses—published in KMP organs¹⁴ was just this kind of permanent move. Kassák himself and the Munka-kör played a kind of catalysing role inside this cot.

The ideal of *Munka* was the creation of a kind of totalistic counter-culture, with more emphasis on politics than art already. Characteristically the climate worsened significantly between Kassák and the official communist movement in that exact moment, when his activity became more and more political. *100%*, the legal cultural and political organ of KMP edited by Aladár Tamás aimed to counterbalance *Munka*. Although it was a high quality paper as well, it could never be a really effective rival of Kassák’s review. Its writings were just as sectarian and narrow-minded as the other organs of the Communist Party. Until Kassák and his comrades remained avant-garde artists, they were considered “fellow-travellers” by official communist, but when they turned towards direct politics, they immediately became “bourgeois decadents”, “chaotic pestilents” etc. In 1930 Kassák labelled this kind of approach “social-Jesuitism”.

At the beginning parallel discourses were possible inside the Kassák-ruled *Gesamkuntswerk* of the Munka-kör, since Kassák—the “pope of the movement” as his enemies denounced him—was not for sectarianism. This was indeed one of his major advantages over the official communists: cohesion was more a result of common activity, ideals and idea-forming disputes than authority or automatic respect. The Munka-kör was a kind of lifestyle as well—but because of its own priorities it had to face some direct political problems soon, causing inevitable ruptures. Inside the permanently critical spirit of the Munka-kör personalities were forming—and step by step they started to feel Kassák’s indisputable dominance smothering. One could even talk about generation problems—while Kassák was over forty, his followers were in their early twenties.

The international disputes of the communist movements permeated into the Munka-kör during the spring of 1930. Contradictions centred around two main topics: the evaluation of the first five-year plan of the Soviet Union, and the exile of Trotsky. Kassák was rather close to the official opinion in both issues. The five-year plan was the triumph of productive work in his eyes: for him work—the title of his review is not incidental!—was the par excellence human activity, and he was not really disturbed by its alienating nature.¹⁵ He accounted the plan to be the organisation of work, therefore a step towards socialism. On the other hand, he accepted the exile of Trotsky, or at least he was neutral in this question: he had never been a Trotskyist, although the *Munka* published some articles by Pál Justus about the problematic ex-leader.¹⁶ “The line of Kassák is parallel to ours in this question”—stated positively an inner material of the Foreign Committee of the KMP in 1932.¹⁷ But some of the most talented young members of the Munka-kör did not share his opinions. The leading figures of his inner opposition were Lajos Szabó, Pál Justus and Pál Partos. In a seminar of the Munka-kör in the spring of 1930 Lajos Szabó attacked the politics of the Soviet Union so ardently that Kassák hurried him out of the room. About fifty people followed him: it was clear that sooner or later rupture will be inevitable.

Among the renegades of Munka-kör Lajos Szabó and Pál Partos had the strongest effect upon the leftist milieu: they were the hardcore of the so called “oppo” (opposition), but they also had a role in the transition of the more or less Trotskyist MEF to the council-communist Organisation of Left Communists of Hungary (MBKSZ, Hungarian section of the Communist Worker’s International), or the radicalisation of MÁMSZ. Both of them—Partos sooner than Szabó—became followers of the German Marxist Karl Korsch, and transported his ideas to the Hungarian milieu. But nothing could have been more heretic than these ideals according to the official communist principles. For Korsch

Communist Parties were essentially social democratic, the Soviet Union was a state of state-capitalism, the last epoch of the capitalist mode of production, and from the early 1930s he already considered the October revolution of 1917 a bourgeois one. Indeed, he called for a “new Zimmerwald”. However, the ideas of Korsch were known by Kassák as well, since the German revolutionary philosopher often wrote articles to the review *Die Aktion* edited by Franz Pfemfert, a paper Kassák also worked for, and which was one of the most important forerunners of his own *Munka*.

The tension between Kassák and the young radicals of the Munka-kör led to an organisational rupture in the fall of 1930. On 1 September a great and violent demonstration shocked Budapest: in the eyes of the young this proved the possibility of an instant revolution. Even some members of the KMP and KIMSZ were talking about the necessity of an “action party”. The next weekend, after the riots, a group of youngsters—members of the Munka-kör, social democratic and communist students—gathered in the outskirts of the city to establish the Student Group of the Social Democratic Party. The meeting was organised by the leaders of the opposition of the Munka-kör: Pál Justus, Lajos Szabó, Pál Fuchs and Andor Szirtes.¹⁸ After the bitter discussions and quarrels Kassák was unable to tolerate this step. “Some of us had started to act as a faction recently, against the original aims of *Munka* [...] so *Munka* denies any common cause with the leaders of this faction”—he wrote on 15 September. Anyway, this official voice was not to be taken as seriously as in the official communist movement: Kassák and the expelled members remained on friendly terms, although Kassák despised a bit the renegades of his movement: “Some lads want to shit into the hat of the big Russian Bear!”—he grumbled.

Following the expulsions a rather unstable movement was formed around the expelled members. At the beginning 20–30 people arrived from the Munka-kör and the

Student Group, later 50-60 youngsters belonging to the "oppo": students, white-collar and some handicraft workers. Some of them arrived from the KIMSZ ("they had climbed down from the tree"—as someone joked), others arrived from other communist factions and movements, or even from the Zionist-socialist Hashomer Hatzá'ir movement, which was of course also "communist" in the eyes of the police. They considered themselves more or less Leninists, and—since they had connections with Trotskyist groups in Vienna and Paris, and spoke foreign languages—followed mainly Trotskyist paths. They wanted to establish links with the Trotskyist Vienna Bureau, but it considered the Marxist Opposition Front of Hartstein more combative and interesting. Unfortunately, the members of MEF thought that the "oppo" wanted to torpedo them: the relation between the two grouplets became stressed for a while, even some tussles occurred.¹⁹

The "oppo" worked within the frameworks of MSZDP, but used the rather narrow infrastructure of the Student Group as well. In turn they took part in the electoral campaign of the Party. In November 1930 they delegated two members to the Youth Committee of MSZDP, but their aim was to recruit enough youngsters to form the "third labour party". Until then they tried to organise illegal cells inside the youth groups. They organised lectures and discussions. At the seminars they often had problems with KIMSZ activists, so they offered them a compromise: two moderators at each discussion, one from the KIMSZ and the other from the "oppo". Their aim was to convince their counterparts, since they wanted to establish the "third labour party" on the base of "class struggle co-operation" propagated also by Kassák. At the beginning KIMSZ accepted this offer (there were always problems of communication between the membership and the leaders, KMP and KIMSZ, and of course between the home-based and foreign leaderships, because of the typically too rigid rules of conspiracy). Soon, it became clear that they were

unable to find enough skilled moderators against the “oppo”. Contrary to most KIMSZ members, the “oppoists” read Marx, spoke languages, and—maybe that was the major problem—asked disturbing questions. They were rather well informed on the situation of the Soviet Union, and were able to confute the shallow and teleological argues of the KIMSZ activists easily. Sometimes they behaved bitingly: summarising the debates they often sang the “hymn” of the “oppo”, a persiflage of the Soviet “tschastushkas”:

*“To electrify the marrow-slicer is a good position,
This is fully understood by the opposition!
Oh, marrow-slicer, you are the Victory of Man,
You will be multiplied by the glorious five-year plan!”²⁰*

Pál Partos—who met Korsch in Berlin—started to spread his new “anti-organisational” theses, according to which in a period of relative social peace all organisations contain the dangers of bureaucratisation and “paralysis”. So the task was not to create a strictly hierarchic party, but to initiate an organic, federative and spontaneous class movement capable of organic development. Debates, self-education and a constant presence of critics could help in “the forging of arms”, which can be the base of an organisation if the revolutionary period arrived. These ideas did not fit in the strategy of the “third labour party”, so in April 1931 the “oppo” split in two: Lajos Szabó, Pál Partos and Pál Justus followed the Korschian “anti-organisational” line, while others remained faithful to the original party-centered Trotskyite views. The latter oriented towards the MSZDP, while the “anti-organisationalists” tightened their connections with the Hartstein-group, often travelled to Berlin to visit Korsch, translated and commented Marx. Lajos Szabó had smuggled the famous “testament of Lenin” into Hungary, in which Lenin strongly criticises Stalin’s “rudeness”.

The “anti-organisational” ideas refreshed the Hartstein-group. One of their leaders, Barnabás Fürth travelled to Berlin where he met Korsch and the representatives of German-Dutch council-communism. After his journey debates rocked the group: Hartstein followed the old Trotskyist way, but Fürth became an advocate of council-communist theories. By that time the “oppo” played no role in the life of the Hartstein group: the “oppoists” always remained young intellectuals searching for intellectual challenges, which seemed strange for the radical young workers of MEF. However, they played a key role in the transition of the Trotskyist MEF to the council-communist MBKSZ that in turn attacked even more ardently than the “oppo” the old Munka-kör of Kassák, “a gang of culture-revolutionaries” as they called them. These attacks became more serious, when in 1932 the Munka-kör published Molotov’s book on the second five-year plan.²¹ But Kassák was not good enough for the official communists either: they denounced him, because—as they saw—Kassák wanted to expropriate the theses of Molotov.

In the mid-1930s the “oppo” dissolved step by step: it was inevitable in such a heterogeneous, intellectually excited grouping. There were no big denunciations and battles of the official movement; not even spectacular or disgraceful ruptures. The “oppo” was a meeting point, where some creative spirits met for a while to part again after some months or years. Some of its former members left the country, others found their way to the social democracy, or the communist movement. Some took part in the anti-fascist resistance; some became the victim of the fascists, others, later, of the Stalinists.

During 1932 and 1933 the Great Depression was very much felt in Hungary. Political struggle intensified between the various trends. On the cultural front Munka-kör was undoubtedly the most important actor with its speech choirs (led by Jolán Simon, the wife of Kassák) and socio-photographers. But the counterculture that was formerly

thought to be united and totalistic became a mere subculture: the times were not right for the “infinite revolution,” the “forging of the new human”—for the masses of workers bare survival was the main problem.

The year 1934 marked a huge crisis of the international labour movement: in Germany Nazi dictatorship was raging; in February the Schutzbund-uprising was cruelly crushed in neighbouring Austria; in October the Asturian miners fell in Spain. In the Soviet Union a witch-hunt began against the “old Bolsheviks” after the shooting of Kirov, even Zinoviev and Kamenev were arrested. During the same year the Hungarian police also started its campaign for the liquidation of the radical left, when a small group claimed to be “anarcho-Communist” put bombs in some houses in upper class areas of Budapest. The “terrorists” were soon arrested, but during the following weeks the police attacked MÁMSZ, the leftover of the Hartstein-group, even the Esperantists and nephalists... A suit was filed against Kassák because of his autobiography. A lot of activists of KMP and KIMSZ were arrested, and the stage of labour movement became clearer again: in 1935 an inner material of KMP was already talking about “the liquidation of the last faction of liquidators”.²²

Although the *Munka* was published for five more years as the highest quality left review of Hungary, the Munka-kör was virtually dissolved during 1934–1935, since its milieu was destroyed or at least seriously weakened. It was not only because of police oppression, but due to the lack of ideological debates, and living space of the grouping. Without the prolific, rampant environment from which its activists and audience came, which incorporated and formed its debates, and where its renegades could find their place, the community of *Munka* was hardly able even to vegetate. The review had to give up high hopes for the creation a totalistic counterculture, and remained—until it could—a bare written document.

Translated by the author

NOTES

- ¹ Kassák, Lajos. *Az izmusok története*. (The history of the isms) (Budapest: Magvető, 1972), 292.
- ² *Ibid.*, 293.
- ³ The figures of these police records are not really reliable, since detectives and agents often gave exaggerated figures to emphasise the importance of their work to their superiors. Anyway, the rates are likely correct, especially if we compare records with the investigation materials.
- ⁴ *Felszabadulás*, I. 1. 11.
- ⁵ At the founding conference the membership accepted the name General Workers' Association of Hungary to emphasise the internationalist shape of the organisation. However, the Ministry of the Interior wanted to change the name into *Hungarian GWA*. *Bérmunkás*, I. 1. 3.
- ⁶ *Kommunista* (an organ of KMP), II. 17. 8. (February, 1929). The article of the Communist press was based on the record of the assembly, and later confirmed by *Bérmunkás*, so the numbers seem to be correct.
- ⁷ For example as József Berke, carpenter, the secretary of MÁMSZ wrote: "not only the history of mankind, but the whole development of organic life is based on the difference between classes," so class struggle for him was not a conscious action, but more „a moment of manifestation of the development independent of human will". This struggle will destroy both those against it, and the politicians who „used it as a slogan to hide its real meaning from the masses." (*Bérmunkás*, I. 1. 2.) A columnist of *Kommunista* denounced this article as "public danger" and "fascist-smelling rubbish". (*Kommunista*, II. 14. 8.)
- ⁸ Cited in *Kommunista*, II. 17. 8.
- ⁹ In 20 August 1933 a detective of the political investigation department already wrote about the end of the Weissshaus-movement: "The Weissshaus-faction of the Communist Party [sic!], which have already been weakened, have dissolved in the last days". Seeing the lack of material background Weissshaus allegedly wanted to accede to the MSZDP, but he was refused, and "finished his political activity." MOL K 149. 651. f.2/1933-1-7403.
- ¹⁰ MOL K 149. 651. f. 6/1934/II., 19., 22. In April, "numerous" members were fired from the MSZDP because of this (*ibid.*, 57).
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*, 103., 116.
- ¹² MOL K 149 651. f. 6/1934/IV. 146.

- ¹³ MOL 651. f. 2/1931-1-4301.
- ¹⁴ Ferenc Huszti from the Foreign Committee of KMP and René Molnár, lawyer of the Red Aid, edited the „beagle-almanac”. As the historian György Borsányi pointed out, „although Huszti tried to do his job accurately, he was unable to see the cards of the Horthyist secret police; his judgments were based mostly on suspicions, thus—as we see today—the *majority of people on the list was innocent*” (it. by author). Borsányi, György. *Kun Béla. Politikai életrajz.* (Béla Kun. A political biography) (Budapest: Kossuth, 1979), 344. Among the informers one can find such names as Janka Bruck, participant of the Second Congress of KMP; Arnold Mayer, leader of a partisan-resistance group in 1943; Vilmos Blitzer, former leader of the KIMSZ; Ferenc Boér, “the Azew of the Hungarian revolutionary movement”... about a hundred names during three years. Of course, the detailed descriptions proved to be a great help to the police.
- ¹⁵ Although the Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts, the basic work of Marxist alienation-theory was first published as late as 1932, analysis of the alienating character of work already had built into communist ideas, especially thanks to the works of Karl Korsch and Anton Pannekoek.
- ¹⁶ Kassák—and all of the leftist opposition groups—of course was often called Trotskyist by the official communist movement. Nevertheless, this was only a synonym of “oppositional,” more a denunciation than a real political analysis.
- ¹⁷ Report on the Justus-Szabó Opposition Group. 11 March 1932. PIL 878. f. 8. cs. 122. ó. e. 1.
- ¹⁸ Román József. “Nem! Párttörténeti mellékszálak.” *Valóság*, 1989. 6. 99—112.
- ¹⁹ PIL 878. f. 8. cs. 122. ó. e. 1.
- ²⁰ Román József. op. cit. 109.
- ²¹ Molotov. *A második orosz ötéves terv.* (The Second Soviet Five-year Plan) (Budapest: Munka-könyvtára, 1932).
- ²² PIL 878. f. 8. cs. 124. ó. e. In the phraseology of the KMP the opposition groups and persons were called “liquidators”.