

Education and the Inspiring of Hatred

RÓBERT TAKÁCS

According to Lenin, the press is a collective agitator, a propagandist, an organiser. In a dictatorship, the media cannot function as an independent, objective and critical forum; its fundamental role is to serve the interests of those in power. In Hungary during the 1950s, this equated to promoting the politics of the Communist Party and to taking a stand against the enemies of the regime, and a multi-dimensional system of control was necessary for its smooth operation. Control of the press was the direct responsibility of the Party, and various methods of censorship were employed, ranging from direct telephone instructions to newspapers and magazines from Party headquarters to a system of follow-up assessments and blame allocation. Grotesquely, the comic paper *Ludas Matyi* (Matthew the Goose Boy) was compelled to operate under the same conditions.

In the 1950s, the ruling Hungarian Workers Party (MDP) took the view that “there are few fields of art capable of gathering as much interest among the masses as caricature. Caricature, with its special graphic, descriptive and illustrative method, educates and motivates in an entertaining way while also shedding light on a not yet understood inherency that science and literature are often not capable of clarifying. This is its important role in society.”¹ Caricature had to be a political and fiercely relevant tool for building socialism and exposing the enemy in Hungary in

the 1950s, eschewing the autotelic, illustrated joke-like quality of “bourgeois” cartooning.

Caricature was extremely important to MDP because this genre is perfectly suitable for making fun of authority and power and this can represent a serious threat. Moreover, humorous caricature was very popular: *Ludas Matyi* achieved a circulation of several hundred thousand and *Szabad Száj* (Free Voice), another comic paper that was allowed until 1951, 60-65 thousand copies. In the eyes of the Socialist Party, this made it the ideal canvassing tool: “The task of *Ludas Matyi* is to communicate clearly and expressively to those who are not interested in politics, do not really read any other papers and are generally not at home with internal and foreign politics. By means of satire, caricature and exposure, it will explain and to some extent inform them about such important events as the plans, crises, internal conflicts, immorality, decline and vileness of the opposite camp.”²

In this study, I examine three major areas of Hungarian caricature literature during the period between 1949 and 1956. Firstly, I consider how *Ludas Matyi* coped with the tasks that were delegated to it. Secondly, I look at the images facing the reader when browsing through caricatures of the period, with a view to describing typical characters and drawing styles. I concentrated on *Ludas Matyi*, but also compared it with data selected from *Szabad Nép* (Free People), the party’s central daily newspaper, from *Népszava* (People’s Voice), the daily paper of the trade unions, and from *Szabad Föld* (Free Land), the weekly paper of the working peasantry. I categorised the caricatures by theme, narrowed down to the fields of economic life and everyday economy. I then selected one particular year, 1953, and classified the selected illustrations as follows:

- Major economic themes (the economy itself, services, agriculture, private life, the private sector, “the West”)

- Sub-divisions that also occasionally feature in the main classifications, (e.g. work ethic, quality, commodity scarcity, deficits, etc.)
- The cartoon characters, their backgrounds, (counter-propaganda, positive propaganda, criticism, neutral drawing)
- The categorisation of the caricatures (civilians, workers, citizens, self-employed people)
- Those both criticising and being criticised in the caricatures, (e.g. leader, employee, worker, middle-class citizen, peasant, etc.)
- The caricature locations (street, home, factory, office, meadow, etc.)

In order to better discern the part played by this particular tool in the party's propaganda and in the press, together with the information gained thereby, I also listed data from the 1958 editions.

I close my study with a short conclusion in which I demonstrate how the effect of these caricatures manifested in the work place, in factory papers and on notice boards.

Ludas Matyi and party control

Ludas Matyi was charged with the same topical canvassing obligations and campaign themes as were other papers and was obliged to implement them with its particular tools. All this created a constant source of conflict between the relevant bodies of the party and the editors and employees of the magazine. Editor Béla Gádor summarised his situation as follows: "It was frequently disputed whether *Ludas Matyi*, a unique satirical weekly paper, could comply effectively with all the direct daily canvassing assignments in a way that would not be distinctly at variance with the magazine's profile. Such events as the celebration of anniversaries, the initiation of competition movements, congresses

and formal demonstrations, for example, do not intrinsically lend themselves to being treated in a satirical, humorous way. To date, Ludas Matyi has tried to deal with these issues with special, 'elevated' drawings, of which only a few could be called successful..."³

Critics of the magazine, on the other hand, stated that "in trying to limit it to funny drawings, the editors of Ludas Matyi do not realise the significance of caricature."⁴ They overlooked good, effective front page drawings that should have served "to enthuse in a comprehensive, deep, effective and often heroically paetic (sic!) way" and they criticised the view of a particular circle of journalists, cartoonists and the editorial board that true humour and satire are apolitical and timeless.⁵ The party's position changed somewhat in the mid-1950s, exemplified by the following extract from a note dated July, 1955: "We need not be afraid of the inclusion of some apolitical humour in the magazine, although it should be in moderation, witty and creative, which is not always evident in the drawings. This kind of apolitical humour also moves things forward, since the more backward strata can be reached by it." Basically, this note recognises *Ludas Matyi's* battle against the remnants of the old world, and proposes that "it should not be restricted in this connection."⁶ In the following year, on the other hand, the relativity of this change is signified in a faint-hearted appeal by the editors: "Let us be allowed to perform canvassing activity only in areas where the nature of the phenomenon itself is interesting and colourful and is therefore suitable to be portrayed in a cheerful and humorous way."⁷

Differences were further engendered because in effect *Ludas Matyi*, despite all its "efforts," lived on in the 1950s as a "remnant of the bourgeois world of cafés," a number of its cartoonists and authors having returned home after the war after working for various major papers in Berlin, Paris and other places, attracting to themselves the majority of their younger colleagues.⁸ The poor political education, urban attitude and unsatisfactory social make-up of the

staff were the subject of recurring complaints:⁹ “The majority of the employees, by virtue of their background and social connections, are primarily related to the higher and lower middle classes in the capital city. They know their own lives and problems and only deal with questions relating to the working class and the peasantry when compelled to do so.”¹⁰

Nevertheless, in the summer of 1956, the vast majority of the paper’s employees, i. e., eighteen of the twenty-four members of the editorial board, were members of MDP.¹¹

The editorial staff was often criticized, both “in general”, on the grounds of faulty or incomplete representation or inappropriate style, and, more specifically, on the tone or visual expression of a specific drawing or article. Supervision was generally implemented down to the minutest detail, with employees being regularly forced to exercise self-criticism, in addition to which the MDP Canvassing and Propaganda Department consistently came up with proposals for the better accomplishment of the paper’s political duties. (The party’s assessment of the caricatures in *Szabad Nép* and *Népszava* outdid even its criticisms of *Ludas Matyi* by branding the ideas and representation of the political sketches as primitive, condemning them as worse than the latter. The 1951 critique of *Szabad Nép* concluded that “neither the content nor the quality of the drawings are worthy of the party’s leading paper.”)¹²

MDP officialdom looked for “improvement” at *Ludas Matyi* primarily by way of more conscious and planned work performance. They pronounced that “in general, at least 60-70 percent of the main articles and drawings need to be planned in advance”, and the editorial board had to plan two-three months ahead. Because of the poor political education of the authors, considered to be a general deficiency among journalists, they proposed that “the editorial staff should receive regular political information and updates on the current political situation, policy and campaigns so as to be able to tailor their work schedules accordingly.”¹³

With all this they sought to prevent *Ludas Matyi* from wriggling out of the tasks emanating from the decisions of the Central Committee: “The content of the magazine should not be created in the editorial office but should be derived from life in accordance with political tasks and duties (!)” opined the critics.¹⁴ In furtherance of this aim, they recommended emulating the style and solutions of the Soviet satirical paper *Krokodil* (Crocodile), the training of new, mainly front-page and portraiture cartoonists, the gradual inclusion of good factory notice board illustrators and the opening up of opportunity for caricaturists from a working class background.¹⁵

Among the numerous criticisms and directives there were also some approving voices acknowledging *Ludas Matyi*'s progress and its efforts to accomplish the tasks imposed upon it. The following is from an assessment written in 1954: “Caricature can be a lot more than just a funny illustration complementing a joke inserted into the text to liven up and decorate the paper. In Hungarian caricature this question has been partly resolved both in theory and in practice since *Ludas Matyi* is aimed at the wider working masses. Its illustrations cover a wide spectrum of valuable education, including sketches, formal and satirical drawings and creative drawings depicting cheerful everyday events. These drawings and writings indirectly aid the realisation of the party's policies.”¹⁶

Conclusion

A particular characteristic of the caricatures between 1949 and 1956 can be detected in the context¹⁷ of the drawings (see *Table 1*). In 1953, most of the caricatures were critical, with 58.4 percent dealing with some sort of harmful phenomenon. This ratio was higher only in *Szabad Föld* (89.2 percent), whereas in *Szabad Nép* it was lower (21.7 percent). The significance of this can only be appreciated

when compared with the 80 percent mark of the critical caricatures during the Kádár regime.

The high proportion of critical caricatures can be considered natural because it is easiest to make fun of what the MDP Canvassing and Propaganda Department would consider a deficiency or negative phenomenon: “Ludas Matyi, being a satirical magazine concentrates primarily on flaws.”¹⁸ Despite this, the magazine had to maintain a careful balance because “self-criticism in a socialist society is one of the motors of social development,” although it was also recognised that “our satire has to appreciate our achievements; it cannot be in opposition to, or sarcastic about, our accomplishments.”¹⁹ This cautioned both editors and caricaturists.²⁰

Table 1

The distribution of economic caricatures according to context (%)

Year/ Paper	Counter- propa- ganda	Propa- ganda	Criticism	Neutral
1953	21.4	19.6	58.4	0.6
<i>Ludas Matyi</i>	20.6	20.8	57.9	0.7
<i>Szabad Nép</i>	78.3	–	21.7	–
<i>Népszava</i>	8.3	33.3	58.3	–
<i>Szabad Föld</i>	2.7	8.1	89.2	–
1958	12.2	9.9	69.7	8.2
<i>Ludas Matyi</i>	9.2	8.9	71.3	10.5
<i>Népszabadság</i>	9.6	13.6	73.6	3.2
<i>Népszava</i>	20.8	5.7	67	6.6
<i>Szabad Föld</i>	20.9	16.3	53.5	9.3

The fact that the percentage of propagandistic drawings was high, however, is not attributable to this burden, but to the canvassing duties imposed by the party. Counter-propaganda used “exposure” as its primary tool, and this is

discernable in more than one fifth of the caricatures with economic themes, i.e. almost twice the 1958 figures and four times those for 1963. The targets of the propagandistic, often tasteless, drawings were the West, imperialism, capitalist exploitation, warmongering, and the kulaks, an internal enemy. If we consider only the caricatures with an economic theme, we see that in 1953 *Ludas Matyi* published almost one hundred caricatures about external enemies, equivalent to about 12-13 percent, whereas 3.4 percent of the drawings related to the kulaks. Nevertheless, criticism by the Hungarian National Association of Journalists emphasised that *Ludas Matyi* “does not exhaust all the possibilities inherent in satire and cannot awaken enough hatred of the enemy.” According to the authors of the document, the battle against internal and external enemies was of primary importance and criticism of the shortcomings of the socialist establishment had to come second to that.²¹

The almost 20 percent of positive propaganda also well surpasses the later percentages, 9.9 percent in 1958 and 4 percent in 1963. This group consisted mainly of three sub-topics: drawings portraying Stahanovists encouraging labour competition (52 examples, i.e., 7.8 percent of the drawings published in 1953), caricatures propagating delivery obligations (25; 3.7 percent), and those embodying general propaganda (48; 7.2 percent). These obligatory inclusions created perhaps the greatest conflict between the editors and the party's organs since the drawings were in such contrast to the humorous profile of the paper, belonging more in the category of posters than caricature. The neutral caricatures on the other hand—those without an intention to criticise or agitate about the simple realities of everyday life—disappeared from the paper by 1953, and I only managed to find four drawings of this kind.

The caricatures of the 1950s treated the main topics in a typical ratio (see *Table 2*)—outstandingly high (above 30 percent), industrial (38.2 percent) and agricultural (30.3

percent)—and during the period of forced industrial development the former data is not surprising. Since agricultural co-operatives, delivery obligations and the battle against the kulaks were emphasised canvassing objectives, *Ludas* was expected to portray “country life” and it tried to include “as many articles and drawings as possible on the subject of agriculture.”²² An examination of the respective papers reveals that of the very few caricatures (12) in *Népszava*, a trade union paper, a strikingly high number (66.7 percent) focused on industrial topics, whereas *Szabad Föld*, the paper of the peasantry, published by the party, dealt primarily with issues of the countryside (48.6 percent) relegating industry to the background (10.8 percent).

Table 2*Distribution of the main topics (%)*

Paper	Industry	Agriculture	Services	General economy	Private life	The West
1953	38.2	30.3	12.1	1.9	0.3	17.2
<i>Ludas Matyi</i>	40.1	30.9	10.9	2	0.2	15.9
<i>Szabad Nép</i>	17.4	–	4.3	–	–	78.3
<i>Népszava</i>	66.7	–	8.3	8.3	8.3	8.3
<i>Szabad Föld</i>	10.8	48.6	37.8	–	–	2.7
1958	25.4	9.1	29.2	16.5	8.9	11
<i>Ludas Matyi</i>	31.5	8.3	26	15.1	9.4	9.6
<i>Népszabadság</i>	15.6	0.8	43	19.5	11.7	9.4
<i>Népszava</i>	23.4	1.9	31.8	21.5	6.5	15
<i>Szabad Föld</i>	4.7	58.1	9.3	7	2.3	18.6

A significant proportion of the published caricatures dealt with the enemy (the West), its pursuits and crises. Although this percentage had greatly diminished by 1958, it was still more than 10 percent at that time, whereas five years later, in 1963, the figure was 5.5 percent. Caricatures on the subjects of private life and the general economy, on the other hand, were missing completely from papers in the first half of the 1950s, amounting to a negligible 0.3 percent in the case of the former and 1.9 percent in the latter. Private life was also obviously reflected in other caricatures not dealing with economic subjects. Ordinary people often appear in drawings relating to services, but the above percentages show very clearly that individuals were only deemed to be important as active members of a society that was building socialism. This is supported by the relative scarcity (12.1 percent) of caricatures about services and the “consumer citizen.” Consideration of the specific choice of themes and the distribution of “small themes” enables a more accurate picture to be gained of the typical problems and tasks of the period. The latter are found primarily in the propagandistic drawings, while the former are cautiously represented in the criticisms.

It can be concluded from *Table 3* that in 1953 three out of the ten most frequent topics, namely work ethic, quality and scarce commodities, were ongoing. Of these clearly critical topics, the one most frequently castigated was the people’s work ethic, epitomised by the portrayal of laziness, late arrival, the production of rejects, negligent, neglectful peasants and bad directors and council leaders. 7.5 percent and 5.7 percent of the caricatures criticised quality and scarce commodities respectively. It must be noted, however, that not all such drawings were critical. Some of them, such as the depiction of the way elastic filo pastry stretched out from shop to street, or the new, two-litre enamel can catering for the consumer’s every need, were expressly propagandistic. One caricature with a political objective represented single combat between Quality and Quantity with

the two protagonists finally making peace with each other in acknowledgement that both are needed.²³ There were numerous caricatures popularising labour competitions (7.8 percent), encouraging delivery to the state (3.7 percent) and stigmatising kulaks (3.4 percent). Over-achieving, voluntary workers were featured in almost every issue, with the editors obliged to report on every labour competition, whether in honour of the April 4 Liberation Day, the Stahanovist Árpád Loy movement, the hot pickaxe movement or the Stalinist guard. In addition to the topics included in the table below, a high percentage of the published drawings concentrated on warmongering capitalists (2.8 percent), Western exploitation (2.1 percent), tyrannical leaders intolerant of criticism (1.9 percent), shelved innovations (1.8 percent) and the spreading bureaucracy (1.5 percent).

Table 3

The occurrence of the small themes in the four papers

Priority, 1953	Small themes	Number	Percent	Priority, 1958
1.	Work ethic	154	23	1.
2.	Labour competition	52	7.8	49.
3.	Imperialism	51	7.6	4.
4.	Quality	50	7.5	2.
5.	Propaganda	48	7.2	10.
6.	Scarce commodity	38	5.7	3.
7.	Prodigality	31	4.6	4.
8.	Delivery	25	3.7	49.
9.	Organisation	24	3.6	14.
10.	Kulaks	23	3.4	49.

Interesting priorities in the distribution of the groups criticised can be inferred from *Table 4*.²⁴ 83.2 percent of those judged were represented in a working role, whereas in 15.1 percent of the cases the criticism was not levelled at individuals or institutions.

Since the editors believed that “those themes which highlight important economic and political problems arising out of human failings best fit the profile of *Ludas Matyi*,”²⁵ the critiques of the 1950s are particularly specific and are aimed at people, Béla Gádor’s letter also revealed that the criticism of specific people and institutions naturally resulted in conflict: “A regularly recurring theme is the question of the so-called not concrete criticism, and satire or joke will naturally lose some of its value if we are forced to apply certain restrictions. This happens when we mechanically repeat in the headings or subtitles of our critical drawings such explanations as: ‘It is like this here and there...’, ‘What should not be...’ In our opinion, this particular caution appeared so regularly because the criticised institutions over-reacted inappropriately.”²⁶ In spite of these problems, criticism of specific people and institutions in relation to delays in collection, the declining competition movement or the failure to fulfill the export plan, was more frequent at this time than subsequently. Approval, on the other hand, was also specifically expressed.

Table 4*Distribution of those criticised in 1953 (%)*

Year/ Paper	Director	Middle- manager	Employee	Labourer	Peasant	Self- employed	Middle class citizen	No data available
1953	26.8	15.4	10.5	17.4	13.1	1.1	0.6	15.1
<i>Ludas Matyi</i>	27.2	16.3	10.5	18.2	13.1	0.6	0.6	13.4
<i>Szabad Nép</i>	25	25	25	–	–	–	–	25
<i>Népszava</i>	–	–	16.7	66.7	–	–	–	16.7
<i>Szabad Föld</i>	28.6	7.1	7.1	–	17.9	7.1	–	32.1

Two remarks are called for in this connection. The first is that any peasant independent of the co-operatives was always represented as a kulak, in other words as an enemy against whom revealing propaganda, rather than constructive criticism, was to be used. The second is that the high percentage, 26.8 percent, of critical caricatures relating to leaders (directors, and heads of co-ops) demonstrated that highly placed economic leaders, who would obviously have been party members, were decidedly not immune to attack; indeed, their working style, bureaucratic attitude, organisational faults and nepotism, all became targets for criticism.

Less conclusive inferences can be drawn from looking at the critics themselves. Criticism often derives more from the scenario portrayed in the picture and from what may be associated with it rather than from people (42.7 percent). Very often it is the labourers (11.4 percent) and peasants (6 percent) who do the criticising—the former mainly of each other or their middle-managers—whereas directors, middle-managers and white-collar employees hardly ever “talk” about problems. From the point of view of style, the inclusion of animals and children (7.7 percent) voicing criticism is important, amplified by the canvassing messages put into the mouths of children. The percentage of criticism by people living ordinary lives is 8.3 percent, but aspects of the phenomena criticised by them are also related to labour and production, with judgment being passed by people walking past the workers in several caricatures. From this point of view, therefore, the primary importance of the world of production is also reflected in the caricatures, an observation supported by the changing locations in the caricatures, the choice of background being indifferent neither to the press departments nor the Party. They concluded that the caricaturists should take more advantage of the persuasive power represented by the choice of locations in the drawings: “It is often necessary to emphasise the message by choosing a suitable background, one which definitely affects the reader’s emotions. The re-

presentation of surroundings and people constitute the foundation of good graphics, illustration, posters and caricatures. There is a certain tendency at *Ludas Matyi* to water down and distil the drawings.”²⁷

The locations which appear most frequently are clearly the buildings and settings of the working world, with 26.6 percent of the stories being set in factories, another 3.8 percent in the factory environs and another 3 percent on building sites. Industrial sites accounted for one third of the caricature backgrounds, with a further 16.8 percent representing offices and 1.6 percent relating to meeting venues. The 10.8 percent of caricatures depicting forests and meadows dealt almost exclusively with agricultural themes. Although homes, apartments and urban streets are usually the province of private life, they can also serve directly or indirectly to represent industry or services, e.g. humped parquet, rock hard bread, soda siphons out of stock or a boulevard messed up by construction works. This category of drawings constituted 20 percent of all caricatures in 1953, of which a little more than 55.5 percent depicted street life and 44.5 percent the home. Furthermore, the number of “street” drawings were augmented by several village drawings dealing with delivery and kulaks represented against a street background, the main square of the village or a cart road.

The caricature characters

Browsing through issues of *Ludas Matyi* from the 1950s, the most striking feature is that only the paper’s format indicates that it was a comic paper, since it had longer and shorter articles, sketches and a correspondence column, with caricature serving as the all-important binding agent. In addition to regular illustrated reports on factory and co-op life, a specific feature was the format whereby each writer and caricaturist specialised in a particular theme—exemplified by factory humour, the agricultural column,

foreign politics and the cultural page—and generally appeared in a fixed place within the paper. The common element throughout, in compliance with the controversial instructions and warnings issued by the appropriate MDP department, was the lack of humorous, light hearted, amusing drawings. On the one hand, they reproached the writers for the “too little humour in the paper [...] it is not funny enough, they do not write about things that interest the masses”, adding that “it is hard to prove this” considering that the paper had an enormous circulation.²⁸ The same criticism was still valid in 1954: “A fundamental fault with *Ludas Matyi* is that its drawings and caricatures are not powerful enough; they rarely make people really laugh.”²⁹ On the other hand, they constantly took action against numerous funny pieces, branding them “remnants of bourgeois taste.” They especially criticised drawings with a political content: “...the intention of the paper’s editors to create funny drawings [...] weakens the message.”³⁰ The demand for devastating satire against enemies and educative humour in place of autotelic, tasteless jokes is a recurring motif.

Another characteristic of the paper was the inclusion of certain regular characters. By no means alien to earlier Hungarian caricature, these figures now commanded attention primarily by making statements in which the emphasis was on the topicality of their message. In the first half of the 1950s, however, the characters—featured as the objects of the drawings rather than the subjects—are representative of various groups successively reprimanded and exposed by the caricaturists. These characters bore telling names emphasising their particular qualities, and in 1953 a typical example was *Lógós Lali* (Lazy Louis), known in some drawings as *Lazsa Kázmér*, the unreliable worker whose watch is slow in the morning and fast in the evening. Lali/Kázmér produces rejects, his colleagues slap together a hammock for him, and he is offended by Pali Kovács’s challenging call for a labour competition.³¹ Rapid pro-

duction “kicks him from behind”, although he is not a hopeless case so that the caricaturisation has an educational purpose: Lali suddenly realises that he is losing out financially, starts to work hard and is able to buy himself the motorbike he so longed for.³²

Öntelt Ödön (Arrogant Andrew), is the bad boss who at times also appears as a colleague. He has a lampshade shaped head, is conceited, does not care about his employees and does not go anywhere near the workshop for months, whereas his own room looks like a little royal kingdom while his workers are squeezed together in crowded places.³³

Zsíros gazda, Hájás gazda (Fatty Farmers) and their wives are the kulaks. They disrupt the life of the village as much as possible and hinder the blooming production of the agricultural co-operative. They infiltrate the co-ops and county halls in order to carry out subversive activity from within, but in time they are exposed and fired from the co-op. They always expect the worst, predict frost damage and lament over successes they cannot subvert, which is why they are depicted next to a crow or an owl. One of their biggest sins is their direct refusal to deliver to the co-op. Mrs. Fatty is represented as a brooding hen who is not willing to part with her eggs, while her husband, in addition to fattening an “eight-legged pig” without a slaughtering permit, sabotages the delivery of their grains quota and hides the seeds.³⁴ *Zsíros gazda* is fat, sports a walrus moustache, smokes a pipe and, above all, is repulsive. I should also mention the village priest at this point, a sly, pot-bellied and always pious individual. In one caricature, he is seen arm-in-arm with a kulak undermining the vigilance of the co-op; in another, he is trying to steer a woman off track when she is on her way to deliver a quota of eggs.

Reakczy Jóska (Reaction Ary),³⁵ was a representative of the old “feudal” regime, similar to earlier characters such as Csaba and Huba. He only appeared once during 1953 when he telephoned Frost about the failed frost damage.

Ötletes Ödön (Witty Walter) is a positive character. He only appeared once in 1953, avoiding being ripped off in the shop by peaking behind the counter.

Most of the characters were nameless, however, generally representing professional groups.

The Labourer. Although the bad labourer does not usually have a name, his main characteristics are the same as Lógós Lali's. The good labourer is basically a Stahanovist, an over-achieving, enthusiastic chap who always has his nose in a technical book and strives for a 100 percent score in labour competitions. The caring, over-achieving (624 percent) Stahanovist congratulates another who achieved 120 percent. Then there is the Stahanovist office worker who shuts his door and starts planing in his room. A minor, but positive character is the good labourer who is worried about a production shortfall caused by bad organisation. These are mainly nameless characters with no definite facial features, although they are sometimes called Pisti or Pali Kovács, i. e. John Smith or any other very ordinary name.³⁶ *Ludas Matyi* was blamed for this on several occasions: "The paper's hero, the heroic, fighting and optimistic character of the Hungarian and international labourer is not consistently developed in *Ludas Matyi*. We can only create this in the inspired style of social realism and not with the vacuous poster-like, decorative stylization and distortion. Labourers would like to see themselves sympathetically portrayed. The demonstrative labour masses ought to be lively and energetic, not wooden puppets..."³⁷

The Leader. Whether managing director of a factory or head of an agricultural co-op, he is always represented as the above mentioned Öntelt Ödön, his most frequently criticised characteristic being that he cannot handle justified criticism. In addition to this, he is idle and negligent, treats his employees badly and behaves like a lord, only knowing the factory, mine or land he is responsible for by repute. The only exception is one 1953 drawing with a moral message representing the good and the bad directors

as good and bad fishermen. They fish from the same landing stage, and the former's basket is full of fish while the latter's is empty. In response to the complaints of the bad fisherman they switch places, whereupon the fish in the water "migrate" to the side of the good fisherman.

The Peasant. Although neither the good peasant nor the bad peasant are typical characters in the drawings, they both appear in various situations. They are without exception members of the agricultural co-op, so that the overall picture is positive: they are strong, hard-working peasants who deliver honestly and even win the delivery competition. Some of them are young and cheerful while others, such as the old peasant who had to grow old to see a pile of money on his table, are old and wise. (Appealing to financial interest was a recurring motif, an aspect of the delivery and co-op canvassing tasks. In the drawings the peasant listens to the many fat sacks rather than the kulak.) Neither are didactic drawings absent, and we have Kati néni (Aunt Katy) reminding us that delivering the quota is more pleasing than the remission of a possible fine, while a young peasant talks about the beneficial effect of hoeing. The female tractor-driver is a heroine after the Soviet model.

The bad peasant is most of all work-shy and idle, lying in the meadow foolishly expecting everything to be handed to him on a plate. The negative characteristic of the old peasants is their backwardness, with Maradi János (Backward John) not wanting to deviate from his ancestors' method even though his grandfather only made pennies with it working for the kulak. Some fraternise with the kulaks, which leads directly to them outwitting the quota delivery obligation, or, more precisely, attempting to do so.

Although many of the *Ludas Matyi* drawings dealt with agriculture, it was hard for them to find their place, since they did not fit easily into the world of this urban comic paper. With good reason, the Party was demanding a "deci-

sive change” in the “representation of peasant people,” emphasising that “the positive figure of the male and female agricultural worker has to be created.”³⁸

The first front page of the year 1953 was very typical of the caricature style, with the coming New Year being disturbed by a Stahanovist who is already fulfilling the 1954 plan. Throughout 1953, the themes of work and labour competitions remained very typical (17.1 percent), with written boards, objects and animals being used to transmit critical messages relating to these subjects. Fed up with “standing still” while waiting for the works manager, the production line machines are sitting on a bench with their “legs” crossed wearing a look of reproach. The same idea also appears in the corresponding propagandistic drawings, with the factory itself proudly announcing that it is the real winner of the (voluntarily obligatory) underwriting of the Peace-Loan, whereupon, because it is no longer needed in that particular factory, the tortoise³⁹ makes off from the competition board and the freshly laid bricks exuberantly praise the nice, warm layer of mortar.

Not surprisingly, the representation of fauna and flora is especially frequent in those drawings with an agricultural theme. The one-eyed ear (in Hungarian the word for eye and grain is the same) is lamenting the loss of its eye due to the late harvesters, while the cow and the hen join forces to stop the farmer’s wife taking the milk and eggs to market instead of delivering the state’s quota, and the snowman is grumbling while picking up the carrots left by the co-op members. The animals also carry out canvassing activities in the caricatures. Ensilage is the theme in more than half a dozen caricatures, the cow is depicted as either crying in the meadow, or peeping through the window and chiding the farmer, at other times negotiating with him and agreeing to increase her milk yield in return for building up the silo. Furthermore, the labour competition mentality also spreads to the animals, with the cows being moved by observing the kindergarten children to the point where they

casually challenge each other to a milk yield increase competition, while the hen runs after the farmer's wife with her freshest egg when the latter is on her way to deliver the quota. The statement made by the animals and plants carries a clear message, namely, that not only the majority of people but also the whole of nature is committed to the fulfilment of the socialist aims, so that they cannot fail and there is no point in resisting.⁴⁰ The representation of children is particularly absurd: a young child walking around in the zoo associates the hamster with the company import stockpilers, and the student reciting the geography lesson echoes the backlog of the coal-mining industry at the beginning of the year that still achieved the plan in the spirit of the Party's resolution.

A characteristic of agricultural caricatures is their calendar style, and a particular example is the character *Spring Fairy* in the picture entitled "Early riser harvests in abundance," in which she is knocking on the door of the co-op centre warning "Last week I only called but now I am here. Comrades, you must sow the seeds of spring wheat immediately if you want to have a good harvest." Drawings encouraging harvesting, autumn work or the gathering of carrots were also published, often with a scolding tone, not only to motivate work but also to regularly report results. In one caricature, we see the harvest competition winner breasting the tape while standing atop a stage built out of sacks of the "record crop".

There were repeated attempts to prove the superiority of socialism by demonstrating the differences between the capitalist circumstances before the war and those of the socialists after it. In one example, the skilled labourer was called up to the office in 1933 to be fired, whereas in 1953 he was recognised for his 280 percent achievement. In another, the engineer was forced to shovel snow on Horthy Miklós Road in 1933, while twenty years later, now a Stahanovist engineer, he leads the construction of a factory on Liberation Boulevard. In 1933 the villages were entirely

dark, whereas in 1953 the streets are lit and a cinema and cultural centre await the villagers.

It was a frequent solution to publish an item of news in the form of a drawing, and in such cases a quote was added about a factory export backlog or a product quality improvement, etc. A special form of this was when the caricaturists embodied statements by party leaders, usually Mátyás Rákosi, such as that the horns of the kulaks had to be broken off. At the same time, drawings of the politicians themselves were not published, even though it had been customary earlier, even a couple of years after the party coalition. This change had not been initiated by the editors of *Ludas*: “In the first editions of *Ludas Matyi* leading statesmen and generally popular people were represented in the caricatures. Our proposal is the following: we could gradually introduce caricatures about well-known people in the context of timely events.”⁴¹

Western politicians, however, were allowed to be included in the paper, Eisenhower, Truman, Adenauer and Tito being the most attacked. Eisenhower was represented as an agent of the dollar, crowned with a full money bag and dressed in gun-barrel trousers, sometimes taming his European dogs with a dollar bone. Truman was drawn driving a car symbolising the American economy into a tree by the side of the road, without, in spite of his big words against unemployment, doing anything about it. It was constantly insinuated that Adenauer was fraternising with national socialism; pictures of Hitler were displayed in his room and he was depicted in the company of Nazis as he conspired, naturally enough, to loot the German taxpayers. Tito was usually represented as a beefy character in a uniform festooned with medals unable to take a single step without his Western “allies”. He is asking for advice from Washington even when marking time in front of the toilet, and is also depicted as a “chained dog” capable of wagging its tail for two owners—the dollar and the pound—at the same time. It was a constant problem with these cari-

catures, however, that “they lose their political effect by becoming schematic and are degraded to standard jokes.”⁴²

The West was not always represented by its leaders: Uncle Sam personified the USA, John Bull Great-Britain, and Wilhelmina, the flabby, warty, old market woman Germany. The caricatures harped on about the conflicts among the “capitalists,” and in the drawing entitled “Capitalist Jungle” cavemen in top hats and loin-cloths are clubbing to death the mammoth of maximum profit while also hitting each other. A typical character symbolising the West is the capitalist, usually wearing a black tuxedo with a top hat, or sometimes an ordinary hat. He is fat, often bald, his white shirt-covered belly peering out from under his jacket and with his customary cigar in his mouth. He is most often an arms manufacturer, someone who is pro-war and wants to get rich instantly. A slave driver, he chases the American people into the gulf of “a life without fear,” and if German, is represented as a fascist. According to the Party’s assessment, however, this was sometimes deemed insufficient: “The enemy: the representatives and lackeys of imperialist Capital are too jovial, everybody is an uncle!”⁴³

Apart from the Capital they also attacked the Church. In one caricature, an American bishop is rejoicing over the exchange gain in arms manufacturing, while in another Uncle Sam is filling up Pious XII’s collecting box while the pontiff preaches on renunciation.

The other main group of caricatures depicting the West concentrates on capitalists tormenting the starving masses. Such characters as the Austrian family “filling up” on the sketch of a chicken leg, or the citizen who is carrying the budget on his back, are pitiable, but arouse only compassion rather than sympathy. The American labourer, on the other hand, is a positive character who is surprised to read an article in the paper about the good fortune of the working masses in the Soviet Union. He is a powerful, conscious worker, a threat to the capitalists squatting in the cold war fridge, whom he takes to task.

The Ludas Matyi papers

The smaller factory papers saw *Ludas Matyi* as their model, often borrowing its character. Chinoin, a large pharmaceutical company, created its own *Ludas Matyi*; Kőbányai Zománc, an enamel factory, produced *Zománc Matyi*; Ikarus, a bus company, published *Hüvelyk Matyi* (Tom Thumb), and Keltex, a bobbin manufacturer, *Cséve Matyi*. Other papers created their own original characters, e.g. *Lantos* (Minstrel) at MÁVAG, *Bök Jóska* at Kistex, and *Cable Berci* at the Cable Factory.⁴⁴

The “recipients” would encounter caricatures and illustrative canvassing not only in national and factory papers but would also see it on posters and notice boards at their workplace. According to a *Szabad Nép* journalist “the new feelings that our male and female employees have for their work and for their colleagues and bosses are expressed in the cheerfulness, humour and healthy joking that can be found in all our factories. No doubt there is also quite a bit of annoyance, jitteriness and confusion in the factories, but we often find the antidote for mistakes by making fun of them.”⁴⁵

The authorities of MDP, therefore, attached great importance to this field, praising and if necessary criticising canvassing within the factories. If there was “nothing but a nude woman painted on the notice board,” for example, they would comment that “it is degrading illustrative canvassing.”⁴⁶ They were glad to comment, however, when workers used caricatures to “ridicule, amongst others, Albert Lakatos the grinder, who is portrayed as being congratulated by ex-capitalists for his outstanding rejects”.⁴⁷ The factory caricatures were educational, one of their main advantages being their speed: “If the caricaturist brigade discovers neglect or disorder anywhere they immediately put their heads together during the lunch break [...] quickly preparing the sketch in the canteen and agreeing on a short punch line. Within a couple of hours the caricature

is already exposing the guilty person on the notice board of the relevant factory department.”⁴⁸

The other reason for their utilisation and “success” was the direct involvement they made possible. The drawings in *Ludas* may have been better and more professional, and these remained popular, but in the factory in-house caricatures the workers could recognise themselves and each other.

This method of canvassing was definitely effective, therefore, albeit not completely, as the following example suggested in the 1950s. One day works manager comrade Szenes “went to János Jencsel and allowed his justified indignation to erupt. Comrade Jencsel listened to him quietly, although his pencil was moving around fast on the paper and ten minutes later a drawing was hung in the middle of the central notice board. The giant Mrs. Vermes bowls over her tiny works manager with a torrent of words: ‘What are you talking about? I was only 38 minutes late!’ That day Mrs. Vermes did not even enter the canteen, staying instead at her work place and thinking about everything the caricature drew attention to. From that day on she was never late from work...”⁴⁹

Translated by Katalin Van Noortwijk

NOTES

- ¹ Note concerning the operation of *Ludas Matyi* between 1 May and 1 November 1954. – MDP, Canvassing and Propaganda Department, MOL 276. f. 89. cs. 211. ő. e.
- ² Critique by MÚOSZ (National Association of Hungarian Journalists), 1951. – MDP, Canvassing and Propaganda Dept., MOL 276. f. 89. cs. 211. ő. e
- ³ A letter from chief editor Béla Gádor to MDP’s Canvassing and Propaganda Dept., 13 June 1955 – MOL 276. f. 89. cs. 211. ő. e.
- ⁴ Note concerning the operation of *Ludas Matyi*, between 1 May and 1 November 1954. – MDP, Canvassing and Propaganda Department, MOL 276. f. 89. cs. 211. ő. e.

- ⁵ Report on the activity of *Ludas Matyi*, 12 July 1955. – MDP, Canvassing and Propaganda Department, MOL 279. f. 89. cs. 211. ő. e.
- ⁶ Note on the profile change of *Ludas Matyi*, 30 July 1955. – MDP, Canvassing and Propaganda Department, MOL 276. f. 89. cs. 211. ő. e.
- ⁷ Problems and proposals relating to *Ludas Matyi*, 1956. – MOL 276. f. 89. cs. 211. ő. e.
- ⁸ Interview in the autumn of 2002 with István Hegedűs, a caricaturist at *Ludas* from the end of the 1950s until the 1990s.
- ⁹ Of the 24 members of the editorial staff, seven came from a working class background, four from intellectual, eight from employee and five from craftsman and retailer families. 70.8 percent of the staff, in other words, can be considered to be of bourgeois origin and there were no staff members coming from peasant families. As far as their previous profession is concerned, five were manual workers, another five began in an intellectual profession, thirteen as government employees, and one was formerly a political officer in the people's army. – MDP, Canvassing and Propaganda Dept., MOL 276. f. 89. cs. 211. ő. e.
- ¹⁰ Report concerning the activity of *Ludas Matyi*, 12 July 1955. – MDP, Canvassing and Propaganda Dept., MOL 279. f. 89. cs. 211. ő. e.
- ¹¹ MDP, Canvassing and Propaganda Dept. MOL 276. f. 89. cs. 211. ő. e.
- ¹² About the situation of caricatures. January 1951. – MDP, Canvassing and Propaganda, MOL 276. f. 89. cs. 211. ő. e.
- ¹³ Critique by MÚOSZ, 1951. – MDP, Canvassing and Propaganda Dept., MOL 276. f. 89. cs. 211. ő. e.
- ¹⁴ Ibid.
- ¹⁵ Note dealing with caricatures in leading papers, January 1951. – MDP, Canvassing and Propaganda Dept., MOL 276. f. 89. cs. 211. ő. e.
- ¹⁶ Note concerning the operation of *Ludas Matyi* between 1 May and 1 November 1954. – MDP, Canvassing and Propaganda Dept., MOL 276. f. 89. cs. 211. ő. e.
- ¹⁷ I call the propagandistic, neutral or critical context of the drawings like this.
- ¹⁸ Problems and proposals relating to *Ludas Matyi*, 1956. – MDP, Canvassing and Propaganda Dept., MOL 276. f. 89. cs. 211. ő. e.
- ¹⁹ Report on the activity of *Ludas Matyi*, 12 July 1955. – MOL 279. f. 89. cs. 211. ő. e.

More about this: “The choice of tone is a question of following the party line. Against our internal and external enemies we use an implacably satirical and sarcastic voice. Let us strike a different note when criticising our own faults or our often stumbling comrades.”
Ibid.

- ²⁰ The following quote also demonstrates the caution of the editors: “In many cases our drawings and articles, although created with the best of intentions, cannot be published because malice can distort or misinterpret them. For example we recently discarded a front-page idea that would have depicted coloniser capitalists in a miserable situation on the beach against the setting sun. The title of the drawing would have been: ‘The Decline of the Colonisers’. We dropped this idea because we feared that it would give rise to the thought of yes, the sun sets, but it rises again!”
- ²¹ Critique by MÚOSZ, 1951. – MDP, Canvassing and Propaganda Dept., MOL 276. f. 89. cs. 211. ő. e.
- ²² Note concerning the operation of *Ludas Matyi* between 1 May and 1 November 1954. – MDP, Canvassing and Propaganda Dept., MOL 276. f. 89. cs. 211. ő. e.
- ²³ These caricatures were published in the following order in 1953: nos. 3, 33, 27.
- ²⁴ In this table I only included criticism related to internal economic life.
- ²⁵ Problems and proposals related to *Ludas Matyi*, 1956. – MDP, Canvassing and Propaganda Dept., MOL 276. f. 89. cs. 211. ő. e.
- ²⁶ Chief editor Béla Gádor’s letter to MDP’s Canvassing and Propaganda Dept., 13 June 1955. – MOL 276. f. 89. cs. 211. ő. e.
- ²⁷ Note concerning the operation of *Ludas Matyi* between 1 May and 1 November 1954. – MDP, Canvassing and Propaganda Dept., MOL 276. f. 89. cs. 211. ő. e.
- ²⁸ Critique by MÚOSZ, Spring, 1952. – MDP, Canvassing and Propaganda Dept., MOL 276. f. 89. cs. 211. ő. e.
- ²⁹ Note concerning the operation of *Ludas Matyi* between 1 May and 1 November 1954. – MDP, Canvassing and Propaganda Dept., MOL 276 f. 89 cs, 211 ő. e.
- ³⁰ Ibid.
- ³¹ Untranslatable pun – *The translator*.
- ³² These drawings appear in the following order in 1953: *Ludas Matyi*, nos. 22, 25, 30, 33, 36, 52.
- ³³ These drawings appear in the following order in 1953: *Ludas Matyi*, nos. 37, 40, 51.
- ³⁴ These drawings appear in the following order in 1953: *Ludas Matyi*, nos. 4, 13, 15, 16, 27, 42.
- ³⁵ Untranslatable pun—*The translator*.
- ³⁶ See *Ludas Matyi*, from the year 1952 nos. 3, 8, 15, 17, 21, 26, 43, 51.
- ³⁷ Note dealing with caricatures in leading papers, January 1951. – MDP, Canvassing and Propaganda Dept., MOL 276. f. 89. cs. 211. ő. e.

- ³⁸ Ibid.
- ³⁹ The tortoise symbolised bad effectiveness on the score-board of the labour competition.
- ⁴⁰ Kresalek, Gábor. *Humour and Politics. An analysis of the 1948–1953 volumes of Ludas Matyi* (Budapest: Budapest City Archives Publications 84, 1985), 265–292. Takács, Róbert. *The Parabola of economic Life: Propaganda and Caricature, 1953–1988* (Morn Script), 2001.
- ⁴¹ Problems and proposals related to *Ludas Matyi*, 1956. – MDP, Canvassing and Propaganda Dept., MOL 276. f. 89. cs. 211. ő. e.
- ⁴² Critique by MÚOSZ, 1951. – MDP, Canvassing and Propaganda Dept., MOL 276. f. 89. cs. 211. ő. e.
- ⁴³ Note dealing with caricatures in leading papers, January 1951 – MDP, Canvassing and Propaganda Dept., MOL 276. f. 89. cs. 211. ő. e.
- ⁴⁴ “Factory humour” – *Szabad Nép*, no. 359, 1953.
- ⁴⁵ “Factory humour”. Ibid.
- ⁴⁶ Report on illustrative canvassing in the factory. – MDP, Canvassing and Propaganda Dept., MOL 276. f. 89. cs. 167. ő. e.
- ⁴⁷ Report on illustrative canvassing in the factory, Győr Wagon Factory, Rábakölkedi. Ibid.
- ⁴⁸ “Humourous drawings educate and criticise” *Népszava*, no. 44, 1953.
- ⁴⁹ “Humourous drawings educate and criticise”, *ibid.*

