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Retreat from Collective Protest: Household, Gender, Work and Popular Opposition in Stalinist Hungary^{*}

Mark Pittaway^{**}

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Introduction

In mid-December 1951 in an attempt to prevent absenteeism on the days immediately after Christmas the government announced that it would end the practice of paying wages before the holiday. Instead workers would receive their wages on 27 December. This resulted in considerable discontent. In the Ikarus bus plant in Budapest both the union and the party organisation were deluged with complaints. Management and the factory organisation received assurances from the ministry that wages could be paid on the 23rd despite the decision. The factory party committee immediately issued a statement to that effect to the discontented workforce. On the 23rd payment of wages began to workers on the morning shift. At eleven, however, the ministry intervened to prevent the payments to those scheduled to receive their wages at half past one in the afternoon. Management objected, resulting in a dispute between enterprise and ministry. Ernő Gerő, second in the Stalinist party leadership and its economic policy supremo, was called on to arbitrate. He ruled that no more of the wages should be paid. By this time it was three thirty and some 1,500 workers were waiting impatiently. As the decision was announced the 1,500 staged an angry demonstration occupying the offices of management and of the factory party organisation. It was only broken up by the use of force. The ÁVH – the Stalinist secret police - took 156 people into custody for their role in the demonstration.¹

^{*} - An earlier version of this chapter was presented at the workshop “From household strategies to collective action”, held at Internationaal Instituut voor Sociale Geschiedens, Amsterdam, 28-29 May 1999. It is based on research for my PhD. Thesis (Mark Pittaway *Industrial Workers, Socialist Industrialisation and the State in Hungary, 1948-1958*, PhD. Thesis, Department of Economic and Social History, University of Liverpool, 1998). This research was conducted in Hungary between 1994 and 1997, and was supported by a studentship from the ESRC (Economic and Social Research Council). I would like to thank Nigel Swain, Padraic Kenney, András Tóth, Martha Lampland as well as the participants at the workshop mentioned above for discussions that have shaped the argument of this chapter.

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This demonstration was the largest single act of collective protest by industrial workers in Hungary during much of the period. It was an exceptional event, during the Stalinist years in Hungary, unlike its neighbours, there were no major instances of open popular unrest prior to 1956 – whether they be strikes, political protest or bread riots.² This apparent lack of open collective protest existed alongside considerable poverty, declining standards of living, extreme repression and increasing work intensity across industry. Despite this even open attacks on workers' incomes met with only sporadic opposition.³

As collective protest became more sporadic members of “working class” households began to centre their activities increasingly on the private sphere. There was a considerable desire on the part of many to seek a relative degree of household self-sufficiency in the production of foodstuffs rather than depend on the unreliable state sector. In mining areas the state began to sponsor a programme of subsidised private house building. This proved to be highly popular simply because a house with a garden offered “working class” households greater opportunities for producing food independently of the state sector.⁴

¹ - Magyar Országos Levéltár, MSZMP Budapesti Bizottság Archiviuma (Hungarian National Archive, Archive of the Budapest Committee of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party, hereafter MOL M-Bp.) -95f.4/118ö.e., pp.81-7

² - On protest elsewhere in the socialist states during this period, there was substantial working class protest in the GDR in 1951, see Andrew Port “When workers rumbled: the Wismut upheaval of August 1951 in East Germany”, *Social History*, Vol.22, No.2, pp.145-73, 1998. In Yugoslavia the Tito regime's attempts to collectivise agriculture met with substantial and violent peasant opposition, see Melissa K. Bokovoy *Peasants and Communists. Politics and Ideology in the Yugoslav Countryside, 1941-1953*, pp. 134-40, University of Pittsburgh Press, Pittsburgh, 1998. The death of Stalin in 1953 led to substantial open protest in many states, though not in Hungary. In May tobacco workers in Plovdiv rioted, see R.J. Crampton *A Short History of Modern Bulgaria*, p.176, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1987. In Czechoslovakia there were riots in Plzeň, see Otto Ulc "Pilsen: the unknown revolt" *Problems of Communism*, Vol.14, No.3, pp.46-9, 1965. The best known disturbances that followed Stalin's death were those of 17 June 1953 in the GDR. The best English language account is in Mary Fulbrook *Anatomy of a Dictatorship: Inside the GDR, 1949-1989*, pp.177-87, Oxford University Press, Oxford and New York, 1995

³ - For some examples of sporadic opposition see Szakszervezetek Központi Levéltár (Central Archive of the Trade Unions, hereafter SZKL) Szakszervezetek Országos Tanácsa (National Council of Trade Unions, hereafter SZOT), Közgazdasági Osztály (Economics Department, hereafter Közgazdaság)/13d./1952

⁴ - For the general point see Pittaway *Industrial Workers, Socialist Industrialisation and the State*, pp. 305-9. I explore the case of the meanings the state and mineworkers' families attached to the limited private house building campaigns of the early 1950s in Mark Pittaway “Stalinism, Working Class Housing and Individual Autonomy: the Encouragement of Private House Building in Hungary's Mining Areas, 1950-1954” in Susan Emily Reid & David Crowley (eds.) *Style and Socialism. . Modernity and Material Culture in Post-War Eastern Europe*, Berg Publishers, Oxford, forthcoming, 2000

In other words as collective protest declined industrial workers increasingly began to centre on the private sphere. Why was this so? The seemingly obvious answer of a high degree of political repression initially springs to mind. This undoubtedly played a partial role. Yet this seems to ignore the fact that collective protest was more prevalent in the rest of East-Central Europe than in Hungary, whilst the populations of these other states were subject to a similar degree of political repression. The severe poverty of the Stalinist years provides another plausible explanation. It might be said, that this fails to account for the precise dynamics of the retreat from open collective protest that occurred. While poverty and political repression provide part of the solution to our puzzle, the processes that re-shaped the boundaries between public and private in Stalinist Hungary were more complex and subtle.

The retreat of open collective protest recast gender relations both within industrial production and the household. Although political scientists and others frequently sought to analyse the occasional explosions of popular protest that periodically characterised socialist societies across the region, there has been little work since 1989 on the nature of the more everyday forms of collective action.⁵ There has been virtually nothing on the gender dimensions of such protest – an analytical framework that can reveal much about the shifting boundaries between the household and place of work. In a study of the gender dimensions of resistance and protest in Communist Poland Padraic Kenney has argued that a gendered division between the public and private spheres played a decisive role in structuring the patterns of men's and women's protest.⁶

The argument presented here identifies a clear similarity between gender ideologies in both Poland and Hungary – for the early socialist period at least. The notion of a gendered split between a male public realm and a female private realm permeated society. Despite the superficially egalitarian rhetoric of the labour mobilisation campaigns of the Stalinist regime this notion was re-inforced, rather than challenged by the new state.

⁵ - Probably the best overview of such events from the pre-1989 period in English is J.M. Montias "Observations on Strikes, Riots and Other Disturbances" in Jan F. Triska & Charles Gati (eds.) *Blue Collar Workers in Eastern Europe*, pp. 175-87, George Allen & Unwin, London and New York, 1981

⁶ - Padraic Kenney "The Gender of Resistance in Communist Poland", *American Historical Review*, Vol.104, No.2, pp. 399-425, April 1999

The argument presented here suggests that the “working class”⁷ womens’ and mens’ experiences of socialist industrialisation created an ideal of social privatisation, and of household self-sufficiency. Increasingly a world of poverty, often insecure wages from the state sector combined with the pervasive shortage in the field of official consumption to transform the state dominated public realm. This public sphere, for many working class households, became an arena in which needs could not be satisfied. A moral economy developed in which the household strove for autonomy from the state dominated public realm. This was never completely achievable, indeed, in many cases was completely unachievable. Households, in so far as they were self-sufficient, were so because of the complex linkages between the public and private sphere. The ideological effects of an ideal of social privatisation should not, however, be underestimated – they legitimised a gradual withdrawal, albeit initially prompted by state repression, from forms of public protest in the factory or the community. They did not eliminate popular opposition but served to channel it – in the workplace into more covert forms of resistance such as pilfering that further supported informal economic activities centred on the household.

Such a shift from public to private had important implications for gender relations within both the workplace and the household. While the Stalinist state advocated gender equality at work and expanded female employment paradoxically women invested more in the maintenance of the household. This was reflected in patterns of collective protest, as well as in survival strategies. Furthermore male bargaining within the workplace reflected the re-drawing of the boundaries between public and private realms. Informal bargaining around wages tended to be underpinned by assumptions that reflected shifting gender relations.

The argument is developed thematically throughout the chapter. The first section deals with the notion of the public and private during the post-war years in Hungary. The second considers the changing patterns of collective protest within the workplace.

⁷ - I use the term “working class” rather than simply working class, without quotation marks, simply to indicate my scepticism as to whether industrial workers constituted a class. For greater elaboration of this point please see Pittaway *Rejecting Class Solidarity*; Pittaway *Industrial Workers, Socialist Industrialisation and the State*

The third section deals with the realm of consumption and the fourth with the household.

The Gendered Dimensions of Public and Private in Post-War Hungary

As the Hungarian Workers' Party ⁸ began to construct the formal institutions of Stalinist dictatorship in Hungary in 1948, the state initiated labour competition in the factories. Labour competition was intended to mobilise workers to increase production. Furthermore, as far as the more idealistic of the builders of the "new" state were concerned, it was to herald of revolution in production and "working class" attitudes towards their work. Propagandists reacted with concern at opinion poll evidence, collected in 1948 in the industrial suburbs of the capital, that 37% of factory workers' wives did not know whether their husbands participated in the labour competitions. These propagandists recognised that factory workers' wives, however, were concerned with the affairs of the home and their immediate community. They were thus "separated from the factory, factory work and the labour competition". ⁹

The compilers of opinion poll surveys about the attitudes of household members to changes that were occurring in the factory were revealing the traces of an ideal of a gendered separation of the public and private in industrial Hungary. Urban industrial workers subscribed to an ideal of the male worker as breadwinner and the married wife as manager of the household. These attitudes were reflected in the attitudes of factory committees – which in heavy industry at least – were dominated up until 1949 by the representatives of the skilled, male worker élite. In the Lampart Factory women in 1948 were systematically moved from the best paying jobs to lower ones by the committee. This was justified on the grounds that the family "responsibilities" of their male colleagues should be taken into account when distributing work. In the Ganz Ship Yards the factory trade union only distributed potatoes and other benefits

⁸ - Magyar Dolgozók Pártja – created in 1948 as the result of a forced union of Hungary's Social Democratic and Communist Parties, it was to become the ruling party for much of the 1950s. It was dissolved as a result of the 1956 Revolution, and reconstituted as the Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt (Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party) on 1 November 1956

⁹ - Tibor Garai *A Kultúrtényező Jelentősége a Versenyszellem Kialakításában (The Importance of the Factor of Culture in Creating the Mentality of Competition)*, pp.14-5, Munkatudományi és Racionalizálási Intézet, Budapest, 1948

paid in kind to "the men and their families" explicitly excluding female labour from direct access to them.¹⁰

While "working class" masculinity conferred the role of the breadwinner on male workers, the female role of household management conferred several responsibilities on women. While this included housework, the management of "house-keeping" money, and shopping for the household¹¹ it could also lead to the adoption of other forms of unpaid work for the household outside the home itself. During the period of poverty that accompanied post-war reconstruction many urban households were provided with an allotment on which chickens were kept or vegetables were grown. In many industrial areas it was the wives of factory workers who worked the allotments while their husbands laboured for wages. Consequently when school holidays arrived enterprises were deluged for requests from families with children for child-care to allow mothers to work on the allotment.¹² Such a division of responsibilities was commonplace in worker-peasant households where the men commuted to work in neighbouring industrial centres, while women assumed the management of the farm.¹³ This gender division of household labour could lead to alternative forms of female participation in the public sphere, at least prior to Stalinism. Ethnographer Erzsébet Őrszigethy traced the fortunes of a series of worker-peasant households examining the strategies they adopted from the 1920s onwards. The husbands took jobs in the Budapest public transport company. The women took responsibility for the landholdings – given that their means of subsistence were guaranteed they used their

¹⁰ - - SZKL A Magyarországi Vas- és Fémmunkások Központi Szövetség iratai (Papers of the Federation of Metalworkers of Hungary, hereafter Vasas)/ 520 d./ 1948; címtelen jelentés (untitled report)

¹¹ - Personal Interview with B.P.-né, Dunaújváros, 8 February 1995

¹² - For such a request from wives' of Tatabánya mine-workers see MOL Magyar Általános Kőszénbánya Személyzeti Osztály iratai (Papers of the Personnel Department of the Hungarian General Coal-Mining Company) Z254/10cs/38t, p.493

¹³ - For pre-World War Two evidence on the importance of the existence of the worker-peasant household in certain regions of the country see Ferenc Erdei *Futóhomok (Running Sands)*, pp.53-4, Akadémiai Kiadó, Budapest, 1977; Zoltán Szabó *Cifra Nyomorúság. A Cserhát, Mátra, Bükk Földje és Népe (Poverty Covered with a Superficial Show of Wealth. The Peoples and Lands of the Cserhát, Mátra and Bükk)*, pp.48-52, Cserépfalvi Kiadó, Budapest, 1938; useful evidence on the gender dimensions of worker-peasant households in the immediate post-war period is provided in István Markus "A Demokrácia Két Éve Martonvásáron (Szociográfiai vázlat) (Two Years of Democracy in Martonvásár (A Social Report))", *Forum*, pp.251-61, 1946

landholdings to produce for the market. This enabled them to enter the public sphere as, if only on a small scale, market gardeners.¹⁴

With the advent of Stalinism the new state offered a vision of social transformation characterised by sociologist Zsuzsa Gille as “metallurgical socialism”.¹⁵ Heavy industry was expanded as Hungary became “a country of iron, steel and machines”.¹⁶ As elsewhere in Eastern Europe this vision of socialist industrialisation was sharply gendered. It celebrated male productive labour and promoted the development of heavy industry – a sector that largely employed men.¹⁷ As the aims of the First Five Year Plan were announced the gendered nature of the vision of social transformation upon which it was based was not lost on many women in industrial areas. They failed to see how an expansion of heavy industry would directly benefit them, preferring instead a plan that raised living standards, improved housing and community services. In Újpest when the plan was popularised male workers supported the aims of the plan even though some questioned its feasibility. Among women the picture was entirely different. They asked “why so many construction sites are needed, it would be better to give higher wages”.¹⁸

Despite the ambivalence of many “working class” women the First Five Year Plan seemed to offer a radical restructuring of gender relations, through opening the doors to full participation in the socialist labour force to women. In 1950 labour planners envisaged introducing 123,000 new women employees into the labour force during the course of the First Five-year Plan. Of these 40,000 were to come from the ranks of young women, 43,000 from agriculture and 40,000 from urban households. 54,000 were to go into industry and 22,000 into construction. Of this 76,000 20,000 were to be directed to the machine industry, and 1,500 to the mines.¹⁹ The National Planning Office pursued an egalitarian policy in the workplace. On training schemes for skilled

¹⁴ - Erzsébet Őrszigethy *Asszonyok Férfisorban (Women Adopting the Roles of Men)*, Szépirodalmi Könyvkiadó, Budapest, 1986

¹⁵ - Personal conversation with Zsuzsa Gille, July 1998

¹⁶ - The phrase is that of Ernő Gerő. See his *A vas, az acél és a gépek országért (For a country of iron, steel and machines)*, Szikra, Budapest, 1952

¹⁷ - See Kenney “The Gender of Resistance”, pp.403-4

¹⁸ - MOL M-Bp.-95f.3/55 ö.e., pp.46-7

¹⁹ - MOL Magyar Dolgozók Pártja-Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt Központi Szervek iratai (Papers of the Central Organs of the Hungarian Workers’ Party – Hungarian Socialist Workers’ Party, hereafter M-KS-) 276f.116/43ö.e., pp.15-6

workers it called for a policy of affirmative action. This policy stipulated that a minimum of 30-50% of the training places be filled by young women.²⁰ To this end it explicitly called for a "reorganisation of male labour" to facilitate the entrance of women into previously male dominated occupations. It explicitly instructed enterprises "not only to place women into occupations that have generally been filled by women, but they have to take the line that women should be directed to every occupation".²¹

Even this policy – which was not to meet with much success – did not challenge established gender ideologies in so far as they related to the boundaries between public and private. Instead it envisaged "freeing women from their domestic duties" through the expansion of crèches and day care centres for children, the growth of factory and communal eating facilities. Furthermore the regime envisaged the growth in the availability of labour saving devices such as washing machines and most ambitiously the industrialisation of housework.²²

Assumptions about a gender division between a male public realm of work and a female private realm formed the backdrop to the retreat from collective protest. Such assumptions were shared by "working class" men and women themselves and played an important role in structuring their attitudes and actions. In some ways, paradoxically, they were reinforced by the new socialist state.

The Retreat from Collective Protest in the Workplace

Hungary's Stalinist turn heralded a revolution in production. The dependence of the practice of comprehensive economic planning on the application of principles derived from scientific management has been much neglected by those who have analysed it. In the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe its implementation entailed considerable institutional centralisation along with an individualisation of responsibility for the achievement of the production targets it laid down. Hungarian economic planning was characterised by this apparently paradoxical combination of collectivist centralisation

²⁰ - MOL M-KS-276f.116/43ö.e., p.17

²¹ - MOL M-KS-276f.116/43ö.e., p.16

²² - The documents contained in the dossier MOL M-KS-276f.116/43ö.e. are full of such plans.

and an individualised production regime on the shop floor. The organisation of production, systems of mobilisation and remuneration were explicitly individualised and tied to the goals laid down in the plan.²³

The institutions that resulted from the introduction of comprehensive economic planning were far from popular. In the workplace industrial workers developed a strictly instrumental attitude towards payment-by-results and labour competition. Workers only participated where direct material benefits resulted.²⁴ The late 1940s were fortunately for the new regime a period in which real wages rose rapidly.²⁵ When wages did not rise, as with the attempts to increase production norms in 1949, the state met a wave of shop floor protest from both male and female workers.²⁶

In late 1949 work was explicitly individualised with the promotion of individual participation in labour competition and the introduction of the Stakhanovite movement in Hungary. Wages rose, not just of the new Stakhanovites – or outstanding workers – but of the workforce in general. Despite distrust of the new Stakhanovite workers the workforce were generally content as a result of their increased wages.²⁷ The individualisation of production that central planning entailed was completed with the transformation of the wage system accompanied by a norm revision for the vast majority of the workforce. The first major step was to change the basis on which worked was rewarded. A piece-rate system was introduced for the majority of the workforce in March 1950. The central component of the system was that the work done, not the individual worker, was the subject of remuneration. Through this the principle was established that payment should reflect the amount and value of what was produced by a worker as laid out in the plan. Alongside this new, tighter production norms were to be introduced in Summer 1950.²⁸

²³ - Mark Pittaway “The Social Limits of State Control: Time, the Industrial Wage Relation and Social Identity in Stalinist Hungary, 1948-1953”, *Journal of Historical Sociology*, Vol.12, No.3, pp.271-301, September 1999

²⁴ - Garai *A kultúrtényező jelentősége*

²⁵ - “A Magyar Munkásosztály Fejlődése (The Development of the Hungarian Working Class)”, p.20, Central Statistical Office, unpublished report, Budapest, 1954

²⁶ - MOL M-KS-276f.116/18ö.e.,p.6

²⁷ - MOL M-KS-276f.116/18ö.e., pp.22-3

²⁸ - Pittaway “The Social Limits of State Control”, pp. 280-1

The introduction of the new norms met with one of the largest waves of worker protest in the post-war period. As early as July before the introduction of the new norms worker anger took the form of workers ignoring and cold shouldering union and party officials on the shop floor. In one Szeged factory a well-organised go-slow was used. In Kecskemét one worker was detained by the secret police for publicly comparing the regime to that of the Nazis. In a neighbouring factory a norm-setter was physically assaulted. He had argued that their 200% fulfilment was the result of the laxness of workers' production norms. In one textile factory the factory committee president stated that a new norm revision would follow if the new norms were systematically over fulfilled. In the Hoffher tractor factory the electricians broke into the factory on Sunday and wrecked one of the most expensive machines in protest. The discontent across industry was only defused through the Korea week labour competition campaign in early August, which management organised to allow workers to fulfil the new norms.²⁹ Despite this the damage had been done and any shaky legitimacy that institutions such as the labour competition possessed had been destroyed.

This was to be made clear to the regime through the pattern of much of the worker protest that emerged. Labour competition was blamed directly by many workers for the norm revision and in many cases the "heroes of labour" were personally attacked for class treachery. In many Budapest factories angry workers held the Stakhanovites responsible for what had happened. In Kiskunfélegyháza construction workers destroyed a wall built by Stakhanovites after they called workers to a labour competition to over-fulfil the new norms. In many cases the pressure that many Stakhanovites experienced forced them to fall back with their work mates and oppose the new norms publicly. One Stakhanovite in the construction industry openly attacked the new norms as being too tight. In the textile industry, at the Magyar Pamutipar cotton factory one Stakhanovite was forced, under pressure from work

²⁹ - MOL M-KS-276f.116cs/19ö.e., pp.129-30; MOL M-KS-276f.116cs/19ö.e., pp.220-3; MOL M-KS-276f.116cs/18ö.e., pp.180-3; MOL M-KS-276f.116cs/18ö.e., pp.197-9; MOL M-KS-276f.116cs/19ö.e., p.1; MOL M-KS-276f.116cs/19ö.e., p.5; MOL M-KS-276f.116cs/19ö.e., p.58; MOL M-KS-276f.116cs/19ö.e., pp.43-5

mates, to formally request the norm office to base norms on average and not Stakhanovite fulfilment.³⁰

The state, however, was prepared for labour unrest and showed a willingness to use repressive measures against those who protested. In the United Lighting and Electrics Factory management working in close co-operation with the secret police were able to identify and squash discontent before it grew. Only two workers were sacked for "oppositional behaviour" in connection with the tightening whilst four were arrested by the secret police for "spreading rumours" likely to lead to discontent. This policy was replicated right across the country. In one Felsőgála factory a worker who publicly stated that only the norms of those workers with fulfilment rates of over 500% should be cut was sacked. Management were sometimes able to avoid the intervention of the secret police. In the machine shop of the Tatabánya mines in July a work stoppage was halted after twenty-five minutes simply as a result of management threatening to report those participating to the authorities. Even individual acts of protest and attempts to informally bargain with management over the new norms were brutally dealt with. Attempts by brigades on one western Hungarian construction site to institute a go-slow in order to secure better norms met with police intervention.³¹

Norm revision and reductions in living standards fed a negative solidarity against the state among workers. From 1950 onwards they were united in feeling exploited by a "bloodsucking government".³² This opposition was expressed in the way that workers collaborated to beat factory systems designed to control them. In the Danube Shoe Factory there was a degree of solidarity between all workers when it came to getting

³⁰ - MOL M-KS-276f.116cs/18ö.e., pp.180-3; MOL M-KS-276f.116cs/19ö.e., p.5; MOL M-KS-276f.116cs/40ö.e., pp.77-82

³¹ - MOL M-Bp.-95f.4/120ö.e., p.214; SZKL Komárom Szakszervezetek Megyei Tanácsa (Komárom County Council of Trade Unions, hereafter Komárom SZMT)/42d./1950; *Szakszervezetek Országos Tanácsa Esztergom-Komárom Megyei Bizottság, Tatabánya, 1950. augusztus 24. (National Council of Trade Unions Komárom-Esztergom County Committee, Tatabánya, 4 August 1950)*, p.1; SZKL Komárom SZMT/43d./1950; *Kiértékelés (Evaluation)*, p.1; SZKL Komárom SZMT/43d./1950; *Szakszervezetek Országos Tanácsa Esztergom-Komárom Megyei Bizottság, Tatabánya, Jelentés, 1950 augusztus 29. (National Council of Trade Unions Komárom-Esztergom County Committee, Tatabánya, Report 29 August 1950)*, p.1

³² - This phrase is taken from the response of a worker to the beginning of the New Course, quoted in SZKL SZOT Bér-Munkaügy Osztály (Wage-Labour Department, hereafter Bér-Munkaügy)/33d./1953; *Feljegyzés a kormányprogrammal kapcsolatos üzemi tapasztalatokról (Report on factory experiences of the government programme)*, p.1

³³ - *Futószalag (Conveyor Belt)*, 29 August 1953

³⁴ - OSA RFE Magyar Gy.6/ Item No. 08794/53, p.1

poor output passed the quality control systems in the factory. The plant newspaper criticised workers on production line 301 1953 for being prepared to accept and pass on the poor quality shoes made by other workers without question.³³ Such forms of solidarity were common across industry and had an important political dimension. Upon his escape to the West in 1953 one former worker in a heavy engineering factory, in answer to the question of why workers collaborated to keep the quality of their work at a low level, or to use more materials than was strictly necessary, answered that "psychologically the situation was that they (the workers) were happy if they could harm the Communist system".³⁴

The culture created by workers' negative solidarity against the state provided a basis for concealed acts of collective protest to continue. Élek Nagy, later a worker's council leader in Csepel during the 1956 Revolution, stated that "there were a whole series of hidden strikes under Rákosi and then under Imre Nagy, which were generally caused by wage issues. The norm-setter gave us the time (for a given job). Then a workmate went to complain then we decided to organise a "black" strike".³⁵ One worker in the Danube Shoe Factory remembered that "in 1953 there were grumbles about the norms, at one time it came to the workers going out on an unofficial smoke break to protest. Work stopped for ten minutes. Because the workers didn't want to risk any more, the management simply forgot the incident, and no-one felt the consequences".³⁶

Underneath these forms of concealed collective protest lay another level at which discontent was expressed. Much worker resistance took an "infrapolitical" form - a form that was concealed from the direct view of those in power and consisted of individual acts such as jokes, persistent rumour mongering and the expression of anti-regime statements through graffiti.³⁷ Many of these statements of discontent revealed

³⁵ - Quoted in Gyula Kozák & Adrienne Molnár (eds.) *"Szuronyok Hegyén Nem Lehet Dolgozni" Válogatás 1956-os munkástanács-vezetők visszaemlékezéseiből* ("It isn't possible to work with a bayonet at your head". A collection of interviews with 1956 workers' council leaders), p.13. Századvég Kiadó - 1956-os Intézet, Budapest, 1994

³⁶ - OSA RFE Magyar Gy.6/ Item No. 3677/56, p.2

³⁷ - For a discussion of the whole nature of "infrapolitical" resistance as a concept see James C. Scott *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*, especially Chapter 7, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1990. For an examination of such kinds of "resistance" in their Hungarian context see István Rév "The Advantages of Being Atomized: How Hungarian Peasants Coped with Collectivisation", *Dissent*, pp. 335-350, Summer 1987

deep discontent with the low living standards of industrial workers. Young workers from Tatabánya who escaped to the West in 1953 recounted how under cover of darkness they would go from the worker's hostel into the town to tear down posters inviting them to produce ""More coal for the homeland"", or to ""sign up for peace loans, build a future for your family and your children"", and replaced them with their own home-made posters with slogans like "Long live the Americans!", and "don't work for such low wages !".³⁸ Negative solidarity against the state made possible widespread theft by workers from their employers during the early 1950s. This often provided the basis for participation by workers in informal, sometimes illegal, economic activity beyond the scope of their employment.³⁹

Shop floor opposition to state policy has been characterised as negative solidarity against the state for the reason that it co-existed with an extraordinary decline in solidarity between workers at the point of production. The individualisation of production increased wage differentials between workers – often between workers who had the same job description. Despite the collectivism of regime ideology this individualisation of production was highly visible by late 1950. Furthermore the implementation of the regime's policy of rapid industrialisation led to the emergence of widespread shortages of materials, labour, machinery and tools in Hungarian industry during the early 1950s. Although the precise impact of such shortages varied from sector to sector, enterprise to enterprise and, often workshop to workshop, they decisively re-shaped the rhythms of production and the shop floor experience of industrial labour. The level of earnings became increasingly unpredictable. Industrial workers increasingly began to compete with their work mates for scarce work in order to make out.⁴⁰

This competition was given enormous impetus by informal bargaining between lower management - desperate to meet plan targets in an unpredictable economic environment - and a discontented workforce. Workers in favourable position within the division of labour of a given plant were able to use their bargaining power to gain advantage manipulating wage systems, or securing preferential access to remunerative

³⁸ - OSA RFE Magyar Gy.6/ Item No. 06687/53, p.5

³⁹ - MOL M-Bp.-176f.2/190/6ö.e., p.204

⁴⁰ - For this analysis see Pittaway "The Social Limits of State Control", pp. 282-6

work. As the state became concerned about the rapidly declining quality of industrial production skilled, experienced workers were able to argue for preferential treatment also.⁴¹

As this occurred older skilled workers, who on the whole had worked prior to 1948, were able to shape the division of power, work and earnings on Hungarian shop floors. Their opposition to certain consequences of state labour policies pursued during the early years of socialist industrialisation was to play an important part in a phenomenon best characterised as the “particularisation of worker identity”.⁴² The gender implications of this process of particularisation of worker identity are of particular interest to us here. As the 1950s went on women were increasingly marginalised on the shop floor, as they enjoyed less countervailing power in informal bargaining than their male colleagues.

This was illustrated most clearly in those sectors like textiles where the workforce was largely female. In textiles the introduction of new norms in 1950s had led to increased work intensity and low wages. A high proportion of the largely female machine operators in the spinning and weaving halls could not make out. In the Magyar Pamutipar, one of the capital’s largest textile factories, during 1951 many of the machine operators complained that "it just isn't possible to maintain this tempo for much longer" and "it's a wonder that the workers can manage this". With this high work intensity, in textiles a higher proportion of the workforce failed to make out than almost anywhere else in industry. In July 1951 the proportion of the workforce failing to fulfil their norms in the two spinning shops were 21.7% and 46.72%, whilst in the weaving shop 31.53% of the workers failed to reach 100%. In addition the average wages in the factory stood at 645 Forints per month in October 1951. This was well under the industrial average.⁴³

⁴¹ - *ibid.*, pp. 291-2

⁴² - For an in-depth examination of this phenomenon see Pittaway *Rejecting Class Solidarity*

⁴³ - For a more in-depth examination of working conditions in the textile industry in the early 1950s, see Pittaway *Industrial Workers, Socialist Industrialisation and the State*, pp.133-43; on the increase in work intensity in the plant over the course of 1951 see *Pamut Újság (Cotton Newspaper)*, 31 January 1952; MOL M-Bp.-143f./14ö.e., p.222; MOL M-Bp.-176f.2/236/2ö.e., p.247; on low norm fulfilment in early Spring 1951 see *Pamut Újság*, 16 April 1951; for the average worker's wage in the factory in late 1951 see MOL M-Bp.-176f.2/236/4ö.e., p.69

Some of the female machine operators did gain preferential treatment. This was not based upon the kinds of informal bargaining seen elsewhere in the economy. In textiles this took place entirely within the boundaries of the labour competition. The management of the Magyar Pamutipar, rather unusually for a large industrial enterprise in 1952, was able to report that "the norms are firm" – a sign that very little if any bargaining over job rates occurred. Among the machine operators in the weaving shop preferential treatment was granted to those workers who operated the most machines simultaneously. The quality of the cotton they received was the best ensuring that they did not have to cope with the thread snapping. This provoked tension between those who operated eight machines and those who operated sixteen machines. Normally the latter earned twice as much as the former but a decline in the quality of the cotton had led to lower earnings amongst those operating eight machines whilst preferential treatment in the distribution of the raw materials had ensured that those working sixteen machines had stable earnings. Such practices caused complaints, in 1951 one young worker complained that "there are materials of variable quality. The good quality ones are taken by the "good" workers its easy to work well when you have good materials".⁴⁴

Among the largely male skilled workers who maintained the machinery informal bargaining of a kind visible elsewhere was endemic. They were far more willing to resort to the tactics of go-slow and of non-co-operation than their female colleagues in order to secure preferential treatment. Rumours of imminent norm revision were frequently used in order to ensure that at such times the workers did not "go too fast with their work". Such strategies were often accompanied by intimidation of norm-setters who complained that "the maintenance staff were putting pressure" on them. Increasingly as work intensity increased and the demands on the machinery with it, male skilled workers were able to translate their relative autonomy, at least when compared with the machine operatives, and management's dependence on them to

⁴⁴ - MOL M-Bp.-176f.2/236/7ö.e., p.151; MOL M-Bp.-95f.3/56ö.e., p.101; SZKL Textilipari Dolgozók Szakszervezet iratati, 1949-1955 (Papers of the Textile Industry Workers' Union 1949-1955, hereafter Textiles-a)/140d./1949-1955; *Magyar Pamutipar. Jegyzőkönyv amely készült 1951. nov 10-én az olvasó teremben megtartott Ü.B. értekezleten (Magyar Pamutipari. Minutes of a factory committee meeting held in the reading room on 10 November 1951)*, p.2

their advantage. It was this small group of workers that gained countervailing power to informally bargain with management to secure better earnings.⁴⁵

The differential access of male maintenance workers and female machine operators to informal bargaining strategies can to some extent be attributed to the differences in their position within the division of labour in a socialist textile enterprise. What is difficult to explain is the lack of female protest at their subordinate position within the workplace. The changing patterns of collective protest in the textile industry help illustrate the more general problem. There is no evidence that women workers were any less inclined than men to engage in collective protest in the pre-Stalinist period, indeed the reverse is true. Women machine operators led a two-day strike in one Budapest plant in 1949 against the introduction of higher production norms. The strike closed the factory making it the most serious single strike in the country prior to the outbreak of the 1956 Revolution.⁴⁶ In Spring 1950 when piece-rate wage systems were introduced across industry once again female machine operators in textiles were more militant than almost any other group in industry engaging in series of strikes of several hours right across the capital.⁴⁷

The crushing of worker protest against norm revision in Summer 1950 seems to have represented an even more radical turning point in textiles than in industry as a whole. Despite a huge increase in work intensity and a large fall in earnings collective protest disappeared. Increasingly machine operators reacted to their working conditions by taking up and leaving. In the Magyar Pamutipar in 1951 party officials noticed that "a large number of workers quit and seek work at factories where they don't have to work Sundays or at night. Neighbouring factories are hiring those that left without permission". Labour turnover stood at around 18-20% over the course of the first five months of the year. Such labour mobility fed an absolute problem of labour shortage, party officials frequently requested the recruitment of more labour while management replied that increasingly it could not be found.⁴⁸ Increasingly married women left the

⁴⁵ - MOL M-Bp.-95f.3/345ö.e.,p.8; MOL M-Bp.-176f.2/236/4ö.e., p.268; MOL M-KS-276f.116/40ö.e., p.74

⁴⁶ - For this strike see SZKL Textiles-a/129d./1949; *Jelentés a Magyar Textilipar részleges leállásról* (*Report on the partial production stoppage in the Hungarian Textile Industry*)

⁴⁷ - MOL M-Bp.-95f.4/2/168/b ö.e., p.37

⁴⁸ - *Pamut Újság*, 2 August 1951; MOL M-Bp.-95f.4/60ö.e., p.133; MOL M-Bp.-143f./9ö.e., p.308; MOL M-Bp.-176f.2/236/4ö.e., p.130; MOL M-Bp.-143f./6ö.e., p.49

textile industry – machine operators were recruited from the ranks of female school leavers in rural areas who in turn left the industry when they married.⁴⁹

Where open protest did occur it did not relate to the questions of working conditions or wages, though considerable discontent with both existed. Instead it directly addressed questions of working time, and the attempts of the state to extend it, limiting the time available to women for the management of the household. In textiles the state expanded the number of working days by cutting down the number of public holidays and tentatively introduced seven-day production. This provoked considerable opposition because they attempted to redraw the balance that the largely female workforce made between work in the factory and in the private sphere. These attempts began in 1950. The first step was to force workers to work on the Saturday before Easter. In deference to the moral economy of the machine operators who regarded their Saturday afternoon as one for making preparations for the Easter Sunday holiday they had been previously allowed the afternoon off. Attempts to make them work the full day were met with vociferous protests throughout the factory and a problem of considerable absenteeism for every year thereafter. The extension of the working week to include Sundays in 1951 was met with similar protests. Though party agitators suspected that this opposition was due to “religious agitation” they could never prove this. Machine operators saw this measure as an attack on both family and household.⁵⁰

Gendered notions of a split between public and private realms were re-shaping collective protest, as much as did state repression. State attempts to extend working time for women and thereby restrict the amount of time to be devoted to the household provoked open protest while reduction in wages and working conditions provoked job-quitting. Furthermore much bargaining over remuneration and work seemed to be deployed by skilled male workers only, and was often at the expense of women. This provoked surprisingly little protest or open complaint. The argument

⁴⁹ - For concern at this pattern see *Pamut Újság*, 27 June 1952; OSA RFE Magyar Gy.6/ Item No. 08794, p.2; MOL M-Bp.-95f.4/60ö.e., pp.133-4; PIL 867f.1/d-50, p.76

⁵⁰ - MOL M-Bp.-95f.4/143ö.e., p.2; MOL M-Bp.-95/4/62ö.e., pp.55-6; MOL M-Bp.-95f.4/60ö.e., pp. 119-20

⁵¹ - Tatabánya Városi Levéltár (Tatabánya City Archive, hereafter TVL) Tatabánya VB ülések jegyzőkönyvei (Minutes of Tatabánya City Council meetings); 29th September 1950, Item No.4, 6th October 1950, Item No.2/b

presented here is that this was in part because the formal, state controlled economy was failing to satisfy the economic needs of Hungarian households. Given that a repressive state had closed off the avenues to collective protest improvements in wages and incomes could not be achieved through collective action. Severe poverty and shortage in the sphere of consumption fuelled the growth of an ideal of social privatisation that women had more to invest in than men. It is however to “working class “ poverty and the problems of consumption that will be discussed next.

The Economy of Shortage in Everyday Life

Problems with the supply of goods were first noticed in Hungary's mining areas. In Tatabánya the problems began in September 1950 with shortages of sugar that led to workers queuing for supplies. The shops ran out of potatoes, onions and other fresh vegetables. By early October the city council responded by distributing daily supplies from 6 a.m. onwards in the market place.⁵¹ Official organs received complaints about consumers having to queue for sugar, especially from households where both partners worked and as a result were unable to queue forcing them to go without for weeks on end.⁵² As far as workers in the VI pit of the mines were concerned the fact "that workers had to run around after them (groceries)" as a sign that the regime "continually talks about rising living standards and gives us nothing". Another stated that living standards were declining because "on the market there aren't any goods". The shortages meant that the workers “only earn salt and paprika now”.⁵³

The shortages in towns like Tatabánya were to spread quickly to all industrial areas. As a result "shortage" became not only a fundamental determinant of life within the sphere of socialist production, but also in consumption. Shortages fundamentally reinforced the perception that the formal economy was incapable of satisfying material need. The chaos that characterised it shaped the search of many households for a degree of autonomy from it. Despite the fundamental importance of the

⁵² - SZKL Komárom SZMT/42d./1950; *Titkári jelentés 1950 év november hóról (Secretarial report about November 1950)*, p.1

⁵³ - SZKL Komárom SZMT/43d./1950; *Szakszervezetek Országos Tanácsa Esztergom-Komárom Megye Bizottság 393./1950 sz. Hangulat jelentés (National Council of Trade Unions. Komárom-Esztergom County Committee. Report on the climate of opinion 1950/303)*, pp.1-2; SZKL Komárom SZMT/43d./1950; *Szakszervezetek Országos Tanácsa Esztergom-Komárom Megye Bizottság 419./1950*

experience of socialist consumption in shaping popular attitudes to the state, the private and the public, as well as the informal and informal it has received little attention in critical social scientific investigation of the patterns of everyday life in state socialist societies.⁵⁴ Shortages of goods undermined the legitimacy of the regime and called into question for many "working class" consumers the relationship between work and reward. Problems in the realm of consumption fundamentally reduced the willingness of industrial workers to respond to the work incentives that were designed to improve their performance in the realm of socialist production. The problems of consumption were to create the space for a large parallel economy alongside that of official socialist production that operated autonomously of, whilst not being entirely separate from it.

Labour histories of proletarianisation and industrialisation under capitalist conditions have underlined the role of increased working class consumption in improving work discipline. More recently historians of scientific management have seen high consumption as having stabilised Fordist production regimes in the capitalist west.⁵⁵ The state in early socialist Hungary aimed to mobilise Hungarian society behind its policy of proletarianisation and its individualisation of production relations within factories with the promise of higher consumption. In 1953 in a party propaganda pamphlet the regime made increases in living standards and in consumption central to

sz. Hangulat jelentés (National Council of Trade Unions. Komárom-Esztergom County Committee. Report on the climate of opinion 1950/419), p.2

⁵⁴ - This is exception to this has been anthropological work on Romania during the 1980s. Katherine Verdery has argued that the regulation of consumption through shortage was part of the attempt of the state socialist regime in the country to "confiscate" the time of its citizens, forming part of the general process that she identified as the "bureaucratisation of time". See her *What Was Socialism and What Comes Next ?*, Chapter 2, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 1996

⁵⁵ - For a useful synthesis of these arguments in so far as they have been made for early industrial England see R.E. Pahl *Divisions of Labour*, Part One, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1984; for scientific management see some of the contributions in Haruhito Shiomi & Kazuo Wada (eds.) *Fordism Transformed. The Development of Production Methods in the Automobile Industry*, Fuji Business History Series, Oxford University Press, Oxford and New York, 1995

⁵⁶ - *Mit adott a népi demokrácia a dolgozóknak ?(What has the Peoples' Democracy Given the Workers)*, pp.12-3, Kiadja a Magyar Dolgozók Pártja Központi Vezetősége Agitációs és Propaganda Osztály, Budapest, 1953

its appeal. Though it admitted there had been "difficulties" in the field of food supply, it argued that "the free market prices of many foodstuffs have fallen and a state of general plenty has been created in the provision of industrial goods".⁵⁶

The reality of early socialist consumerism in this regard fell short of state intentions or its propaganda. Though the number of shops increased substantially the conditions in them were often inadequate. In Újpest during the course of the 1950s the number of shops selling spices doubled. Between 1951 and 1958 the number of butchers increased from 29 to 40. Despite this even as late as 1958 officials judged that "alongside modern and pleasant shops there are those which are old fashioned and give cause for concern on health grounds". Furthermore whilst the centre of the district was well provided for, "goods supply to outlying areas" was "inadequate",⁵⁷ disadvantaging the residents of those parts of the district. In the new town of Sztálinváros, despite its privileged position as far as state investment in services was concerned, similar problems were experienced. In 1954 the local representative of the Ministry of Internal Commerce admitted that "the development of commerce has been pushed into the background in recent years" and that this had led to poorly designed and often inadequate shopping facilities in the town.⁵⁸

Even though the provision of shops and basic services for consumers in the industrial centres left much to be desired it was at least considerably better than in the surrounding villages from where many workers commuted. In the villages surrounding Tatabánya there was a simple lack of basic facilities and services; a grocer's shop only existed in those villages where a marketing co-operative for agricultural produce had survived the collectivisation drive, though most had a small pub.⁵⁹ In rural Zala county which because of the oil industry contained a significant number of village dwelling commuting workers the situation was similar. In 1953 there were 31 villages without a shop, of these 1 had a population of between 500 and

⁵⁷ - MOL M-KS-288f.21/1958/20ö.e., p.272

⁵⁸ - *Sztálin Vasmű Építője (Builder of the Sztálin Steel Works)*, 19th March 1954

⁵⁹ - SZKL Komárom SZMT/61d./1950; *Jelentés a bányász falvakról (Report on the mining villages)*, pp.1-2

1000, whilst the remaining 30 had populations over under 500, as a result some village dwellers were often 4 kilometres from the nearest shop.⁶⁰

In theory, however, from 1951 onwards "working class" consumers were able to turn to the "free markets" where producers directly sold their goods to consumers at market prices. Such a market was created in Sztálinváros in 1952, but was not as widely used as hoped by "working class" consumers. One official reported that "in the morning it is the housewives who live locally, after work the workers come down to get necessary things. The real situation is that very few use it".⁶¹ "Free markets" suffered from a problem of legitimacy as in many consumers' minds they were often associated with speculation and a poor deal. Many consumers incorrectly referred to the "free market" as the "black market" implicitly refusing to recognise its officially tolerated status.⁶² Because of the reliance of both state shops and "free markets" on the state of agricultural production food supply in both state shops and on the "free markets" suffered from the same problems. Where agricultural production was of a high quality and quantity the markets tended to be well stocked.⁶³ In industrial areas they tended to be poor.⁶⁴ Furthermore during times of agricultural dearth they tended to be poorly stocked.⁶⁵

At least in urban households because of their strict gender division of labour, the "working class" consumer was often the woman within the household. It was her responsibility to negotiate the problems of food shortages and poor standards of service and design in the shops. This task was often made more difficult by both the acute poverty in many "working class" households during the early 1950s and the gender division of household income. Poverty and declining living standards were

⁶⁰ - ZML MSZMP ZMBA ir. 57f.2/Ipar/66ö.e.; *Kedves Nagy elvtárs (Dear Comrade Nagy)*; ZML MSZMP ZMBA ir.57f.2/Ipar/66ö.e.; *Kedves Elvtársak ! (Dear Comrades !)*, p.1

⁶¹ - FML MSZMP FMBA ir. 17f.1/24ö.e.; *Jegyzőkönyv felvétel 1952.junius 3.-án megtartott pártbizottsági ülésen, a P.B. tanácstermében 9Minutes of a meeting of the party committee held on 3 June 1952 in the party committee meeting room)*, p.2

⁶² - SZKL SZOT Szociálpolitika/9d./1951; *Kereskedelmi és Pénzügyi Dolgozók Szakszervezete Feljegyzés a kenyér és husjegyek bevezetésével kapcsolatos hangulatról (Report of the Commerce and Finance Workers' Union on the climate of opinion in relation to the rationing of bread and meat)*, p.2

⁶³ - OSA RFE Magyar Gy.300/40/4/43, Item No. 8349/56

⁶⁴ - FML MSZMP FMBA ir. 17f.1/24ö.e.; *Jegyzőkönyv felvétel 1952.junius 3.-án megtartott pártbizottsági ülésen, a P.B. tanácstermében (Minutes of the party committee meeting held on 3 June 1952 in the party committee meeting room)*, p.2

⁶⁵ - SZKL SZOT Szociálpolitika/22d./1952; *A 1952 II.negyedév kiskereskedelmi forgalmáról (About shopping in the second quarter of 1952)*, p.5

serious problems in the early 1950s. According to trade union figures real wages were some 16.6% lower in 1953 than in 1949. The average income of households living from wages and salaries had fallen by 8% over the same period. This was reflected in changing patterns of household expenditure. Groceries accounted for 45.9% of the budget of an average household in 1949, a figure that had risen to 58.8% by 1953. The share of expenditure on clothing had fallen from 18.2% to 10.4%. Furthermore the average household's consumption of meat, fat and milk was lower in 1953 than in 1938. ⁶⁶ These averages concealed the desperate poverty of many households, one young worker who had escaped to the West remembered that many of his neighbours had "gone every six weeks to give blood to get a supplementary income". ⁶⁷ In the early 1950s the sight of large numbers of people scouring Budapest's rubbish dumps for scraps of food or assorted bric-a-brac to sell was very common. ⁶⁸

In addition to this absolute poverty, severe pressure was brought to bear on "working class" household budgets. In urban households with very few dependants living standards were low. For larger households the situation was desperate. One miner's wife who fled to the West in 1952, described the problem of budgeting given the low level of industrial wages and the relatively high level of prices: "My husband gave me the whole of his wage to manage the householdAt the beginning of the month the mine paid the first instalment that was always about 320 Forints, and I had to budget with it so that it would last until the middle of the month, when my husband got the second instalment of his monthly pay. During that time I only bought the most necessary things, like fat, oil, flour then came the second part..... from that with the most basic living standard I managed to save 100 to 120 Forints, though that was only done because my husband instead of resting did extra shifts so that sometimes I could buy material to make clothes for the children". ⁶⁹

Often, however, the husband or male partner refused to give all his earnings over to his wife or partner insisting that he keep sufficient income for leisure while he

⁶⁶ - SZKL SZOT Szociálpolitika/13d./1953; *Adatok és példák a Szakszervezetek Országos Tanácsa III. Teljes Ülésének beszámolóhoz (Data and examples for the third full sitting of the National Council of Trade Unions)*, pp.1-5

⁶⁷ - OSA RFE Magyar Gy. 6./ Item No.11555/55, p.4

⁶⁸ - László Földes "A város peremén. Leírás Nagy-Budapest szeméttelépéről, 1954-ben (On the fringes of city. A description of the rubbish dumps of Greater Budapest in 1954)", *Mozgó Világ (Moving World)*, No.5, pp.22-9, May 1994

expected his wife to maintain the household. Often women were severely disadvantaged by this distribution of the household budget. An extreme example of a situation that was by no means uncommon was that of a young woman who lived with her fiancé in a poor Budapest district. Though her fiancé was a skilled worker he "drank and gambled on the horses" that resulted in her getting "600 or 700 Forints" of the "1100 to 1200 Forints" he earned monthly, and from this housekeeping allowance he would "often ask for money back". Because of high prices she was often unable to buy food for herself or afford to heat the flat during the day in winter. She ate only bread and jam, and stayed in bed simply to keep warm when not out shopping for the household.⁷⁰

Even where women were able and willing to ease the income problems of their households by participating in the labour force of the socialist sector, the burden of homemaking fell upon them. This in a world characterised by shortage, unresponsiveness and inefficiency was far from an easy task. One Budapest consumer who did not work described the daily shopping routine when the supply of food and goods was not interrupted by shortage thus; "every morning I got up at six and went to the *Tejért* (the dairy shop) to buy necessary things for breakfast I had of course to queue, but at least in the week I could buy as much milk as I wanted, or as much as I could afford. It was only on Saturday there was a restriction on how much I could buy, just a litre per person I had to buy bread at the *Közért* (general grocery store) after my fiancé had gone to work I would do the shopping for lunch and dinner, by this time one did not have to queue". Consumption was frequently characterised by many small trips to the shops in the industrial districts simply because "the wives of workers didn't have enough money to buy large amounts".⁷¹

For working women, especially for those on morning shifts, shopping had to be done before or immediately after work. Because of the lack of capacity of many of the shops and the frequent late deliveries of many foodstuffs, there was a problem of queuing. In Sztálinváros in 1952 queues frequently developed in the morning hours before work and then in the afternoon at the end of the first shift at 2 p.m. It was

⁶⁹ - OSA RFE Magyar Gy.6/ Item No. 08371/52, p.1

⁷⁰ - OSA RFE Magyar Gy.6/Item No. 10820/54, pp.1-5

⁷¹ - OSA RFE Magyar Gy. 6/ Item No. 10820/54, pp.4-5

reportedly common to have to queue for "hours" whilst the bread was delivered, shelved and distributed. This forced many to wait for up to two hours in the morning and then to wait again in the afternoon before they were able to buy what they wanted.⁷²

Commuters from rural areas, even those with no land, were in a more unfavourable position as consumers in the socialist economy. In rural households where one or more members worked in urban industry the gender division of labour had been modified, with women likely to remain in the village and work in agriculture.⁷³ In such cases it was the men who would combine their work with shopping for goods that where a family owned land, could not be cultivated at home, or were scarce in the village generally. This division of labour within a household unit existed both where the men commuted over a long distance returning home only every few weeks, and where the worker commuted on a daily basis. In both instances commuters' consumption habits differed significantly from their urban counterparts, though for different reasons. The major difference was that commuters did not go to the shops frequently, but tended to go infrequently and buy noticeably large amounts. In the case of long distance commuters this was in order to take large quantities of goods that were scarce in their home villages for their families over the time that they were away. In 1953 in Sztálinváros the long distance commuters were said to be taking advantage of the favourable supply of meat to the town alongside "customers who do not work here", causing a run on meat supplies on the day before the free Saturday when they were off work.⁷⁴ Those who commuted on a day to day basis would buy larger amounts than urban residents for another reason, namely that they would buy for friends and relatives in their home village who did not have any other connection to the urban world. One commuter to the mines in Tatabánya was challenged on the

⁷² - FML MSZMP FMBA ir. 9f.2/PTO/48ö.e.; *A Sztálinvárosi Tanács végrehajtó Bizottságba...* (To the implementation committee of Sztálinváros City Council), p.1

⁷³ - For evidence of this kind of gender division of labour in areas characterised by commuting see the example of Tárnok, close to Budapest (OSA 400/40/4/43; Item No. 7095/54); for allusions to this as a reason for the "weakness" of agricultural co-operatives in the rural mining areas in Komárom-Esztergom see SZKL Komárom SZMT/168d./1956; *Jelentés a Falusi Oszályharc Helyzetéről* (Report on the state of the class struggle in the villages)

⁷⁴ - FML MSZMP FMBA ir. 17f.1/29ö.e.; *Jelentés a város közellátásának helyzetéről és az üzlethálózat fejlesztéséről* (Report on the state of supply in the town and the development of the network of shops), p.1

train home by a trade union official as to why he had ten loaves of white bread, and replied that he had been asked to buy them for his neighbours.⁷⁵

Commuting workers' consumption patterns led to accusations that they hoarded goods. This contributed to a climate in which commuters were actively discriminated against. In Tatabánya in 1952 one trade union official instructed the director of the local shop to "give out the white bread at midday when the buses to the villages depart" He justified this on the basis that "the commuters take loaves and loaves of the bread from the town dwellers, the same happens with the flour and so hinder our shopping for food".⁷⁶ This kind of discrimination was widespread and led to considerable anger among commuting workers. One village youth described his day-to-day experience of such discrimination stating that in his village "meat was not available, if someone wanted to buy meat they had to go to town. In the town, if they knew you were from the village and wanted to buy they very unwillingly gave you fat, let alone meat, because it was commonly said, why do the villagers come to the town, when in the village they have plenty of everything".⁷⁷

The considerable difficulties created by the inadequacy of the state shops and "free markets" intensified during the periods of extreme food and goods shortage. The experience of this phenomenon had two effects. The first was to encourage "working class" consumers to resort to a series of measures designed to mitigate the situation. The second was a more long-term process that led to the development of a trend towards reduced dependence on the wage packet from the socialist sector and the goods available in the state shops. This led workers to strive for greater household self-sufficiency. Even the most successful households who tried to become more self-sufficient never managed completely to achieve this objective.

Firstly the various forms of immediate adjustment to shortages which "working class" consumers attempted to deploy are examined. The most common response among those with sufficient cash available to them was to buy up goods when they became

⁷⁵ - SZKL SZOT Szociálpolitika/21d./1952; *Szénszállító és Szolgáltató Vállalat Szakszervezeti Bizottsága, Tatabánya - Jegyzőkönyv Társadalmi ellenőrök részére megtartot értekezélről*, p.2

⁷⁶ - SZKL SZOT Szociálpolitika/21d./1952; *Szénszállító és Szolgáltató Vállalat Szakszervezeti Bizottsága, Tatabánya - Jegyzőkönyv Társadalmi ellenőrök részére megtartot értekezélről*, p.1

⁷⁷ - OSA 300/40/4/43; Item No. 6700/54, pp.1-5

available and to hoard them. Because of the financial constraints on most "working class" households, it was reportedly those with spare money, who had either an extra source of income or food through land, and were not dependent on their low wages from industry for survival that were able to employ such a strategy. In February 1952 as fat and eggs reappeared in the shops in two counties it was reported that "largely villagers" bought up the goods with the intention of hoarding them, from one shop 5000 eggs were sold in two hours.⁷⁸ Some families sought to buy up goods by sending all the family members to queue. In one case in Tatabánya five members of the same family had stood in one queue and had each bought flour.⁷⁹ In 1951 rumours of food shortages often provoked waves of panic buying⁸⁰

Shortages, buying up and hoarding significantly reshaped buying patterns amongst those who had the ready cash to do so, and severely disadvantaged those who did not. Food and goods shortages often forced consumers to resort to informal, unofficial and often illegal solutions to their problems. Certain "working class" consumers were able to secure privileged access to goods through kin and friends who worked in the stores. In February 1953 it was reported that staff in the state shops in Tatabánya were secretly reserving scarce supplies of flour for their friends and relatives.⁸¹ Very little direct evidence exists of bribery, but its existence seems likely given that overcharging by staff in shops, with the staff pocketing the extra, seems to have been a common practice throughout industrial Hungary during the early 1950s.⁸²

The other form that informal, unofficial and illegal strategies took was that of buying through the "black" market. Due to administrative control access to it could be extremely restricted. Many people came into contact with unofficial economic activity through itinerant sellers from rural areas who would offer food in exchange for used

⁷⁸ - SZKL SZOT Szociálpolitika/22d./1952; *Feljegyzés a dolgozók hangulatáról (Report on the opinions among the workers)*, p.3

⁷⁹ - SZKL SZOT Munkásellátás/15d./1953; *Tatabánya. Ótelepi gépezem, 1953. január. 31 (Tatabánya. The machine factory on the old site. 31 January 1953)*, p.4

⁸⁰ - ZML MSZMP ZMBA ir.57f.2/Agit/10ö.e.; *Nagykanizsa Városi Pártbizottság, 1951. január 2. du. 4.30 (Nagykanizsa City Party Committee. 2 January 1951. 4.30 p.m.)*

⁸¹ - SZKL SZOT Munkásellátás/15d./1953; *Tatabánya VIII.akna. 1953. február 9. (Tatabánya. Pit No. VIII. 9 February 1953)*, p.2

⁸² - FML MSZMP FMBA ir.9f.2/PTO/48ö.e.; *A Sztálinvárosi Tanács végrehajtó Bizottságba....*, p.1; SZKL SZOT Szociálpolitika/21d./1952; *Szénszállító és Szolgáltató Vállalat Szakszervezeti Bizottsága, Tatabánya - Jegyzőkönyv Társadalmi ellenőrök részére megtartot értekezeltől*, p.2

clothes or industrial goods.⁸³ Given the need for extra cash "working class" consumers themselves sought to exploit shortages in order to supplement their own incomes. In Miskolc in 1951 cases were reported of workers who had bought boots that were in short supply selling them illegally for prices higher than those in the state shops.⁸⁴

Households sought a degree of autonomy for the household as a long-term response to the problem of shortage. This strategy was well illustrated by the problem of bread production and consumption in the mining areas. Much state-produced bread was not only frequently late but was of extremely poor quality. As a result of this poor quality "working class" consumers demanded the freedom and the goods to make the bread themselves by 1953. Many miners told a party committee investigating their living conditions that "they wanted to eat home-made bread, as the factory-made bread was of appalling quality" and demanded that the appropriate flour and yeast be made available in the shops.⁸⁵

Household Autonomy: Ideals and Realities

With the beginning of socialist industrialisation the state became concerned about those it termed *kétlaki* – in other words those workers who were members of households with land and therefore incomes from agriculture. It saw this as a central obstacle to "new" workers acceptance of socialist work discipline. A campaign was implemented in 1951 and 1952 that had two prongs. The first prong aimed to use propaganda to make the *kétlaki* existence socially unacceptable in the eyes of other workers. Regime propaganda portrayed the worker-peasant existence as detrimental to all of the workers, including the worker-peasants themselves, because it prevented the development of a purely socialist consciousness. In the words of one propaganda booklet, "the *kétlaki* miner is his own enemy". Furthermore by concentrating on their own land it was inevitable that they would betray their work colleagues, by undermining the earnings possibilities of their work mates by going sick. The second

⁸³ - OSA RFE Magyar Gy.6; Item No. 11699/52, p.1

⁸⁴ - SZKL SZOT Szociálpolitika/9d./1951; *Jelentés a Miskolc, diósgyőr munkásellátási kérdésekről (Report on workers' provision in Miskolc and Diósgyőr)*, p.1

⁸⁵ - MOL M-KS-276f.53/145ö.e.; *Tájékoztató az üzemi dolgozók és az üzemi vezetők által felvetett szociális és kulturális problémákról*, p.40

prong was to launch a programme of agitation among the workers to persuade them to sell, at a favourable price, their land either to the local council or to join the co-operative.⁸⁶ In areas where a worker-peasant had deep roots this campaign engendered considerable opposition from the wives who managed the smallholding while their husbands went to work. Women did not want the land sold, nor did they want to join co-operatives even when their husbands were willing to agree to state demands. From their vantage point as managers of the household they saw land as giving the household a degree of independence from the shortages of the socialised retail sector and the unreliability of their husbands earnings. In villages in the Zala oil fields wives were said to have threatened their husbands with divorce and suicide if they joined the co-operatives. They had refused to cook for their husbands where they had signed away their land. One oil worker told the authorities what his wife had told him - "it (the land) is there to help us live, because of it we have not starved, but if it is taken away from us we will (starve)".⁸⁷

Despite the pressures to which agricultural households were subjected in the early 1950s, in the face of shortage the worker-peasant existence represented an ideal to which many workers, and especially "working class" women subscribed.⁸⁸ With the limited liberalisation that followed a change of government in 1953 those workers – normally worker-peasants – with sufficient resources to build a private house did so.⁸⁹ The growth of private house construction fed a growing parallel economy as the state sector, - hit by power cuts and shortages failed to meet the material demands of the population.⁹⁰ Materials pilfered from their official workplace formed one major source of construction materials for such houses. A journalist who escaped to the west in 1956 cynically commented that "the villages surrounding the "great constructions of socialism" contain the most new peasant cottages, built from excellent materials,

⁸⁶ - *Kétlakosság (Worker Peasant-ness)*, p.8, Szakszervezeti Ismeretterjesztő Előadások, Népszava, Budapest, 1952; for the programme see Mátyás Rákosi *Visszaemlékezések. 2 kötet. 1940-1956*, p.845, Napvilág Kiadó, Budapest, 1997

⁸⁷ - ZML MSZMP ZMBA ir. 61f.2/Agit/7ö.e.; *Hangulat jelentés (Report on the climate of opinion)*, p.1; ZML MSZMP ZMBA ir.61f.2/Agit/7ö.e.; *MDP MAORT Lovászi üzemi pártszervezet titkársága jelentés (Hungarian Workers' Part – MAORT Lovászi factory party organisation secretariat report)*

⁸⁸ - Pittaway "Stalinism, Working Class Housing and Individual Autonomy"

⁸⁹ - For the situation in one poor county in 1954 see ZML MSZMP ZMBA ir. 57f.2/63ö.e.; *Kimutatás a Zalamegyében engedélyezett (Family house construction approved in Zala county)*

⁹⁰ - For this see Mark Pittaway *The Victory of Production over Consumption: Reform, Workers and the Possibilities of a New Course*, unpublished manuscript, Southport, England, 1999

and of sound construction of course the material "removed" from the site of the socialist constructions".⁹¹

Household autonomy in early socialist Hungary was premised in the minds of many upon either the private ownership of land, a family house or access to some source of income outside of an unreliable state sector. The household was at the centre of an informal economy that grew up in the cracks created by the malfunctioning of the state. The repression and poverty prevalent in the official realm during the 1950s, led to the creation of a household centred, partially visible economy. Paradoxically, however, this economy was based on an interaction between worker experiences of the state sector – both in production and consumption. It drew on notions that property conferred independence that were far from unique to Hungary⁹² and further reinforced and strengthened them. Not all households, however, were autonomous in any sense – although those that were relatively less independent of state sector suffered the greatest poverty. The differentiation that opened up between “working class” households on the basis of access to resources, other than those provided by the state, fuelled the spread of an ideal of social privatisation.

For households dependent on wages alone in urban Hungary by the mid-1950s living conditions were poor. Even according to a poverty line set at a miserably low level the National Council of Trade Union estimated that in 1956 35% of households dependent on wages from the state sector lived in poverty. Among urban households it discovered that the key determinant of poverty was the ratio of earners in a household to dependants. This left young families – with one earner where the mother could not find any work – in dire poverty.⁹³ Low household earnings went together with poor housing conditions, in 1957 it was still common in industrial towns that “a five member family live in a one room flat”.⁹⁴ In such families where incomes could

⁹¹ - Quoted in Bill Lomax "The Working Class in the Hungarian Revolution of 1956", *Critique*, Vol. 13, p. 32, 1981

⁹² - For a useful description of the ideological role private home ownership has played in the United Kingdom see Pauline Hunt “Gender and the Construction of Home Life” in Stevi Jackson & Shaun Moores (eds.) *The Politics of Domestic Consumption. Critical Readings*, especially pp. 310-2, Prentice Hall & Harvester Wheatsheaf, London and New York, 1995

⁹³ - MOL M-KS-276f.66/36ö.e., p.31

⁹⁴ - MOL M-KS-288f.23/1957/21ö.e., p.54

not be increased through younger family members taking work in industry, rising prices cut into household incomes during the early 1950s.⁹⁵

The large number of young urban households with children had several options open to them. The male earner could attempt to increase his income through moonlighting if the sector in which he worked gave him skills that could be deployed in the informal economy. Where the worker provided a service the route to extra income was easy to find. Household electricians' wages were around 1000 Forints a month, but they could often make another 400 to 500 Forints monthly through what one former electrician described as "black work". His employers' – the local housing repair co-operative – charges for repairs were high and often the electrician could pocket the money for the job by charging the customer lower rates. In one case the customer "eagerly agreed but after she had to call the co-operative to say the work hadn't needed doing".⁹⁶

Access to incomes from "black work" were not open to everybody and depended either on the nature of their state job or personal connections. The second possibility open to a low paid worker would be to take a second job. This possibility, however, was circumscribed by legal regulation. These provisions were commonly side stepped which led workers to take up secondary employment unofficially. In 1953 wages amongst railwaymen varied between 420 and 700 Forints monthly. Of these some 8000 employees failed to earn more than 570 Forints. In such cases many workers spent their spare time undertaking additional employment, most commonly informal agricultural work to guarantee a basic standard of living for their families.⁹⁷ Access to such informal work was often dependent on contacts secured through work mates in the socialised sector of the economy. This was especially true of casual labour in agriculture during periods of harvest. As early as summer 1951 the local authorities had noticed that the Sztálinváros construction site was being used as an informal labour market to recruit casual labour.⁹⁸

⁹⁵ - MOL M-KS-288f.23/1957/21ö.e., p.49

⁹⁶ - OSA RFE Magyar Gy.6/ Item No.1646/55, pp.1-8

⁹⁷ - SZKL SZOT Bér és Munkügyi Osztálya (Wage and Labour Department)/21d./1953; *Közlekedés- és Postaügyi Minisztérium Vasúti Főosztálya levél Varga Jánosnak, Szakszervezetek Országos Tanács titkára, 21st November (1954) 1953 (Ministry of Transport and Post. Railway Department letter to János Varga, Secretary of the National Council of Trade Unions, 21 November 1953)*

⁹⁸ - FML MSZMP FMBA ir.18f.2/1ö.e.; *Jelentés a Dunai Vasmű Pártbizottság augusztus havi munkájáról (Report on August work of the Danube Steel Works party committee)*, p.1

The third possibility for poverty stricken urban families was for other adult household members, normally the wife and mother, to seek work. It was nevertheless difficult for a woman to find work in Hungary during the early 1950s.⁹⁹ From 1953 female unemployment was privately recognised as a problem by the authorities as opportunities for women to enter manual employment were extremely restricted. In Budapest in 1955 and 1956 the labour exchanges reported a problem of finding industrial work for women, leading local authorities to state that there was a problem of hidden unemployment among women, the extent of which "can only be estimated".¹⁰⁰

A fourth option was to spend less by recycling clothes. Bodies such as trade unions noted that "large families restrict their expenditure on children's clothes through handing them down from the older to younger children". In doing this however they came up against the problems of the poor quality of the clothing sold in Hungarian shops. Mothers were thus forced to "ensure they remained usable through continual repair and re-stitching, whilst they continued to keep a stock of really inferior clothes."¹⁰¹

Lastly such households could attempt to reduce their expenditures by becoming more self-sufficient. This attempt to shift towards greater self-sufficiency took a number of forms that were generally more open to those who lived in or close to rural areas than to workers in Budapest. Often it led to the theft of certain goods that were in short supply in the socialised chains of shops. This was the case with firewood, of which there was a significant shortage in winter 1952. In areas close to woods and forests this led to a significant problem of the illegal felling of trees. One miner's wife who escaped to the West in 1952 remembered that "because my husband wasn't a member of the trade union, we didn't get wood" at concessionary prices. That meant "wood cost 280 Forints for a cubic metre" and anyway was in short supply. Instead they went to the nearby woods to cut wood, which was only possible to do "on Mondays and Fridays, when no-one was there to look after the wood", as if caught they faced a

⁹⁹ - Personal interview with T.J-né, Dunaújváros, 6 May 1996

¹⁰⁰ - MOL M-KS-276f.94/886ö.e., p.141; MOL M-KS-276f.94/886ö.e., p.230

¹⁰¹ - MOL M-KS-288f.23/1957/21ö.e., p.59

heavy fine.¹⁰² In some rural areas a growing problem of poaching was experienced as many workers in both industry and agriculture illegally hunted to ensure that they gained an adequate supply of meat.¹⁰³ Another sign of this shift was the growth of unofficial fishing. During the early 1950s the state reorganised fishing clubs placing them under the control of the enterprises and banning those who were not members of a club from buying either fishing tackle or obtaining a fishing licence. The state furthermore ordered anglers to keep a record of every catch so that when their records were inspected, the authorities would be able to see that the angler had caught only the amount of fish that was deemed necessary to feed the family. Yet unofficial fishing was widespread.¹⁰⁴

Rural dwellers enjoyed considerable advantages over their urban work-mates in pursuing strategies based on household self-sufficiency. At many industrial establishments the expansion of the workforce during the early 1950s had led to many of the rural poor escaping under-employment in their home villages by taking unskilled industrial work. These workers commuted and were able to use their gardens as a hedge against unreliable earnings and chaos in the state sector.¹⁰⁵ Alongside this the *kétlaki* phenomenon existed. This was not unique to the socialist period. The evidence does suggest that it expanded as a result of the parallel pressures of collectivisation campaigns and socialist industrialisation. The first official post-war estimate of the extent of this phenomenon, in 1957, suggested that of households attached to agricultural producer co-operatives 29% had permanent, non-seasonal income from wages. Of households that owned family farms 35% had some income from industry.¹⁰⁶

The expansion of the *kétlaki* lifestyle cannot be understood without some reference to rural communities' experiences of the various strands of Stalinist agricultural policy. From 1948 onward the intensification of "class war" politics by the state, increases in taxation and compulsory deliveries, as well as the attempts to socialise agriculture transformed rural life. The combination of high taxation of land as well as the sharp

¹⁰² - OSA RFE Magyar Gy.6; Item No. 08371/52, p.2

¹⁰³ - OSA 300/40/4/24; Item No. 8183/55, p.5

¹⁰⁴ - See OSA 300/40/4/25; Item No.9394/54, and OSA 300/40/4/25; Item No. 09153/53

¹⁰⁵ - "A Magyar Munkásosztály Fejlődése"; Pittaway *Industrial Workers, Socialist Industrialisation and the State*, pp. 150-229

increases in compulsory deliveries severely squeezed the incomes of individual landholders by 1951. Even before compulsory deliveries, amounts of goods that had to be sold to the state at fixed prices were levied, taxation of smallholders was high. The son of one remembered that in the early 1950s "tax was under normal circumstances was 250 Forints per month, but in many cases rose to 300 Forints, because if we couldn't give anything to the state it was put into tax".¹⁰⁷

Compulsory deliveries were often punitive whilst the arbitrary methods used to enforce them were bitterly resented. One young farmer remembered that the local supervisor of agricultural procurement "strictly ensured that the correct amount was collected at the latest milk had to be brought to them (the authorities) by quarter past six in the morning. The calculation took place monthly the yearly delivery of milk was 660 litres from our first cow, 380 litres from the second one. They didn't take into account that we also used them as beasts of burden and so the poor, tired animals hardly produced any milk on the days we worked with them. For this reason we were happy if a single cup of milk was left for us in a day". In response to such pressure many smallholders resorted to the blatant avoidance of regulations.¹⁰⁸

The taxation and compulsory deliveries had pushed many small farmers close to starvation by late 1952 and early 1953. As a result of compulsory deliveries "the farmer got less for his produce, than his seed had cost him" causing "general hunger in western Hungarian villages. The rural population had to wait in long queues for bread and flour, whilst the family who could get hold of half a kilo of flour was delighted".¹⁰⁹ Living conditions for members of the new agricultural co-operatives were little better. Many were extremely disorganised and their production levels were low. Taxes ate into the low earnings of the agricultural co-operatives. One member of a co-operative remembered that by 1952 "the older members did not have a fillér for pocket money or a cigarette had their children not gone out and found some other work".¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁶ - MOL M-KS-288f.23/1958/27ö.e., p.19

¹⁰⁷ - OSA 300/40/4/22, Item No. 8027/55, p.2

¹⁰⁸ - OSA 300/40/4/22, Item No. 04759/53, p.3; OSA 300/40/4/22, Item No. 8501/55, p.1

¹⁰⁹ - OSA 300/40/4/22, Item No. 3242/54, p.1

Faced with this misery the younger members of many agricultural households were sent out to work. The way this worked was illustrated by the experience of one smallholder family in predominantly rural Tolna county: "M.K. could not maintain his independence any longer, and his daughter Ilonka went to work for the post office. She helped at home in the morning, and collected and delivered letters in the afternoon. She gave her money to her father, couldn't buy herself clothes from it, and stole food from work so that her mother and younger sister could have something decent to eat". Often the needs of family members led to changes in the gender division of labour in smallholder households. One escapee from a south western Hungarian village stated that "the women have never worked as much as they do now. Nobody employs anyone else in the village because there aren't applicants, and it's impossible to accept them anyway. Women have to leave the housework to work in the fields".¹¹¹

It was predominantly poor rural youth that took jobs in industry. The lack of any security of income for the rural poor was the major motivation for such young people. This forced families to send one or more of its young members out to earn a secure income. The household unit could use this as a hedge against the failure of the agricultural producer co-operative to pay out at the end of the year, a bad harvest or a severe tax or compulsory delivery collector. One such worker who took up employment on a large construction site lived on a farm of 8 kh (about 4 hectares), as a result of the farm's inability to guarantee an income for the family he had to go to work. He remembered that "twice a month he could go home for one and a half days and had to spend half a day of free time travelling. He gave his family 200 Forints of his monthly earnings and had to live from the rest". In some cases where there was no child of working age it was the head of the household who went to work; "the private farmers were attached to their small amounts of land and were not willing to enter the co-operative. The majority of private farmers couldn't live from their land and were forced to go and work away. The peasants in general went to the construction sites to get work, the women and children farmed the land". Many were driven by the notion

¹¹⁰ - OSA 300/40/4/23; Item No. 267/54, p.3; OSA 300/40/4/41; Item No. 12232/53, p.3

¹¹¹ - OSA 300/40/4/22, Item No. 14271/52, pp.8-9; OSA 300/40/4/22, Item No. 4154/55, p.7

that for work the wages "were paid in cash that you receive in your hand. Furthermore in the town they take the effort to provide bread to the people".¹¹²

The earliest surveys of the phenomenon from 1957 confirm that those who took up industrial employment came from the ranks of poorer villagers. Of agricultural households with less than 1 kh¹¹³ of land, 51% had one or more family members working industry, with 15% having 2 or more members. For households with between 1 and 3 kh the respective proportions were 37.6% and 9.1%. Among households with more property the phenomenon was virtually non-existent, of those farming between 20 and 25 kh of land the proportions stood at 8.8% and 0.9%.¹¹⁴

It is important not to idealise the worker-peasant lifestyle. Many households were pushed into it by dire poverty. Furthermore it was premised on a particular configuration of gender and generational relations within the households which were often profoundly exploitative. In a climate of low wages and shortages many of these new worker-peasants refused to accept the demands of their jobs in the socialist sector, when they conflicted with those of the household. This was despite the fact that unauthorised absenteeism was a criminal offence during the early 1950s and offenders were often prosecuted. This concerned many in the party leadership, including Mátyás Rákosi – Hungary's home grown Stalinist dictator- who stated that "these workers during the harvest go absent from their factories, and disrupt the rhythm of production. At the same time because of their work in the factory they don't pay enough attention to their land, which shows itself in their production. These *kétlaki* workers in one go disrupt industrial and agricultural production". Many local functionaries shared the views of their leaders and indeed many worker-peasants did strongly defend their way of life. One such worker in one western Hungarian construction enterprise bluntly told his superior that "the democracy secured for him 7 kh of land, and he had to work it. First came his land and second came the factory". Indeed at harvest time a large number sought to leave the factory to perform agricultural work on their land. In July 1951 in the Mátyás Rákosi Works around

¹¹² - Nándor Pálfalvi *Mint Fához az Ág (Like the Branch to the Tree)*, pp.149-55, Kossuth Könyvkiadó, Budapest, 1958; OSA RFE Magyar Gy. 6/ Item No. 06852/53, p.5; OSA 300/40/4/42, Item No. 7929/54, p.1; OSA 300/40/4/41, Item No. 12232/53, p.3

¹¹³ - A measurement equivalent to 0.58 hectares

2000 workers asked for unpaid leave to work on their land. In machine manufacture absenteeism was high among these *kétlaki* workers who "at the beginning of the spring agricultural season leave work for a longer or shorter period or quit completely during the harvest season labour turnover becomes a mass phenomenon". Of those that remained employed in industry *kétlaki* workers came to work tired given that in their "free-time" they had had to perform agricultural labour. Those on the night shift in the oil industry often went to sleep given the relative lack of supervision to conserve their strength for work during the day in the fields. ¹¹⁵

Nevertheless as the weight of taxation and compulsory deliveries lessened after 1953 the members of such households had a degree of independence and countervailing power that was envied by many of their work-mates. In the post-1953 period the incomes of individual landholders increased at a faster rate than those of industrial workers. In the Tatabánya coal fields in 1954 officials in the local branch of the state savings bank began to notice that worker-peasants were becoming less dependent on their wages. Increasingly their wages would be left in the bank and not be touched for months on end as they lived from their agricultural incomes and produce. After a reasonable amount had been accumulated it would be spent on consumer goods, or on luxury items like a motorcycle. ¹¹⁶ The relative affluence of worker-peasants fuelled considerable resentment among poorer urban workers who lacked access to alternative sources of food and income. ¹¹⁷

Conclusion

¹¹⁴ - MOL M-KS-288f/23/1958/27ö.e., p.54; ZML MSZMP ZMBA ir.1f.1958/12ö.e.; *A tapasztalatok összefoglalása (A summary of our experiences)*, p. 9

¹¹⁵ - Rákosi *Visszaemlékezések 1940-1956*, p. 845; SZKL Komárom SZMT/59d./1950; *Építők Szakszervezet Komárommegyei Bizottsága Havijelentés (Montly report of the Komárom County Committee of the Construction Workers' Union)*, p.2; MOL M-KS-276f.116/7ö.e., p.28; MOL M-KS-276f.116/7ö.e., p.99; on tiredness see ZML MSZMP ZMBA ir.58f.3/4ö.e.; *MDP Olajüzemi Szervezet Nagylengyel Jegyzőkönyv felvétellett a Nagylengyeli Olajüzem M.D.P. Szervezetének kibővített vezetőségi ülésén, 1955. augusztus 22.-én (Hungarian Workers' Party Nagylengyel Oil Factory Organisation – Minutes of an expanded leadership meeting, 22 August 1955)*, p.3; ZML MSZMP ZMBA ir. 61f.4/2/26ö.e.; *Feljegyzés a Párt Bizottsága megbízásából a kapott feladatot - A pártszervezet munkája a fegyelem megszilárdítása érdekében (Report on the fulfilment of tasks allocated by the part – the work of the party organisation in improving work discipline)*, p.1

¹¹⁶ - KEML MSZMP KMBA ir.32f.4/53ö.e., pp.10-11

¹¹⁷ - MOL M-KS-288f.21/1958/20ö.e., p.260

It has been argued throughout this chapter that industrial workers responded to socialist industrialisation and the consolidation of the Stalinist state in the factories through investing in an ideal of social privatisation. The brief sketch of the fortunes of various kinds of households outlined above demonstrates that all of them were unable to manage from the wages provided by the state sector alone. They sought to some extent to compensate for this. The extent to which they were able to do this was based on whether they could combine wages with some other means of satisfying material need. Some households managed better than others – those split between agriculture and industry were the best placed while the dire poverty of those households entirely dependent on wages demonstrated their disadvantage.

The sources of income on which households drew were very diverse. Their extent is impossible to estimate precisely because of the lack of reliable information. Nevertheless there is evidence of a multiplicity of different sources of income and resources ranging from wages, expanding employment within households, moonlighting, theft, hunting and fishing, growing vegetables, keeping chickens and combining farming with an industrial wage. In years of severe “working class” poverty differential access to sources of income not derived simply from the state sector stratified “working class “ households. Furthermore – as the jealousy of worker-peasant incomes attests – all workers were acutely aware of how household circumstance divided them.

The Stalinist state crushed collective expressions of protest, action and organisation. Its vision of creating a class conscious working class that could be mobilised around the goals of building socialism was not realised either. Instead poverty and shortage forced industrial workers to supplement their incomes and find resources outside of the formal state sector in order to survive. Hidden discontent fuelled informal bargaining, legitimised theft from the workplace, absenteeism during the harvest period, and moonlighting.

For many industrial workers the state sector became a realm of poverty and shortage where needs could not be satisfied. State repression meant that the public sphere could not be used to express discontent, improve living conditions, or to protest. Shortage in production and consumption created tension between individuals and groups as the

discussion of both the particularisation of worker identity and of consumption shows. Poverty was felt to be a household problem, and this drove an ideal of greater social privatisation. The lack of collective protest in Stalinist Hungary was much more therefore than simply a response to considerable state repression. The circumstances of socialist industrialisation promoted a withdrawal into the household. Not all, indeed only a minority of households, pursued this strategy with significant success. Yet the fact that some households could mitigate their poverty by combining industrial work with agricultural activity, striving for greater household self-sufficiency, or engaging in informal economic activity did legitimise social privatisation as an ideal. The spread of an ideal of social privatisation as an ideal led to a marked decline in social solidarity.

The subtext of the argument that has been presented here is one that deals with the consequence of socialist industrialisation for gender relations and identities. Given the sharp gendered split between public and private that much gender ideology assumed in Hungary, ideals of social privatisation would have deeply conservative implications. Despite the apparent egalitarianism of the state it never challenged established ideologies of gender directly, but accommodated itself to them. The evidence seems to suggest that women had a deeper investment in ideals of social privatisation, the protection and maintenance of the household than their male work-mates. This led to an apparent paradox. Although women were supposed to assume a central role in the socialist labour force according to Stalinist ideology women were less willing to protest as workers than men. After 1950 they withdrew more substantially from collective protest about workplace issues than male workers. Where they did protest it was about extension in working time. Women, it would seem, invested more in ideals of social privatisation than men. This was because they coped with the consequences of socialist industrialisation not only as workers but as homemakers and consumers.

It would be an overstatement of the case made here to say that Hungarian society was “atomised” by the Stalinist state. Such arguments are often premised on a myth of an all-powerful state. The argument presented here suggests that although it prevented collective protest, it did not control social process. In fact were studies of Stalinism to focus more on the material world, and less on the political a picture would emerge of

a weak state confronting a weak society. The state was repressive but it could not control the shop floor, nor indeed how people made their living more generally despite attempts to re-shape agricultural production and enforce proletarianisation. The state was confronted by a privatised society – one that, at least until the outbreak of the 1956 Revolution, was characterised by the pursuit of an ideal of household self-sufficiency and independence from the state.