

# Youth and the State in Hungary

Capitalism, Communism and Class



László Kürti



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**Pluto  Press**  
LONDON • STERLING, VIRGINIA

First published 2002  
by PLUTO PRESS  
345 Archway Road, London N6 5AA  
and 22883 Quicksilver Drive,  
Sterling, VA 20166–2012, USA

[www.plutobooks.com](http://www.plutobooks.com)

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data  
A catalogue record for this book is available from  
the British Library

ISBN 0 7453 1791 X hardback  
ISBN 0 7453 1790 1 paperback

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data  
applied for

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Designed and produced for Pluto Press by  
Chase Publishing Services, Fortescue, Sidmouth EX10 9QG  
Typeset from disk by Stanford DTP Services, Towcester  
Printed in the European Union by Antony Rowe, Chippenham, England

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## PREFACE

The narrative presented here is based on my fieldwork in Csepel, the twenty-first district of Budapest, where I conducted anthropological research in the mid- to late 1980s and during the 1990s. The reason why I chose this area lies in my desire to probe the secrets of 'Red Csepel', a legendary place I had come to know through a revolutionary socialist song we had to sing on trips and in music classes as Hungarian school pupils in the 1960s. I was brought up in the country and, although I made the trip to the capital, Budapest, a few times in the course of 15 years, I never managed to visit Csepel. Whispered rumours about the 'workers' paradise' there only intensified its status as *terra incognita*.

When I finally reached the island in 1985 as a trainee-anthropologist brimming with enthusiasm, the town itself appeared to be anything but 'red'. Rather, it was dusty, noisy and lively; there, as in any other ordinary industrial city, people rushed to work, mothers took their children to kindergarten, and children wore Pioneers' scarves as they jostled together on their way to school. In vain did I seek signs of its revolutionary past, coming no closer to that metaphorical colour than the pioneers' neckwear. By the time I left after months of intensive field research, I had come to realize that the colour 'red', like so many youthful illusions, is indeed deceptive; and its nuances are often hidden beneath surface appearances.

Spending time in Csepel was also a form of time-travel, an ethnoscape of back-to-the-future. Frequently, I found myself recalling my own youth when, after graduation from high school, I worked for the state-run railway in the regional centre of Szolnok (which we nicknamed 'Little Moscow' in deference to its several Russian army bases and the desolate 'modern' apartment blocks reminiscent of Stalinist architecture). As I listened to Csepelers' complaints of a rigid industrial hierarchy, excruciatingly slow career development and a hectic work rate, I could not help recalling how, as an 18-year-old semi-skilled mechanic, I, too, had felt about the same issues. As we serviced railway carriages dripping with oil, we were aware that our work was filthy; when we picked up our monthly cheques, we knew we were grossly underpaid; and when we requested concessions, we were dismissed out of hand. What could be done? To whom could we turn? There was a union, of course, but we were not included in its ranks. There were social organizations – the Hungarian Socialist Workers Party and the Communist Youth League (thereafter HSWP and KISZ respectively), organizations of which we

knew little and whose power we only vaguely sensed, whose leaders descended unannounced on the workshops like demi-gods. In the course of such reminiscences, though, I was brought squarely back to my fieldwork reality by explanations of how differently shop floors were organized, and how decisions were made in Csepel. These were frustrations 'in the field' occasioned by the transference of frustrations from 'out of the field', in a different time and place.

No research, it goes without saying, can take place without frustrations, trial-and-error procedures and serious mistakes. Returning to Hungary after more than ten years' absence and with an American education, I was well aware that time had not stood still for my youthful friends. Fashions were different, popular dance music had changed, new slang words, unknown to me, had been coined and material conditions had improved substantially. Although I found it difficult to appreciate the speed of their evolution, these changes did not fail to impress me.

As I pondered a potential fieldwork site, I observed that no one could tell me what I wanted to hear: that is to say, that an ideal factory town bursting with the appropriate organizations, heritage, locality and working-class lifestyles awaited my research project. Still more frustrating were the complaints of Hungarian sociologists and political scientists about the current economic situation in Hungary, the impossibility of conducting surveys and the presumably worthless effort of carrying out fieldwork and participant observation among workers. The more I tried to comprehend this, the more I clung to my 'otherness', my 'difference' from them; after all, I was an American, and an anthropologist.

The world of work as seen from the point of view of steel mills and urban ghettos has enjoyed scant attention in the anthropological literature on Eastern Europe, preoccupied as it has been with small-scale peasant societies and the ways in which they evolved as the result of socialist transformations in agriculture. When I discussed my plan to conduct fieldwork and participant observation in an industrial urban milieu, with specific reference to workers at the Csepel Works, a few Hungarian sociologists were non-committal, some supported my idea, while others found ways to discourage me. They argued, for example, that the site was too large, ill-suited for an in-depth study, no longer a functioning community, and the subject matter out of favour. Despite this discouragement, I stuck to my original idea and was able to secure permission to enter the Csepel Works, which I was told was of military significance. Little did I know then that any group or social cluster has the potential to constitute a 'proper' subject.

Csepel has, of course, attracted writers and travellers. To evoke its impact, I quote here two sources, both western, that bear testimony to Csepel's enduring power, at once both real and symbolic. The German writer Hans Magnus Enzensberger describes it as follows in *Europe, Europe*:

Today the ironworks of Csepel is one of the dinosaurs of the socialist planned economy. Red Csepel is also a symbolic place for the economic reformers. For them this state-owned concern is not the engine of the economy but a brake block, an unprofitable, immovable relic of Stalinism. The machinery still dates, in part, from the forties; the fittings and infrastructure are obsolete. In truth, Hungary's crisis can be read quite literally from the dust in the passageways, from the resignation in the faces, from the rust in the factory halls. (1989: 104–5)

While the Italian I. Zanetti sees it thus:

According to a 1990 map, the short little 'Grass-street' in Csepel ends at a square where the statue of V.I. Lenin stands. However, one looks in vain for Vladimir Ilich Lenin: instead we find a few, beaten up containers, dog droppings, and patches of grass here and there. The bronze statue of the leader of the revolution was removed in March 1990. Where? No one knows. One thing is sure: it is gone now. To rework the past is not what people think of these days. The market economy is at the doorstep of the country requiring the full energy of all; clearly new times are coming to Csepel. (1992: 14)

Seeing the Csepel Works for the first time in the mid-1980s, I too was struck by its vast size, ear-splitting din and energy, and the contradictory images it projected. People moved in and out of the factory; and at the gates, through which only those with identity badges could pass, banners, signs and packed stores signalled a strong life force. Outside the main gate single-family workers' houses, with their small allotments, reminded the visitor of the aftermath of the First World War; the main square, with its central location for a Catholic church, police station, city hall, HSWP, KISZ, trade union, shops and bus stations, conveyed a sense of importance and centralized power. Further off, huge, ten-storey apartment blocks dominated the sky-line, results of the 'glorious victory' of Stalinism and state socialism over bourgeois capitalistic individualism, terms freely quoted even during the mid-1980s.

Life in Csepel, it soon became clear, had a rhythm of its own. Although it was part of the nation's capital, it nevertheless seemed separated from Budapest, just as Csepel youth were different from their inner-city counterparts. When I was a regular visitor to Csepel I realized that the 20 minutes it took to get there by train meant far more than distance in miles. As it happens, Csepel is cut off by the Small Danube and a good three-mile road from Soroksár and Pesterzsébet, two of Budapest's outlying working-class districts. No other districts have such boundaries, and the Danube bridges contribute to this sense of isolation. Finally, the Csepel Works, with its former 'red' heritage, are still productive, even though, as one young informant confided to me, Csepel has become more pink now than red (here the 'pink' symbolizes alcoholism, as in the term *rózsaszínű*, referring to the 'pink world' one supposedly sees when drunk). The district now wants to become Hungary's Manhattan; its current leadership is bent on creating a new capitalist town with all the benefits and not the negative side-effects of global capitalism. Are



they too idealistic? Perhaps. Yet, this book conveys a good dose of realism mixed with idealism without which no community can survive.

Perhaps this last point too was one of the reasons why I instantly liked, and still like, working-class communities. Like other academics, anthropologists select fieldwork sites according to criteria ranging from availability of funding, and pressures from supervisors, to offers of help from those-to-be-studied and personal, intrapsychic motivations. The above impressions contributed to my selection of Csepel in the first place. After the initial trips, I read what I could about its history, working-class movements and workers' life stories, and was fortunate to find excellent, well-documented studies on Csepel, its past and later developments. As a data source, these texts offered intriguing insights into the town's struggle to maintain its identity and retain its population. I was able to obtain much of this information, especially concerning the struggle of the communist underground in the Horthy era, from the parents of my informants, some of whom found their way into this study.

While collecting my data through interviews with selected workers, functionaries and management personnel, I placed special emphasis on obtaining company statistics, production records, HSWP, KISZ, brigade files and historical documents. Other aspects of my sources came from participant observation in the Csepel Works and the many organizations within its framework. Of the more than a dozen different factories within the Csepel Works, two were selected for closer scrutiny: the Machine-Tool Factory (an industry chosen for its historical importance at Csepel) and the Non-Ferrous Metal Works (for its impressive output and monopoly in Hungarian metallurgy).

No sooner had I begun my daily visits to Csepel and its young workers than I realized that I could not conduct interviews with them alone. Rather, I had to proceed hierarchically, from the top down. In fact, my first informants were company managers, party and communist youth organization secretaries, and trade union stewards who were genuinely eager to learn what 'this American' wanted to do in Csepel. By satisfying their curiosity, I also learned that many of my initial hypotheses concerning reproduction, socialism and factory work were outdated, if not simply wrong. When I reached middle-level management and, finally, the workers themselves, I was quite familiar with the hierarchical set-up, organization, power distribution and the most important company statistics.

From the approximately 100 individuals with whom I came into contact throughout 1986–96 I selected a manageable group for in-depth inquiry based on availability, willingness to contribute to this study and the personal chemistry required between fieldworkers and their informants. I followed these workers through their factory life; I learned of involvements in various political and cultural organizations, their relationship to other workers and the management, and discovered how – and on what – they worked. Their world of work was equally fascinating and, in a sense, complex, almost

chaotic. I hope, however, that in this analysis I have been able to represent their ideas and aspirations faithfully.

A final note is in order concerning the location and time-frame of my study. I am well aware that the conclusions of this research are bound by both factors, for in other trades too, such as mining, textiles, and service, workers are shaped by the material forces of their lives. Youth in industries located in smaller towns or in the country, however, must be viewed differently from Csepelers, for despite their work in industry, rural youth remain closer to material values and conditions, and the life-styles characteristic of the countryside in general. Nevertheless, some aspects of blue-collar Hungarian youth may be generalized, not the least of which is that they are, on the whole, a poor and exploited group, yet not without considerable countervailing power. Whether in Budapest or the countryside, a generational spirit characterizes them; and this spirit is I hope, discernible in my analysis.

The most intensive portion of the material for this study was collected in 1986 and subsequently between 1991–93 and 1996–98. The changes that took place between 1989 and 1992 were so fundamental and thoroughgoing that they compelled me to rewrite several chapters. The Scandinavian political scientists have, it seems, been on the mark in noting with reference to these changes that: 'Anything is still possible in Eastern Europe' (Berglund and Dellenbront 1991: 211). In 1993 and 1996, I had the opportunity to revisit a substantial number of informants, a fair percentage of whom had already left the Csepel Works and found employment outside heavy industry. In other cases, my earlier youthful informants had become 'middle-aged' with families, a house and a car, those material aspirations that had been so wistfully expressed only six years earlier. In 1999 and early 2001, I had the opportunity to speak to several of my youthful informants I had befriended in the mid- to late 1980s. We were glad to see each other again and ruefully noticed each other's wrinkles and grey hairs. More than that, we were all stunned by the enormous changes we all had experienced in just one decade.

I have organized these chapters in a fashion that may well be considered by some as traditional; after the theoretical and introductory chapter, Chapters 2–4 are chronological in the usual sense, attempting to examine the historical events that were so vital in shaping Red Csepel. In these two chapters, I discuss the transition from feudalism to capitalism, from fascism to Stalinism and the concomitant realignment of productive relations and the politics of age. Chapter 5 describes the establishment of state socialism in Hungary and in Csepel specifically, analysing the nature of the socialist firm, with particular emphasis on those institutional mechanisms that maintain and reproduce power relations. Chapter 6 traces the specific political organizational features of the KISZ, detailing its nature, activities, membership and the views that foreshadowed its eventual demise. This chapter considers the ways in which young KISZ members regarded themselves and others, their activities and the events in which they

participated. These concerns are also examined in Chapter 7, where I take up the after-hours lives of youth, the family, non-kin networks and leisure activities. Chapter 8 analyses the tumultuous changes that occurred between 1988 and 1992, concluding by recapitulating my main thesis, together with a discussion of the end of state socialism and its repercussions.

It is my pleasure and responsibility to acknowledge here the contributions of many individuals and teachers along this long and arduous road. My intellectual debt extends to members of the academic community at the University of Massachusetts, at Amherst, who share the credit for whatever merit may be found in my original data from the mid- to late 1980s. I am greatly indebted to my advisers there, John W. Cole, Sara J. Lennox, and H. Martin Wobst, for exceptional interest in my work and constructive suggestions that greatly enhanced both the research and its subsequent publication. John Cole in particular introduced me to new ideas in anthropology, offered friendship and intellectual stimulation, and provided a much-needed sense of direction.

My initial research from 1985–86 was funded by a combined IREX-Fulbright Hays Fellowship, a European Studies Training Grant from the Department of Anthropology of the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, and in, 1991, by research grants from both the National Council for Soviet and East European Studies and the American Council of Learned Societies. The Institute for International Relations sponsored my research in Hungary, aided me in attaining access to scholars and archives, provided a home in Budapest and offered more than adequate funding, as did the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and its staff at the Office for International Cooperation which sponsored my fieldwork in 1991. In the mid-1990s, the Research Support Scheme (Prague, Open Society Foundation) and The Harry Frank Guggenheim Foundation offered financial assistance. In the period 1998–2001, my research was funded by the Hungarian Higher Education Research Grant (FKFP). I am greatly indebted to these institutions. I also extend thanks and appreciation to the University of Miskolc, the Dean's Office as well as the Department of Political Science, where I found many excellent and helpful colleagues who have cared about my research.

I would like to acknowledge as well the invaluable assistance of friends and compatriots in Hungary whose enthusiastic support and hospitality made my stay a truly pleasurable adventure. In Budapest, the staff of the Institute of Culture, the Social Science Institute, the Research Group for the Communist Youth League and Institute of Party Education (both defunct since 1990), and the Research Institute of Education offered generous assistance, as did members of the Youth Statistical Research Group at the Central Statistical Office. I owe thanks especially to I. Harcsa, J. Andics, I. Samu, G. Török, M. Samu, I. Vitányi and T. Kozma, who provided useful ideas and assistance in Budapest. I am also grateful to L. Kéry, E. Tóth, L. Boross, Z. Békési, I. Dögei and K. Friedman for contributing unselfishly their

time and attention, and to I. Csatóry who was influential in sustaining my commitment to the Csepel project.

In Csepel, many individuals helped me gather information and shared valuable time. I express sincere appreciation to D. Bolla, an avid Csepel historian, and to F. Nagy for insights into Csepel's past and present; J. Kiss, a police officer, for statistics concerning crime in Csepel; ministers of Csepel churches who willingly answered uncomfortable questions about religion in a workers' town; J. Kiss for data concerning KISZ activities at the Csepel factories; to A. Koknya for valuable information on factory management and leadership; to P. Tóth for instruction on the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party's policies and its *modus operandi*; to J. Nagy for invaluable data concerning the cultural centre known as the Worker's Home; and, finally, to the many young workers who graciously granted interviews and enabled me to understand their ideas and life-styles. A word of thanks is also due to I. Fürth for aiding me with company documents in Csepel, and to the administrators in various offices of the Csepel Works for assistance and endless cups of strong espresso on cold winter mornings.

I am grateful to the young workers of the Machine-Tool Factory and the Non-Ferrous Metal Works for friendship and invaluable assistance, for they are the true subjects of this study, and I hope their opinions and aspirations have been articulated fully and fairly. Above all, I express my gratitude to Catherine Portuges who offered many invaluable comments and critical insights and for reading and editing earlier versions of my Csepel material. Without her constant source of inspiration, energy and encouragement, the original material could not have been written (*köszönöm szvetsz*). For their generous readings of various parts of my earlier publication resulting from my Csepel fieldwork I thank Zdenek Salzman, Sabrina P. Ramet and Chris Hann. I am indebted for steadfast encouragement, and to anonymous press readers for valuable suggestions of my earlier materials published in *Anthropology Today*, *Social Anthropology* and *East European Politics and Societies*. Much of what I have come to understand of youth in Hungary I owe to discussions with Susanne Klausen, my Danish friend and colleague who helped me formulate some of my ideas about Hungary, the nature of political life and youth. I would like to thank Jon Mitchell who has been a supportive friend and a sharp-eyed editor who provided me with many useful ideas to shape the manuscript for the Pluto Anthropology, Culture and Society Series.

Finally, I wish to express thanks to my mother, Magda Hajdrik (1929–93), for her support during the research phase and for the unlimited love she gave me throughout her life. She, too, played her part as a steadfast mother and worker in building Hungary under Stalinism and state socialism. This work is dedicated to her.

# 1 INTRODUCTION: YOUTH, CLASS AND THE STATE

But, my comrades, this is the working class.  
(Attila József, *Workers*, 1931)

The ethnography I present in this volume of young workers in a factory town in different historic periods serves to critique theories of youth and youth cultures that do not adequately take into account labour and politics. The centrality of production, reproduction and politics in creating the category of youth in general and age-specific power relations in particular challenges ideas about the nature of adolescence and youth cultures assumed in much theory dealing with Euro-American youth and adolescence.

The incorporation of young people into the official youth movement and the labour process provides a metaphor for the euphemisms of exploitative relations within the specifically distorted reproduction processes under both capitalism and state socialism. A number of studies, for example, examine the place of blue- and white-collar youth in society and their specific forms of cultural expression. Analyses that place youth on the pedestal of cultural consumerism, however, are marred by an overemphasis on the recreational and leisure aspects of youth culture. As Markowitz (2000: 17) puts it, there are various 'misinterpretations' and 'misreadings' of young people's behaviour. More often than not, it is argued that young people in Europe and America have experienced the 'pushes and pulls between rebelliousness and conformity, risk-taking behaviour and concerted efforts to plan for the future, and childishness and attempts at adult responsibility and autonomy' (Markowitz 2000: 17). Or, as Schlegel and Barry put it: 'Adolescence is a stage of rapid transition that can be stressful' (1991: 6). Nevertheless, youth in most analyses continue to be represented not as a class but as an autonomous, homogeneous group without distinguishing class features (Markowitz 2000; Phillips 1999; Skelton and Valentine 1998). Most studies of consumerist youth culture and popular culture shy away from viewing class as both essential and formative. In this volume, I examine the role of age and political socialization in the construction of labour and power relations within capitalist and state socialist industries. The results suggest that any definition of youth must be conflated with membership of a class, the roles youth play in production and political socialization processes.

I shall begin with a question: why are youth an enigma for anthropological enquiry? The question is both intriguing and important. Anthropologists have studied age and age-grade systems, but have allowed sociologists, historians, political scientists and cultural historians to investigate the category of youth. The fact is that anthropologists have always been concerned with rites of passages that mark important changes in the individual's social status. Anthropologists can also be credited with turning the totalizing notion of 'socialization' (Cheater 1991: 143) into a scientific commodity. Anthropologists have not, it is true, shied away from theorizing notions of 'adolescence' (Schlegel and Barry 1991) and especially the categories 'age', 'age-sets' and 'age-grades' (Spencer 1996: 5–7, 25–6). In fact, whole disciplines and paradigms have been devoted to the ethnography of socialization, childhood, children, child abuse and parenting.<sup>1</sup> But this does not extend to youth. The gap is especially striking when we realize, for instance, that neither earlier works nor more recent volumes have an entry for youth: this includes the *Encyclopedia of Anthropology* (Hunter and Whitten 1976), the *Encyclopedia of Cultural Anthropology* (Levinson and Ember 1996) and the *Dictionary of Anthropology* (Barfield 1997). What seems to be going on here? I shall argue that the reason why anthropologists find it difficult to understand youth is that there has been a stubborn tradition of projecting functionalist categories and values onto age. This has been an essential part of western thought and scholarship. Despite the fact that anthropologists have long been asking the core question: why do societies create ubiquitous and salient symbols marking entry into and exit from this group? they did not 'invent' the term youth. The term is not one of the 'great, integrative, totalising concepts' (Geertz 2000: 221) like 'nation', 'state', 'identity', 'ideology', 'tradition', 'values', 'society', 'culture', 'adolescence', 'religion', 'gender' and 'people'. And perhaps this is for the good. Yet, we can argue that youth, like men, women, class or gender, can be attached to any of these by usefully interrogating the validity of these homogenizing concepts or, better, explaining the intricacies of social processes at the local level – both exercises long the hallmark of anthropological research. Therefore, we cannot escape the question: why hasn't youth entered into the core vocabulary and major theoretical debates of anthropology and why is it not contested with the same passion and energy? Nevertheless, as anthropological theory is undergoing revision as the result of the reflective and postmodernist turn, we can contend that terms such as 'child development', 'adolescence' and 'youth' should also be questioned as to their totalizing and essentialist meanings.

It is sufficient to remind ourselves that we were all young once; and, moreover, that a large percentage of the population always belongs to this category. At the risk of banality, I should stress that to be young is both a biological and a social process, just like being middle-aged or elderly. And as the boundaries of youth are constantly contested, negotiated and manipulated, so too must middle and old age be categories of flexibility and

difference. However, youth, more than any other category, engenders intense debate and political conflict. Why is there so much enthusiasm on the part of states and regimes to champion the young? This has been especially true since the mid-1990s when the European Union initiated a series of research projects and policies dealing with youth and set up a Youth Directorate of the Council of Europe in Strasbourg (Centre Européen de la Jeunesse).<sup>2</sup> Similarly, the European Union devised a series of policy actions to monitor 'youth mobility' in various countries between 2000 and 2006. Why the stress on 'youth' on the part of one of the largest and most important transnational agencies at the end of the twentieth and beginning of the twenty-first centuries? And why would anthropologists, champions of the marginalized, the suppressed and the exploited, not recognize the validity and importance of the category of youth and especially the role it plays in the working of global and transnational – not to mention national or regional – policies? Is there more going on here than just simple myopia, or have anthropologists simply not been interested in youth *per se*, allowing other disciplines to cash in on it?

Here I shall neither attempt a comprehensive review of all that has been written on the topic of adolescence, age and age-sets, nor address the different interpretations of youth and youth culture across the various disciplines. I think we might be in a better position to answer these questions by providing a glimpse of the ethnographic material itself and a brief look at where youth has been placed for anthropologists to begin their ethnographic inquiry.

It pays us to remember too that, in opposition to adulthood, various younger age groups have been invented, or generated as I will argue, in the past. Ever since Ariès' (1962) study we have known that 'childhood' was discovered, just as psychologists and anthropologists invented 'adolescence' in the early twentieth century. As the post-war generation matured, the notion of the 'teenager' was promoted. Since the 1960s, debates on youth culture have dominated the study of adolescence. The idea of the '1960s' is anchored to the emergence of youth counter-culture and a whole series of popular culture industries. Since then, a special sub-discipline – in fact, a whole cultural and intellectual industry – has emerged to investigate Euro-American youth (Gillis 1981). What has emerged in the past three decades of youth studies is an interesting critique and often enthusiastic appreciation of youth movements and cultures across various societies and periods. The debates and counter-arguments have been so prolific that scholars rightly suggest that the term youth is steeped in ambiguity (Sibley 1995: 341; Valentine, Skelton and Chambers 1998: 6). Even among sociologists the buzz-word 'generation' (Mannheim 1952; Eisenstand 1956) seems to lack intellectual clout and rigour. One fundamental duality, however, has emerged from all this theorizing. On the one hand, youth are seen as a problem group, generating major research efforts dealing with delinquency, crimes and juvenile gangs. On the other, in line with the theoretical arguments presented by the British Centre for Contemporary Cultural

Studies, youth culture is seen positively as resistance and as a way of empowering the very group generating that culture (Hebdige 1979, 1988; Willis 1977).

Another important outcome of youth studies has been the realization that the ambiguity surrounding youth has to do with the fact that it is increasingly difficult to define youth according to a specific age or years, for these are always culture-bound and bear very little resemblance to diverse legal, political and cultural uses of age, body cultures and styles. Indeed, the boundary separating children, youth and adults is not only fuzzy but, as recent research has shown (Phillips 1999, Skelton and Valentine 1998; Sibley 1995), contested and negotiated. Political and transnational agencies such as the European Union, however, seem to know exactly when one enters youth. For the EU, youth means 15–25 years of age. For anthropologists, 'The age span of adolescence varies among individuals and societies; most typically, it begins at the age of thirteen or fourteen and ends at sixteen or seventeen for girls, a little later for boys' (Schlegel and Barry 1991: 5). Maybe the reason why youth are an enigma to anthropologists is that youth in specific cultural and political settings has little to do with 'age' or 'age-grades' *per se*, but concerns the manipulations and representations of social relations. I shall write about youth by showing how this classification intersects with social relations and the way in which those relations are reconfigured through the political-economic contestations of history.

With these preliminary remarks in mind, I shall analyse the condition of working youth in Hungary by foregrounding the development and reproduction of class relations in their East-Central European setting. I shall focus in particular on the reorganization of the labour force and the political socialization of young workers since the 1890s when large-scale industrialization and urbanization shook East-Central Europe. To do so, I shall employ an historical anthropological perspective, one that explores formal and informal structures at the heart of working-class life and production, and the means by which their recruitment and socialization into the labour market and political institutions took place. I shall detail changes in industrial relations, social and political organization, and life perceptions in Csepel, an industrial district of Budapest. In the following chapters I shall describe how educational institutions, political socialization, religion and mass culture serve class interests by focusing on young industrial workers as they led their daily lives, participated in production and took part in political activities. I want to show how the state established and legitimated its hegemony over working youth, and the ways in which Hungarian youth were segmented into further groupings – by occupation, region, gender, ethnicity and age. In short I shall examine the significance of class analysis for understanding the processes of reproduction and class-consciousness among Hungarian industrial workers in the twentieth century. In order to understand the complex nature of class formation under different political systems – totalit-



arianism, state socialism, and free-market capitalism – I shall highlight the generational aspects of working-class culture, identity and reproduction.

By analysing these in relation to one another, we arrive at a better understanding of the ways in which industrial workers countered the state and enabled the bloodless collapse of communism in 1989 in Hungary. Yet, the upheavals of Vaclav Havel's grass-roots level 'velvet revolution' and the 'revolutionary' changes in Timothy Garton Ash's formulation, instituted by party bureaucrats and an elite opposition (1990a: 309–10), were enacted in a variety of guises. Thus, the pervasive question for many in Hungary, as well as for anthropologists and observers world-wide, including former communists, concerns the ways in which the political-economic system collapsed in East-Central Europe in what appeared to be a remarkably brief period (Hann 1993; Holy 1996; Lane 1996). As the sociologist Jadwiga Staniszkis (1991) argues, three spheres of contradictions within existing socialism contributed to its crises and eventual collapse. These spheres – domination of the political realm, state ownership of the economy and the colonialist character of the Soviet bloc – resulted in dependencies and inequalities between members of the Council for Mutual Economic Exchange (Staniszkis 1991: 2–3). However, I argue here that in most Soviet bloc countries there was an additional contradiction: between the obvious desires of the state to create its own youth guard and the overt and sometimes covert wishes of the young to be something else.

In a similar vein, J. F. Brown paraphrases six interrelated factors according to which public disenchantment with the communist regime can be understood: economic (inflation, debt, economic insecurity); social (the chasm between rich and poor, falling real wages, suicide, alcoholism and drug abuse); generational (the coming of age of the post-1956 generation); oppositional (the emergence of dissident circles); Gorbachev (the impact of his early *perestroika*); and the Romanian factor (the issue of the Hungarian minority in Transylvania). In particular, Brown has suggested that: 'The majority of the workers everywhere had become so contemptuous of their regimes, and so disaffected from them, that they would do nothing to support them. This finally sealed communism's fate' (1991: 39). However, while this was true of Hungary in the late 1980s, Brown's list conveys little sense of the dynamism of these factors at the local level from the 1970s. I will analyse the background and unfolding of this dramatic development in detail below.

In choosing to focus on the generational aspects of class relations, I hope to establish a fertile ground for comparison and detailed analysis. When the category of youth is critically examined particular issues inescapably emerge, such as debates concerning the definability of youth as a generation, their age-specific characteristics and the roles they play in history (Ariès 1962; Gillis 1981).

We must wait until the nineteenth century to observe, in Europe, the reversal of sensibilities through which a generation became not so much men who shared the same

age as men who shared youth. At this point, the mechanisms and social supports that, in the nineteenth century, contributed to the elaboration of an ideology of youth are becoming better understood – how youth came to be seen as a period of time at once ephemeral, specific and privileged. (Kriegel 1978: 26)

The class-based institutions Kriegel focuses on – the army and school, both defining and measuring time and service and hence contributing greatly to a ‘division of their population founded in time’ (Kriegel 1978: 26) – are neither the only nor necessarily the most important institutions.

However, like Kriegel I shall argue that young workers represent a target group that is both time- and space-specific, and the manipulation of their age and location in industrial production and reproduction provides specific and useful parameters for analytical study. This area of inquiry is under-represented in anthropological studies (Schlegel and Barry 1991) with a few notable recent exceptions (Amit-Talai and Wulff 1995; Markowitz 2000), especially in the anthropology of Europe. A focus on young workers enables us to analyse the impact of state policies and political socialization in the workplace, making it possible to observe the extent to which the planned socialization of youth – the ‘generational problems’ under both fascism and state socialism of the 1950s and 1980s – contributed to the success or failure of the state’s ideological goals.

Anthropologists have long examined specific ethnographic examples to make sense of age and generational conflict as part of the cultural mechanism of social differentiation. As Cheater argues, age-based conflicts are part of the socialization process but, more often than not, ‘they are also generated, and changed, by relations of power at both national and individual levels’ (1991: 145). The generational problem within Hungary was anchored to the antagonistic relationship between the state, political socialization and labour. In this power struggle, the conflict between state ideology and young workers’ marginalization in politics, economics and culture was especially acute – a distinguishing characteristic of centrally controlled state socialist economies (Davis 1976; Fisher 1959; Hooper 1985; Kovacheva and Wallace 1994; Markowitz 2000). Young people’s second-class status, and with it their alienation from the state, was present even before the First World War but was especially true after the Second World War under communism. The conflict between youth and the Communist Party was a fundamental element of a general crisis, which can be best summarized as the inherent contradictions of the economies of Eastern Europe (Kornai 1985; Staniszkis 1991). The distorted power relations under the different regimes only enhanced the antagonistic age hierarchization and conflict. In this study, I seek to provide an ethnographic example not only of the development of youth as a category of difference, but, equally important, of what power youth culture holds in its own right. As Ben Agger argues, youth culture is not only part of the ‘commodified and co-opted

corporate culture industry', but may be the very basis of an emerging class consciousness (1992: 234).

In order to highlight the generational aspect of power relations we must answer the questions: how was industrial production transformed by ideological pressure from above and, more specifically, what was its impact on young Hungarian workers, their culture and consciousness? In order to answer these questions, I will first describe the specific problems of the Hungarian socialist industrial experiment and then analyse the ways in which the state attempted to increase production by politicizing work, workers' lives and the reproduction of the workforce.

Socialist industrial and agricultural production was founded upon a myriad of contradictions, dilemmas and inherited cultural patterns, as numerous anthropological studies have pointed out (Borneman 1992; Burawoy and Verdery 1999; Creed 1998; Fuller 2000; Holy 1996; Wolfe 2000). Specifically, heavy industry was a Stalinist oxymoron in largely agricultural states; yet, most of the East European countries embarked on a monstrous plan of industrializing their economies in pursuit of the Soviet blueprint. Csepel is the ethnographic setting I have chosen to reveal local aspects of this social engineering. However, many other 'Lenin-' and 'Stalingrads' throughout the former Soviet bloc have similar stories to tell. Lacking sufficient energy supplies, infrastructure, skilled labourers and transportation systems, these steel and coal towns suffered enormously from mismanaged plans and lack of essential resources. For example, in order to ensure full employment, firms hired more and more workers, a practice resulting in the devaluation of labour and the hierarchical structure of the labour force. This created its own internal contradictions: mismanagement in the organization of work and labour shortages. As more workers were hired and retained for the factories, absenteeism, alcohol abuse and shoddy goods leaving the shops were everyday occurrences. The result was that skilled workers were absent from the secondary and tertiary sectors (Berend and Ránki 1985: 243; Radice 1981: 138). With such undue emphasis given to certain professions and jobs, the industrial workforce became atomized and young workers especially felt the negative effects.

Another feature missing from the capitalist interwar production years in the Csepel factories was that the state was always under pressure to revise production quotas, update quality standards and meet deadlines. However, whether under fascist, Stalinist or state socialist rule, unrealistic quotas demanded unprecedented work rates, hierarchical reorganization and strict labour discipline. Target plans were assigned to each factory according to 'plan bargaining', a mode of decision-making by ministry planning offices and factory/trust management. Instead of being market-led, central incentives and ideological pressures determined industrial output. The goods produced went to socialist and Third World markets only. Even so, Hungarian industries were characterized by delays, missed deadlines and shoddy goods.

Unlike the situation before the war, in Hungary, as elsewhere in the Soviet bloc, everything was planned. From family size to the choice of consumer goods, from the content of newspapers to factory output – all were conceived by party officials and bureaucrats, the Central Committee of the Communist Party and its exclusive inner circle, the Politburo. To comply with centrally established quotas, blue-collar workers usually spent long hours at their machines, especially towards the end of the production year – the ‘storming cycle’ (Laki 1980: 37; Rostowski and Auerbach 1986: 293–5). Such ideological mobilization incorporated socio-cultural as well as economic transformation and targeted young men, who were ideologized as young workers of the state. Known as Stakhanovism after the Soviet model, the first such mobilization was attempted in Hungary in the late 1940s and early 1950s, and again in the early 1980s as the legalized second economy. This was another contradiction, which I shall describe in detail in Chapter 5 (Kornai 1985: 103–4). The result was unevenness in production and chaotic production periods. This was extremely problematic for the state and workers alike: for the former because of unscheduled expenses and political pressures (from Moscow and other Soviet bloc countries); for the latter because of long shifts and little leisure time.

By the mid-1980s, it had become clear that central planning was maintained only at the cost of sacrifices in the economy and manpower and a growing national debt. Scholars have revealed that the end-of-year rush was the consequence not of market conditions but of plans that determined what occurred during the rest of the year. The ways in which young workers were mobilized and age and gender categories politicized were directly related to this policy, as state leaders believed youth to be essential to the maintenance of social stability.

As workers’ states, Hungary and her communist neighbours tried to respond to such pressures with politico-economic solutions. According to Pavel Campeanu, the new working class was called upon to fulfil three roles: as a revolutionary vanguard, as agents of management and ownership and as a productive force (1989: 53–4). The proletariat was to be led by the Communist Party, a trained elite whose mission it was to serve as well as guide the people. As we shall see in Chapter 3, to overcome low productivity an official workers’ movement was created by the Communist Party in the late 1940s. The ideal target group for this mobilization was youth. In this process, the state-manipulated workers’ movement mobilized tens of thousands of young workers to work according to ‘socialist principles’.

Metallurgy and steel production and their markets were centrally planned and organized from above; they never truly operated as a market. There were attempts to create a market, as in the 1968 New Economic Mechanism. But in order to achieve this, quality had to be improved, outdated machinery scrapped and workers retrained. Thus, we arrive at one of the most important contradictions: that between politics and labour. George Schöpflin argues that under the state socialist system:

The ideal worker was always the male manual worker using simple technology as portrayed under Stalinism; this did not change symbolically in any major way later. In this sense, the working class that emerged from communism was relatively homogenized, confused and economically increasingly threatened by the collapse of these economies. (1991: 13)

The specific ways in which this took place emerge from the workers' testimonies in the following chapters. To do so, we need to see the workers in and on their own terms.

The tension between working-class life and state politics was furthered not only by labour hoarding, but by a policy known as plan bargaining whereby factories, whatever their capacity, were assigned production quotas and quality standards. Workers entered into a semi-official agreement in this 'bargaining' process by fulfilling only a percentage of their share and then volunteering for more and better paid overtime. As they put it: 'They pretend to pay us, we pretend to work.' These plans, rational and systematic at first, were quite unlike the industrial planning during the Manfred Weiss years (1914–44), a period when factory output was determined by western and southern European markets and military demands.

Under state socialism, central planning was the only way to train workers according to the needs of the state. Every year the state planning committee drew up a schedule and calculated how many welders, rollers, machine-tool operators or bus drivers it needed to comply with the plan. Thus, educational institutions were under the direct supervision of state planners, an aspect of schooling that is still difficult to eradicate in Eastern Europe (Sabloff 1999). When we look at vocational training and the liberal arts in high schools, an interesting duality can be observed. According to Poulantzas, who examines French education (see also Bourdieu and Passeron 1977), the dual structure cannot be viewed as wholly responsible for reproducing class formation and struggle (1975: 32–5). Instead, it should be regarded as fostering dissent and encouraging opinions at odds with the state-controlled system. As my research demonstrates, schools in the fascist, Stalinist and socialist periods also produced students who did not conform to the stereotype of unthinking tools of the state (Cornelius 1998; Gzásó, Csákó and Havas 1975; Kozma 1985; Ormos 1986). For schooling is only one aspect, albeit an important one, of the production/reproduction continuum. And, as anthropological and cultural studies of community networks and informal interaction indicate, individuals and working-class youth will attempt to resist institutional barriers in order to advance their common and personal interests (Boissevain 1974; Riordan 1989; Vincent 1978; Willis 1981). Csepelers' experiences show that reproduction constitutes a fundamental element in the interplay of dynamic forces. Such elements include productive activities, formal state agencies, non-state institutions, family affairs and peer group networks. Taken as a whole, these are responsible for the class disposition of workers and their identities at any given time, while providing members of

a particular class with a unified – if distinct – mode of expression for their tastes, values and aspirations (Bourdieu 1984; Müller 1991; Szelényi 1998).

Not surprisingly, educational institutions in state socialist Eastern Europe differed in important ways from their pre-socialist antecedents. For both education and pedagogy were under the official version of Marxist-Leninist principles, aimed at creating a ‘new socialist personage’ (Kürti 1991a, b). While it was doubtless simpler to envisage than to construct such individuals, educators and policy-makers were instrumental in attempting to implement Marxist principles initially meant to elevate and humanize society as a whole (Price 1977: 71; Vitányi 1983: 218). The testimonies of the young workers themselves provide an in-depth look at just how these formal channels did not work and how the workers themselves managed to formulate their own ideas and aspirations independent of state and Communist Party directives.

#### URBAN WORKERS IN EASTERN EUROPE: ANTHROPOLOGICAL DILEMMAS

Before we venture any further, a few words should be said about the anthropology of Eastern Europe. Despite the fact that, from the early 1990s, the anthropology of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union ‘experienced significant growth’ (Wolfe 2000: 195), it should be remembered that for decades this sub-discipline was an eccentric and marginal aspect of the anthropology of Europe (Kürti 2000a). The world of work as seen from the point of view of steel mills and urban ghettos has enjoyed scant attention in the anthropological literature on Eastern Europe, preoccupied as it has been with small-scale peasant societies and the ways in which they evolved as the result of socialist transformations in agriculture (Creed 1998; Kideckel 1993; Nagengast 1991; Salzman and Scheufler 1974; Winner 1971; Wolfe 2000).

Several pioneering studies have widened the scope of our understanding of related phenomena in this region, including the role of education (Hollos 1982; Ratner 1980); the interplay between ethnicity, ethnic identity and nationalism (Cole and Beck 1981; Humphrey 1983; Verdery 1983, 1991a, 1991b); rituals and their relationship to state ideology and processes (Kligman 1988, Wanner 1998); socialist planning and its disastrous consequences (Sampson 1982; Kideckel 1992); the Solidarity movement in Poland (Kubik 1989; Ost 1990); and the nature of realigned gender relations (Gal, 1994; Gal and Kligman, 2000a, b; Haney 1999; Kürti 1991b; Lampland 1989, 1995). The recent resurgence of research by ‘Anglophone anthropologists’ in Hungary follows the general trend of anthropological literature on Eastern Europe. Since the early 1980s, Hungarian villagers and minorities have been the foci of such analyses: peasants, migrant workers, Gypsies, rural families, the socialization of children, and the problems and eventual demise of state collectives are at the forefront of current anthropo-

logical discussions on Hungary (Bell 1983; Hann 1980; Lampland 1995; Maday and Hollos 1983; Sozan 1978, Stewart 1997, Vasary 1987).

These populations have been seen as a microcosm of society at large, within an exploitative relationship foisted on them by the state. The customs, folklore and other 'traditional elements' of such groups are viewed by native ethnographers as remnants of the nation's past which must be collected and preserved at all cost. For western social anthropologists, these same complexes may mean very different things, from 'timeless cultural entities', to ideology, invented tradition and reactions to powerful external influences. It is only recently, however, that attention has been shifting to a critical anthropology with its questioning of historical and political economic themes (Herzfeld 1992; McDonogh 1986; Roseberry 1990). Such critical analyses, however, are with few exceptions (Anderson and de Soto 1993; Hann 1994, 1995; Kideckel 1995; Verdery 1991b) virtually absent with regard to East-Central European societies. An exploration of the intersections of history and culture, economy and politics, in light of a key social group – Hungarian working-class youth – is the primary objective of this study: the interconnectedness of the material and mental worlds, in Maurice Godelier's formulation (1988).

The emergence of urban anthropology in the 1950s and 1960s, when the works of Oscar Lewis, Robert Redfield and Eric Wolf drew attention to the misery and exploitation of urban dwellers (Wolf 1955: 452), was hailed for its contribution of a specific disciplinary concern: life in the city. Interestingly, as the Second World War ended and its Cold War aftermath gained momentum, tribalism and the Third World became the *raison d'être* of anthropologists, while the newly created Eastern bloc was portrayed as the enemy.<sup>3</sup> Such a homogenization is easily discernible in the RAND research project initiated by Ruth Benedict and continued by Margaret Mead, whose aim was to decipher the 'national character' of various European populations. Since that time, the disciplinary interests of urban and European anthropologies have endeavoured to develop a separate discipline in its own right. This prompts anthropologists to pose different questions in their investigation of globalized and transnational urban networks, power relations and theoretical advancement in a disciplinary context (Hannerz 1996; Holston 1999; Low 1999), although Europeanists at times seem to be separated by walls of regionalism as impenetrable and insurmountable as the Berlin Wall once was.

One urban anthropological approach has argued that that field investigates social and political-economic processes as they redistribute power relations among classes. This focus does not study city-dwellers in isolation, nor does it disregard those rural structures that underpin the urban framework. As one anthropologist observed, urban anthropology should not create a vacuum between the city and the country; instead 'theories of communities' (Silverman 1984: 15) are needed. Since then, anthropologists have been interested in accounting for the complex nature of relationships

between settlements and their populations, and assessing the ways in which these relationships are configured, conceptualized and manipulated. These issues have gained in importance recently with the specific turn towards new anthropological comparisons of cities, urban cultures and the cultural specificities of urban spaces (Finnegan 1998; Southall 1998). Specifically, new concerns about 'cultures of globalisation' (Jameson and Miyoshi 1998), the 'new urban anthropology' (Low 1999) and the globalized market as it creates a new 'geography of centrality and marginality' (Sassen 1999: 182) have been identified. These concerns provide excellent anthropological perspectives on sociology, cultural studies and other social science disciplines concerned with the impact of globalization on groups, individuals and social life in general (Featherstone and Lash 1999).

With a renewed agenda in East European urban studies largely unfulfilled, regionalism in European studies has maintained a clear demarcation between what European scholars themselves performed and what 'outsiders' professed to know of these societies. In North American anthropology, too, the Cold War left its mark, so that for decades 'European' was understood as west of the Elbe, as indicated by pioneering work in Great Britain, France and the Mediterranean. The separation of Europe into its Mediterranean, western and eastern parts continued into the 1990s (Goddard and Shore 1994; Macdonald 1993; Müller 1991; Rotenberg 1992; Wilson and Smith 1993). This has, in a sense, segregated the discipline into competing factions as researchers debate historical specificities, regional patterns and cultural values that are far more meaningful when seen as ideologically motivated geographical entities. The Csepel historical data suggest that we risk misunderstanding the Mediterranean and the West if we fail to acknowledge the contributions of Central and Eastern Europe.

The ethnography of the city in these regions has been relegated to a marginal status, the majority of research having been conducted in what was traditionally considered 'urban anthropology'.<sup>4</sup> One aspect concerned folklore studies, a discipline structured on workers' songs, individual stories, characteristic life-styles and rituals. This official approach, however, came to an abrupt halt after a few years of initial interviews with workers – including older blue-collar workers at the Csepel Works (Nagy 1951; Pesovár 1951) – after Stalinism was denounced in the late 1950s.

Yet in the North American context, as Halpern and Kideckel have observed in their bibliographic survey of the anthropology of Eastern Europe, 'Despite the sizeable research effort on peasant-workers and urbanization, there are no systematic discussions of socialist industry from an anthropological perspective' (1983: 392). The 'political realities' (Hann 1987: 150) and the 'integration of community into regional and national processes' (Cole 1977: 374), consequently, remain to be incorporated into the field. Despite the fact that the anthropological study of Europe as a whole is gaining momentum and consolidating its position within anthropology, there remains an urgent need to develop critically-oriented studies with regional, historical and cross-



cultural comparative analyses, as well as 'general theoretical perspectives and integrative works' (Halpern and Kideckel 1983: 394).

With the expansion of global capital it would seem that the cross-fertilization of ideas from diverse academic practices is both necessary and unavoidable. I would therefore endorse Appadurai in calling attention to interconnected global cultural flows or 'scapes' (Appadurai 1990: 296–7), but would push for a more thorough approach that requires not only sustained focus on 'fundamental disjunctures between economy, culture and politics' (Appadurai 1990: 296), but also on regions, groups and individuals who face specific problems at a more local level. Hence we do well to take into account historically-specific developments as well as current conditions that determine the status of former socialist states in a reconfigured Europe where many live as 'satellites' of what may be considered urban networks.

As state socialism is continually re-theorized by anthropologists (Berdahl, 1999; Creed 1998; Lampland 1995; Stewart 1997; Verdery 1999), its pre- and post-life histories should not be relegated to historical footnotes. The historical ethnographic example of Csepel provides an instance of precisely this approach. At the same time, it would be absurd to deny the specificities of East European experience, in view of the globalization of capital and the emergence of a nearly seamless transitory period. For enduring anti-Semitism and xenophobia, as well as the peasant-based rebellions and the indigenous fascist movements of the 1930s and 1940s, are as much a part of East Europe's history as its heroic partisan myths, vast Stalinist factories and *kolkhoz* collective farms. Memories of East German cars spewing exhaust fumes, *apparatchiks* (party hacks) and a subservient intelligentsia of the 1960s and 1970s will undoubtedly live on in the East European consciousness as a terrible nightmare. These phenomena must, however, be interpreted in particular cultural and historical contexts – the ways in which they were constructed and subsequently deconstructed. Similarly, how a working class was created and maintained during state socialism needs to be understood in its specific cultural setting and timeframe. In this the category of youth cannot be disregarded, for youth are at the heart of the process of state and labour formation.

## THE GENERATION OF GENERATIONS

What does the category youth entail, and how is it created, reproduced and maintained? What makes a generational group conscious of its identity, its power of resistance and its aspirations? These are fundamental questions, but for our purposes they need to be reformulated as follows: what were the connections between the state, party and labour, and where did youth fit in? In order to proceed, we must investigate the ideological foundation of the state and working-class consciousness, at the heart of which lies the notion of ideology. The Hungarian state-builders' ideology was Marxist and that

had profound ethnographic implications. They espoused Marx's view that people tend not to perceive themselves and the world around them as they might wish, because of ideology. Ideology – or, better, ideologies – can be defined as a 'relatively coherent ensemble of concepts, representations, values', providing 'an 'imaginary' relation to their real conditions of existence' (Poulantzas, quoted in Jessop 1985: 195). Yet ideology, or 'false consciousness', as Gramsci argues, is essential to the creation of class-consciousness and action (Hoare and Smith 1983: 377). According to Althusser: 'Ideology (as a system of mass representations) is indispensable in any society if men are to be formed, transformed and equipped to respond to the demands of their conditions of existence' (1970: 235). How was this ideology produced, maintained and challenged during existing state socialism? What did it mean to young workers in Hungary under successive regimes? The way in which educational institutions, religion, mass culture and the media serve ideological class interests in establishing and legitimating the ruling hegemony, and the ways in which the population is segmented by occupation, region, gender, ethnicity and age, remain central questions for the social sciences and for this study.

The following chapters describe the workings of such hegemonic principles by focusing on young industrial workers as they led their daily lives, participated in production and took part in political activities. When the category of youth is critically examined in its cultural setting, particular issues inescapably emerge. Debates concerning how youth are defined as a generation, their age-specifics and roles, have a long history, from classics such as Karl Mannheim's pioneering study *Das Problem der Generationen* (1928) to Eric Erikson's *Identity, Youth and Crisis* (1968). But as I have indicated, while the category of youth has received the attention of historians and social scientists (Cornelius 1998, Gorsuch 2000, Hooper 1985, Price 1977), with few notable exceptions (Markowitz 2000), it is missing from the anthropological agenda.

Furthermore, the predominant view in anthropology concerning the socialization of youth has been preoccupied with formal education and discussions of educational practices cross-culturally (Spindler and Spindler 1987). At least since Margaret Mead's *Coming of Age in Samoa*, most 'culturally'-oriented approaches conclude that institutions serve more than one function, and view them as transmitting cultural practices and values while socializing the young in accordance with societal concerns. Many anthropological or socialization approaches can, however, be taken to task for under-emphasizing the ways in which educational systems reproduce inequalities and power relations in order to legitimize a system of political and economic force and a dominant cultural life-style. One discovers in critical analyses that schools under capitalism serve to reproduce capitalistic relations and dominance (Bourdieu 1984; Bourdieu and Passeron 1977). Yet educational institutions in complex states do not merely reproduce existing relations of production and ideology. Alvin Gouldner, for instance,

speaks of the double function of universities that 'both reproduce *and* subvert the larger society' (1982: 45). Fehér and Heller – drawing on their analysis of state socialist systems in Eastern Europe – argue that 'education is not merely a preparation for social activities, but is achieved in the actual carrying out of these activities, in the very process of making decisions' (1987: 122). Anthropologists have provided ample data to support this: schools can be seen as possessing a relative degree of autonomy, providing a framework for other class interests as well. In fact, studies on formal schools, as sites of cultural production as well as reproduction, have pointed to the fact that youth have different attitudes to authority, order and control (Reed-Danahay 1996: 33).

Not surprisingly, educational institutions in state socialist Eastern Europe differed in important ways from those in capitalist societies in terms of the centrally planned, socio-economic nature of the political system.<sup>5</sup> Education and pedagogy, both under the official version of Marxist-Leninist principles, aimed at creating the 'new socialist personage' to which I have referred. As C.W. Mills observed (the current gender consciousness inherited from the 1980s notwithstanding): 'Communism, like capitalism, requires certain types of men; not the private entrepreneur, the economic man, but a political man who is dedicated and wilful and whose superego, whose conscience, is restricted to the disciplined party' (quoted in Horowitz 1963: 153). While it was doubtless simpler to envisage than to construct such individuals, educators and policy-makers were instrumental in implementing Marxist principles initially meant to elevate and humanize society as a whole (Price 1977: 71; Vitányi 1983: 218). Thus a Marxist scientific youth policy was created to deal with those under 30 years of age.

In addition to the formal educational there was the overt character of political education and political socialization. The concept of political socialization, however, is difficult to define, despite (or perhaps because of) the fact that political scientists have been engaged in doing so by linking it to the notion of 'political culture' (Tucker 1987: 5–6).<sup>6</sup> Political socialization for state-controlled educational systems was paramount.

A few studies published in Hungary (Boross and Kéri 1984; Fritz 1990; Hegedűs and Forray 1989) have suggested that a 'generation' is both empirically observable and definable. In these analyses, the concept of generation – *nemzedék* (from *nemzeni*, to beget) and *évjárat* (year cohorts) – is based on the politicized 'typical life histories' experienced by youth.<sup>7</sup> According to Hegedűs and Forray, for example, a generation is (1) that age cohort which lived under the 'same childhood and adolescent socio-historical experiences'; (2) separable from both the previous and the following generations, although all have had similar historical, social, cultural and economic circumstances; (3) a group from these age cohorts which experienced enormous and fateful (*sorsszerű*) social and economic transformations as children or during adolescence; and (4) a particular group exhibiting 'dominant currents, which in time become objects of social

discussions, and possesses representative moods and tendencies' (1989: 13; cf. also Fritz 1990: 8–17). Even in this definition the question of 'generation' as an age-specific culture with political overtones connecting tens of thousands must also be evaluated in light of the data presented here. Thus whether young industrial workers fit easily into the general sociological notion of 'generation' is, at the very least, debatable: in the case of Hungary, it will be critically re-examined as a basis for cross-cultural comparison.

It is, however, in line with this argument that in this study I view youth not just as belonging to an age-based category but as a politicized group that is 'also generated, and changed, by relations of power at both national and individual levels' (Cheater 1991: 145). Thus, I want to argue, with Cheater, for a balanced understanding that generations are *generated* by changing power relations at both national and individual levels. In this sense, the local and individual experiences of young informants should be taken into consideration when discussing specific cases of youth. As Hilary Pilkington argues, these experiences are 'classed, raced and gendered and the experience of gender is mediated by class, race, ethnicity, sexuality and age' (1996: 1). For our purposes, I will call this the generation of generations, or the political experiences of youth.

This generation of generations, however multifarious and complex the process may be, cannot be maintained without conflict, for the very power relations that are supposed to serve it are already fraught with contradictions and difficulties. In this the state is a major player as there are other educational institutions, religious organizations and economic players that must be taken seriously when considering youth. To create youth, socialization is needed, and schools serve that purpose well. Or so the ideological argument goes. It has been noted since early studies on Soviet education (Bronfenbrenner 1970; Fisher 1959; Mead and Calas 1955) that the state wanted to educate children and adults according to its own ideology. But this special 'upbringing' – the *Bildung* of the German Romantics – did not cease at the level of general educational institutions, for special schools were set up to educate citizens in Marxism-Leninism, working-class history and other related topics (Price 1977). As in other East European states, the Soviet model was applied in Hungary from 1948 (Bronfenbrenner 1970; Ferge 1976; Ratner 1980). Schools thus functioned as both educational and political institutions 'to develop meaningful work, public life and moral deeds in order to solve the economic and political problems of society; and, at the same time, to enhance the development of educated, responsible, and harmonious personages' (Lukács 1985: 149).<sup>8</sup> Moreover, the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party (HSWP) and the Communist Youth League (KISZ) ran their own schools, providing 'Marxist-Leninist diplomas' and selecting 'cadres' as well as teaching socialism. In this way, what gives a special 'flavour' to youth in state socialist societies is that it presented a dilemma for state planners and most of the participants. For most of the youthful residents

it was 'a heavily constructed social category but in ways which were considered meaningless' (Kovacheva and Wallace 1994: 10).

In addition to these schools, there were school and workplace organizations for those who could not attend on a full-time basis. In other words, every educational institute and workplace had its own HSWP and KISZ, although membership – especially after the late 1970s – was not obligatory. Nevertheless, it is clear from earlier studies that, during the 1960s and 1970s, membership was required of leaders and managers. As the need for better-trained technical intelligentsia and skilled workers became apparent, this condition was relaxed, and the coercive nature of the political realm gave rise, slowly but surely, to the possibility of democratization and liberalism (Békés and Havas 1986).

Thus, by relying on the insights of critical anthropology into class and reproduction, we can look at various forms of political and educational institutions not merely as tools in the hands of the state, inculcating state ideology. Instead, we must stress the ways in which different levels of educational practice reproduced inequalities while mobilizing different social groups. Vocational education was clearly not the most overtly politicized institution: none the less, as I argue in Chapters 6–7, it did serve purposes other than providing students with technical training and vocational diplomas (Ferge 1976; Gazsó, Csákó and Havas 1975). What is required, it would appear, is a more dialectical view, one that places this special form of state education on a continuum: on the one hand, as an organ to ensure a given number of skilled workers; and, on the other, as a means to provide culturally and politically able-bodied citizens for its maintenance and survival. In interpreting official ideology (Stalinist as well as fascist and socialist), 'generation' was to be an obvious socio-political and economic phenomenon. As my study reveals, a commitment to the system was generated through an age-class hierarchy, which fostered a homogeneous generational consciousness, while the informal socialization practices subverted many of its stated aims. The methods for achieving these goals, as well as their shortcomings, will be discussed in later chapters.

## PRODUCTION AND REPRODUCTION

In addressing questions of working-class formation, reproduction and consciousness, I do so from an empirical, methodological and theoretical framework of particular interest to social scientists, especially anthropologists and historians concerned with these matters and with the transformation of European cultures. The empirical side is based on a detailed discussion of urban working people and youth, both of whom have been marginalized in mainstream discussions of Eastern Europe, while the methodological objective is to apply an alternative strategy for studying complex economic, political and cultural institutions as they undergo

change. To that end, this study focuses on the ways in which formal institutions and informal networks contribute to the formation of values, ideas and working-class alliances during different periods. An understanding of the importance of the interrelation of these layers of analysis may well enable researchers to explain more accurately the dynamics of working-class movements and political action.

In order to elucidate the nature of Hungarian working-class life and politics, I wish to stress the interrelatedness of reproduction and class consciousness. I suggest that the identity and class relationships of working youth are shaped by the mutual and dynamic interaction of participation in production (labour/work in the state and non-state sectors), reproduction (socialization of the formal and informal spheres), and politics (ideology) in the context of historically-specific state political economic practices. By examining these interrelated elements, we see how state political economies attempted to control working youth for their own productive and reproductive needs. Although it may have seemed at times that these states were successful in 'taming' and controlling youth, most young workers were able to resist state power by the very relationships they consolidated and the ideology and political structures they created on their own, without state approval.

Thus, the political economy of labour relations refers not only to the sweeping economic boom-and-bust cycles the Csepel factories experienced, but is meant to evoke the dynamism of the global economy with which the productive, political and cultural spheres engaged as an interlocking historical complex. Even though at present governments in Eastern Europe are striving to embrace a capitalist market economy and liberalized educational practices, we may benefit by examining the ways in which social relations follow fluctuating cycles under the pressures of market conditions, for national economies tend to undergo systemic ups and downs in short and long cycles (i.e. the Kondratieff cycle), resulting in irregular, unstable and disorderly centrally controlled markets (Kornai 1990; Wolf 1982). As Jacques Attali notes:

A market form thus has a relatively short life stability, sandwiched as it is between two long-lasting periods of disorder ... At any moment, market society is either in the process of separating itself from an older form, or approaching a newer form. The long period of uncertainty and apparent regression between two forms is called crisis. (1991: 26)

To this general crisis – which largely determined the nature of production in East European industries under both fascism and the shortage-burdened state socialist industries from the 1950s to the 1980s – was added another, perhaps more serious, element, which can best be summarized as the inherent contradictions of the economies of socialist Eastern Europe (Kornai 1985; Staniszki 1991). As the following chapters make clear, these internal discrepancies were based on the fact (1) that Eastern Europeans inherited a devastated economy after the war and as the Marshall Plan was not available

to them, they were forced to rely on their own resources; (2) they systematically fostered their own downfall in technology, production and trade, by covering up these errors rather than admitting them, in order to (3) work towards unrealistic plans and ideals to build communism and eventually overtake the West.

I intend to focus here on one aspect of this contradiction: the relationship between the nature of working-class life and its concomitant state-political economic practices: or, more specifically, the ways in which centrally planned and controlled labour processes influenced reproduction (socialization) and cultural politics. These processes will be illustrated through an examination of the ways in which the consciousness of youthful workers was part of this reproduction. While a plethora of literature is available on these concepts with regard to the western and Third World working classes, their applicability to the states of Eastern Europe in different historical periods is less well documented. For the most part, social classes in the former Soviet bloc societies have been described as victims of fascist dictators and Stalinist repression and forced centralized policies executed under the banner of Marxism-Leninism. While improvements in working conditions and even living standards have been noted, one discerns a primarily negative tone in works describing East European nation-states, especially over the past 30 years. Preoccupied with ideological underpinnings, faults in the redistribution system, party domination and affiliation, and other inequalities, scholars have tended to reject the validity of working-class existence, its *vis vitalis* and reproduction under socialism in Eastern Europe.

In order to begin to show the interconnectedness of political economic aspects of class and generation, let me turn to a brief analysis and critique of the orthodox Marxist concept of production/reproduction, an ideological aspect fundamental to East-Central Europe for almost half a century. In order to understand how young workers form an essential part of the reorganization and politicization processes, the concept of reproduction can be profitably considered to contribute a fuller picture, which also encompasses previous notions of education, enculturation and socialization. I do not mean to suggest that the family has no major role to play in this. On the contrary, I view the family as part of the reproduction process, together with the other formal and informal institutions and networks that are fundamental in shaping consciousness of youth. In earlier historical anthropological works the origin, role and structure of family forms have been over-emphasized (Goody 1981, Kertzer and Saller 1991). Such an anthropological essentialization of the term 'family' – and with it landownership, inheritance, marriage, choice of partner, property and kinship – places undue stress on the biological point of view of agricultural populations and does not allow for the social reproduction and the industrialized urban family variations. Here, while reproduction refers to the biological continuation of the group, it will be extended to include social reproduction. It was Marx who explained in *Capital* that 'every social process of production is, at the same time, a

process of reproduction' (1977: 566). In these terms, reproduction is an economically and materially based concept:

It denotes a continuous process of production in which resources are used up partly to meet current consumption needs and partly to recreate resources to enable continued production in the future. Reproduction can be *simple*, when the scale of production is unchanged; *extended*, when the scale is increased with the aid of additional investment ... and *contracting*, when the scale is declining, which is normally associated with negative investment. (Wilczynski 1982: xv, 63)

These aspects of economic and social/biological reproduction are integrated to form a dynamic process, which I view as essential to consciousness and identity-making. In Poulantzas's words: 'Reproduction, being understood as the extended reproduction of social classes, immediately means reproduction of the political and ideological relations of class determination' (quoted in Jessop 1985: 167). In global terms, reproduction refers to the concept of extended production through which the means and relations of production – and with them the means of consumption and compulsion – are continually renewed (Ossowski 1979: 185–6). Individuals are not simply social agents only, as orthodox Marxists once put it (Kozlov 1977: 274), but are movers and shakers who fundamentally change existing social relations. As we shall see, in the case of Csepel workers, productive relations and the intended outcome of state indoctrination did not always go hand in hand, as class relations were the result of the totality of productive relations.

Nevertheless, the concept of reproduction enables a conceptual discussion to take place between institutions and the actual class formation process (Poulantzas 1975). This view allows the activities of various state institutions – the vocational school, party, youth organizations, trade union and second economy work units – to be perceived not simply as agencies hindering the class struggle and consciousness, but also as enhancing the possibility of consciousness-raising among young workers (Noti 1987; Pirinyi 1986). As critical theorists argue, self-awareness of one's situation is indispensable to developing a sense of being as a social person, which is also required of individuals to form collective groups. Critical theories are best defined as forms of reflective knowledge which are meant to produce enlightenment and emancipation in those so informed, freeing them from coercion and false interests by acting as a guiding light for their own actions to improve their lives. As developed by the Frankfurt School (Agger 1992; Gouldner 1982), critical theories enable us to undertake two important tasks: (1) to provide an analytic framework for industrial workers and policy-makers seeking to understand problems inherent in the system in which they exist; and (2) to compensate for limitations in more traditional political economic analyses and recent 'cultural Marxism' and practice (Baudrillard 1988; Willis 1981).

Thus, aside from the education and politicization of workers' lives, other important processes of reproduction take place that warrant attention.



These may be summarized as the restructuring of the labour force and the reproduction of working-class values and institutions. While there are sufficient analyses of this complex phenomenon in industrial capitalism, few have been applied to Soviet and state socialist East European societies. I begin with a discussion of the former, seeking their relevance to the material under consideration by examining specifics of Hungarian working-class formation processes.

#### CLASS MATTERS: EXPERIENCE AND ANALYSIS

In today's post-communist climate, when global capitalist influence is felt everywhere in Eastern Europe, it serves us to remember not only how this terrain is experiencing the traumas and 'uncertainties' of transition (Burawoy and Verdery 1999), but how earlier transitions and cultural change occurred. Moreover, our goal is not only to describe the intricate webs of social relations that characterize the present situation, but also to recover and reassess the earlier tropes of class, identity and youth. With regard to labour processes and work relations, I rely on the concepts that emerge from Harry Braverman's celebrated work *Labor Monopoly and Capital* (1974). This work has implications for young workers in Hungary for a number of reasons. First, we may glimpse the process of how youth are socialized into the world of labour. Most importantly, we fully understand why and how young workers are marginalized within and outside the factory. The process introduced by Braverman is de-skilling and concerns the ways in which management devises strategies of control. This recalls the idea of Scientific Management or Taylorism, in which de-skilling and fragmentation of the workforce become necessary 'in order to achieve increased output from a more manageable and cheaper (because less skilled and less trained) workforce' (Salaman 1986: 17). Once this concept is implemented, control over the whole production process as well as the workers themselves may be systematically achieved. Interpretations of the capitalist mode of production are numerous, ranging from the displacement of the proletariat, as noted by Lewis Mumford (1934), to Dan Clawson's (1980) consideration of the marginalization of workers in the factories. Studies by David Noble (1984) show that numerically controlled and computer-numerically controlled machine tools replaced conventional machine tools because of their greater potential to control production. Moreover, as Paul Willis suggests, on capitalist shop floors there is 'A real tendency towards increased intensification of labour processes, and a further wresting of control from, and decomposition of, craft skills' (1981: 180). For Braverman, such control is *the* logic beyond the capitalist mode of production. The history of the Manfred Weiss Works in Csepel illustrates well the implementation of Taylorism in a specific East-Central European setting. Moreover, I will stress

that such 'logic' also worked during state socialism in the form of Soviet labour policies.

However, as later chapters will reveal, young workers are not mindless machines in the service of the state. Critics of Braverman have been more cautious of such a logical practice of de-skilling (Rose 1987: 21–3). Juravich, for example, argues that Braverman's analysis contains 'stereotypes' and 'is overly simplistic' (1985: 9). Charles Sabel argues that evidence from the United States, Great Britain and France indicates 'that if there are shops where unskilled workers load and unload numerically controlled equipment, there are others where worker-augmented craft skills are indispensable' (1982: 66). Sabel sees numerically controlled machine tools as the culmination of the intellectualization of skill, 'the process of technological advance by which skill gradually comes to be defined as the capacity not to perform a certain operation by hand but to instruct a machine to perform the necessary manipulations' (1982: 67).

Other contributors to the 'Labour Process Debate' are also critical of control and de-skilling in the workplace as presented in *Labor and Monopoly Capital*. In *Working* (1986), Graeme Salaman argues in favour of the incorporation of informal social relationships that influence class priorities and dynamics within work organizations:

But informal structures of work relations are always potential bases for power and resistance, which centre on protecting or advancing what are seen as shared interests. As such, this informal power and organization can be seen as representing, or leading to, or fracturing, resistance to management's class-derived initiatives, and thus as examples of class resistance. (1986: 112)

It is also true that studies of working-class consciousness and shop floor politics emphasize both formal and informal, culturally patterned structures in determining their outcome, an area Braverman neglected. Anthropological studies caution that workers, both as individuals and as a group, react differently to political and economic pressures.<sup>9</sup> This will, I hope, become evident as we follow the ethnographic example of young workers and their plight through crucial historical and economic crises in the working-class town of Csepel.<sup>10</sup>

But Braverman's analysis remains important, for it sheds light on why class antagonism continues in capitalistic societies – the basis of Marxist theory – and results in the polarization, heterogeneity and declining radicalism of the working class. As demonstrated by some (Gorz 1982; Lipsett 1985; Offe 1985), one of the most important features of western working classes – a result of capitalistic reorganization of the international division of labour, technology and de-skilling – is a lack of powerful working-class hegemony and class-consciousness. However, since the late 1980s globalization 'sets into motion a whole series of new dynamics and inequality ... [together with] ... massive distortions in the operations of various markets, from housing to labour' (Sassen 1999: 181). The new globalized economic

geography inflates these distortions in urban industrial enclaves, especially in those that are increasingly jeopardized by marginalization and exploitation. This seems to be the case with industrial communities in East-Central European countries which are facing massive reorganization following the collapse of state industries and the arrival of joint industrial ventures (Burawoy and Lukács 1992; Elster, Offe and Peuss 1998; Halpern and Wyplosz 1998; Stark and Bruszt 1998). In Chapter 8 we learn how Hungarian workers experienced the negative effects of restructuring, with over 500,000 unemployed by mid-1992, whether they have been marginalized as a class and, moreover, the extent to which they have lost class-consciousness and mutual interests in achieving their goals.

Thus far, I have concentrated on the problems confronting workers in western capitalism. Now a further question must be posed: how does their experience translate to Eastern Europe in general and Hungary in particular?<sup>11</sup> My experience in Csepel leads me to formulate the question in the following way: what are the dynamics and forms of social interaction among classes in Eastern Europe that allow us to discern elements useful to understanding the implementation and workings of class dynamism? Such a recasting, I suggest, enables us to gain insight into the development of historical phases in societal evolution and transformation, and the way in which specific groups can catalyse such processes.

With this in mind, let us consider the struggle and nature of the working class and their generational aspects in Eastern Europe from a different perspective. Given the fact that, under capitalism, workers sell their labour power and capitalists control the means and relation of production, and are thus locked in an incessant, antagonistic battle, how do we come to understand the worker/management dichotomy and power relations under fascism, Stalinism and socialism? Under totalitarian rule, the party acted as a mediating force to decrease or eliminate such antagonism. However, since the very foundation of socialism was collective ownership of the means of production, antagonism should have become meaningless once true socialism was established. As the history of East European states demonstrates, by adopting socialism, the working class and the Communist Party appropriated capital and the means of production (Berend and Ranki 1985; Wilczynski 1982). Under classic Marxist principles, both were supposed to be agencies 'of general human liberation ... dedicated to abolishing class society altogether' (Worsley 1982: 88–9).

From the history of state socialism in Eastern Europe and the Third World, especially after the 1989 'springtime of the people', it is difficult to deny that theory and practice have not always united successfully to meet the desired ends of such socialist principles (Hann 1993). While the fascists took control through militarization, the Communist Party acquired power under the sway of a strong bureaucracy and powerful personalities, and gained a strong foothold by providing the state with powerful means for redistribution as well as an unequal power base. While inequality is typical of any

system where power is wielded and true democratic principles disregarded, it would be wrong to suggest that, under state socialism, this resulted in a futile class antagonism and hence the inability of the working class to pursue unified action.

Furthermore, we must exercise caution before discrediting these early attempts as wholly irrelevant or empty, for as sociological works published in the 1960s and early 1970s indicate, Stalinism and its national variants in Hungary, Romania, Czechoslovakia, Poland and East Germany had a lasting impact on the societies in question, providing: general well-being; increasing levels of education and leisure, with concomitant flexibility in social mobility; modernization and industrialization, coupled with centralized planning and regional development; and the establishment of the rights to work, free health, education and culture (Ferge 1980; Hegedűs 1977; Kolosi and Wnuk-Lipiski 1983; Kovács 1984; Zagorski 1984).

These developments, in turn, helped ease the emergence of new social classes and the levelling out of some social inequalities. As Misztal argues, 'The first stage of industrialization in East Europe between 1948–1953, based on strong central institutions, was relatively successful in extracting the maximum possible surplus from the peasantry and working class' (1990: 70). However, the creation of a new industrial labour force was a primary objective achieved by the early 1950s as the result of rapid, autarchic and over-rationalized central planning and industrialization, causing a conflict between the Stalinist states and workers, as the 1956 uprisings in Poland and Hungary, and 1953 in East Berlin indicated.

In East European societies in general, and in Hungary during the periods under discussion, capital/labour antagonism well known to capitalism can be translated into a state (and up to 1989) party/labour dichotomy. Nevertheless, the homogenization of working-class life experiences under various state-controlled systems (whether fascist or Stalinist), while producing its own contradictions, created a heterogeneous and dynamic social awareness among those affected by it. Depending on the nature of socio-economic forces and the extent of political upheaval, such conditions have served as a basis for collective consciousness resulting in political action. The collective workers' struggle against fascism in Csepel in 1944, the 1956 and 1968 uprisings, the Polish Solidarity movement and the 1987 Romanian workers riot in Brasov offer compelling support for this claim.

In Hungary, there were no such analogous large-scale social movements under state socialism, a period generally encompassing the era following the 1956 revolution. The taxi drivers' strike of 23–28 October 1990 and the train conductors' strike in early 1991 reflect changes in working-class attitudes which resulted in the collapse of the centralized state socialist system, yet the lack of prior, overt, radical political action warrants further inquiry into the dynamics of working life *in statu nascendi*. This study seeks to examine the significance of class analysis for understanding the processes of reproduction and class-consciousness among Hungarian industrial workers in the

twentieth century. In order to comprehend the complex nature of class formation under different systems – totalitarianism, state socialism, and free market capitalism – I highlight the generational aspects of class-consciousness and reproduction.

When considering the class nature and class antagonism of East European societies, one is struck by an oversimplification – perhaps even myopia – characteristic of a large body of literature. On the one hand, studies suggest that, with the establishment and implementation of socialism, a ‘new class’ was created based on party affiliation, cadre selection and involvement in the technological development espoused by the state (Djilas 1971; Harman 1983; Horvath 1982; Szelenyi 1986–87; 1988). On the other, they contend that the peasantry and the industrial working class, the preponderant classes in Eastern Europe, experienced a different social evolution. Their fate can best be summarized by the terms *embourgeoisement* and *lumpenproletarianization*.

Anthropologists have observed that the Hungarian peasantry, especially during the last two decades of state socialism, experienced general upward mobility and relative autonomy as well as independence from state power (Bell 1983; Hann 1980; Lampland 1995; Vasary 1987). Studies on small-scale agricultural communities, the hallmark of anthropological research on Eastern Europe, provide ample illustrations. At the same time the industrial working class underwent a serious crisis, resulting in backwardness in its social and cultural standing and a further weakening of working-class consciousness. What some writers have portrayed is, in fact, a picture not so different from that of the western working class; namely, the withering away of an East European working class lacking in consciousness (Bahro 1979; Bienkowski 1981: 268; Harman 1983: 309; Matejko 1986: 132). Given the fact that during much the 1970s there were no large-scale workers’ protests or anti-state movements, it is understandable that, in the view of the former East German dissident Rudolf Bahro, the absence of ‘opposing classes’ would suggest that the working class *per se* is a loosely structured ‘social stratum’, and that the current proletariat ‘loses its specific socio-economic identity together with the bourgeoisie’ (1979: 185).

Likewise, reading Neuburg (1972) and Haraszti (1978), one might well conclude that the Hungarian working class has been moribund since 1956. If indeed there has not been a working class as such, there would consequently have been no concomitant class-consciousness (Bahro 1979: 351–2). Accordingly, one end of the hierarchy would always occupy the higher position, unifying the new class of intellectuals and technical intelligentsia in a homogeneous socio-economic and political group representing their own as well as the state’s interests. Unfailingly weighing down the lower end are the working class, a heterogeneous, atomized and dispossessed mass, incapable of reversing the disequilibrium.

This rigid, one-sided explanation of working-class existence must, I believe, be historicized and even discarded. As Gouldner argues, the New

Class, however unified or homogeneous – itself a questionable proposition when applied to social mobility in Hungary and other East European countries – acts as a unit and, at the same time, exhibits countervailing tendencies (1982: 30–1). Workers, too, embody several features enabling them to act as a unified group pursuing collective goals and interests and as individuals representing their own personal needs. As the case studies in this work indicate, the political and social seesaw is in a constant state of motion, a never-ending dialectical relationship. Seen in this light, a provisional conclusion can be made: political economic changes in society bring about cultural transformations, and vice versa. These affect the ways in which concomitant class relations, identities, dispositions and values are configured. Thus, if production in society alters one group's relations to production, its internal workings and consciousness will exhibit elements of that change. Other groups – also related to the productive base – may experience various dislocations. Indeed, this is also the case for class-based hierarchies and official and unofficial institutions, which is precisely the issue with regard to age groups and generations: by altering political economic structures, age-group formations and relations do not always act according to the wishes of state leaders and party affiliates.

Before embarking on an examination of specific features of Hungarian working-class consciousness, it is important to consider a potential obstacle to the understanding of class proposed here, in the guise of confusions emanating from the country's own intelligentsia, and, in the West, among critics of the East European system. One such feature is the lack of communication and understanding – even bias – on the part of some intellectuals concerning working-class interests. Bogdan Denitch has summarized this point:

A brief conversation with most East European middle-class professionals will produce endless tales about workers' greed and laziness; on the other side of the class divide, there are endless stories of the privilege, incompetence, and arrogance of the second-generation university educated strata. Not only have the class lines between the ruling elite and the working-class increased, but class differentiation as a whole gelled and hardened in Eastern Europe. (1990: 72)

János Kis and György Bence, writing jointly under the pen name Marc Rakovski, have referred to this problem as follows: 'All communication between Marxist intelligentsia and the working class has once again been made impossible, because the gates of the information channels and organization have been closed' (1978: 137). As a result, in Hungary there has been little solidarity between intellectuals and workers (Konrad and Szelenyi 1979: 226, 230), unlike the situation in Poland, as demonstrated by the powerfully unified, working-class movement Solidarity in 1979–81 (Kubik 1989; Laba 1991; Ost 1990; Schopflin 1991).<sup>12</sup> The identification of Hungarian workers as a class in itself is based on the findings of sociologists and political scientists projecting a sense of alienation and atomization on

workers under state socialism set against each other by management, members of the party elite, and pursuing their own materialistic self-interest (Haraszti 1978; Matejko 1986). This denial of the relevance of class analysis for the East European context has relegated class and class-consciousness to the margins of social existence, and failed to take into consideration class-based attitudes and actions in Western European historical contexts (Hobsbawm 1984; Thompson 1963). There has none the less been dissatisfaction and segmentation in the workforce in Hungary, and in Eastern Europe generally, just as among workers in the West.

Another common misconception is based on the blurring of demarcation lines in contemporary living conditions and cultural activities which were characteristic of earlier social classes. The well-being of the industrialized proletariat was noted by Marx and Engels in the late nineteenth century when they observed that, 'The English proletariat is actually becoming more and more bourgeois' (quoted in Worsley 1982: 58). It is also important to realize that industrial and technological reorganization is a necessary step in making work more pleasurable for workers, without which 'labour becomes irksome' (Veblen 1953: 31).

Viewing the intellectualization of labour in this way, we witness the traditional separation between manual and intellectual labour drawing to a close, a characteristic feature in Marx's proposal for a classless society as envisaged in his *Theories of Surplus Labour*. In his view of the future socialist society, 'it simply means that the specialised activity performed in production does not determine the direction of a person's intellectual activity during their free time, and that it does not determine their chosen form of self-realisation' (Heller 1978: 107). For Raymond Williams, on the other hand, this stage is the 'climax of industrialism' and not the coming of a 'post-industrial society' in which the artificial classification of workers into productive, manual and mental work becomes more subdued, even meaningless (1983: 160).

Thus, when writers at the end of the twentieth century refer to the 'embourgeoisement' and 'lumpenproletarianization' of Hungarian workers (Szelenyi 1988; Völgyes 1981: 224–35), they note the tendency on the part of the working class to improve its situation. In the modernization and technological development characteristic of East European states since the late 1960s, precisely the same phenomenon has occurred (Ferge 1980). Thus, as Branko Horvat has noted, together with general developments of social forces, the emergence of a 'new working class', more highly skilled and better off, is not inconceivable (1982: 408–9). This has certainly been the case with regard to Hungarian workers since the early 1980s and during the post-communist economic and political reorganizations after 1989. It is evidently also a part of the post-industrialist and post-socialist enigma: the continuation of patterns relevant to earlier, modernist technological and productive tendencies needs to be taken into account when working-class values, lifestyles and aspirations are discussed.

From a classic, political-economic perspective, labour always signifies a certain level of connectedness within the productive hierarchy. But at the beginning of the third millennium, with global factories dotting the East European landscape, this interconnectedness has long gone. On the contrary, it has shown considerable resilience and alterity at the same time. For Baudrillard, perhaps one of the best-known writers of the deconstructionist and postmodernist tendencies of critical thought, labour 'is defined (anthropologically and historically) as that which disinvests the body and social exchange of all ambivalent and symbolic qualities, reducing them to a rational, positive, unilateral investment' (1988: 113). Whether we accept such a definition or not the labour process and its alienation effects on capitalist/consumerist production cannot be seen as identical to alienation under Stalinism and state socialism.<sup>13</sup> While there are similarities in type and degree, the differences are equally important. As Chapter 3 suggests, under the White Terror and Nazism, workers' political actions were manipulated by the right – under the spell of Christian and nationalist slogans – and the left (both Marxist and social democratic). Under Stalinist terror, this took the form of compliance (in the form of joining the party) or radical rejection (joining in the uprising of 1956). I am arguing for the presence of a heterogeneous viewpoint among Hungarian workers. Clearly, like-mindedness does exist, as the interviews in this study will indicate, especially along gender, regional, age and occupational lines (Turkonyi and Ferge 1973); however, these differences and similarities should not always be identified as *class* antagonism *per se*. Poulantzas defines the class struggle in capitalism as 'the antagonistic contradictory quality of the social relations which comprise the social division of labour' (1975: 14). With this in mind, I argue that alienation as a feature of class antagonism should not be confounded with personal dissatisfaction and disenchantment, and that these do not necessarily lead to overt expressions of class struggle. This was certainly the case among Hungarian workers during much of the 1970s and 1980s, when class conflict took specific, non-violent forms while, at the same time, a generational friction was clearly observable.<sup>14</sup>

At the heart of this problem lies a misunderstanding concerning revolutionary class-consciousness inherent in works critical of Marx, Hobsbawm, E. P. Thompson and their followers. Baudrillard cautions that 'it becomes impossible to think outside the form of production or the form of representation' (1988: 103). Labour, as a form of representation, then, must be understood within a particular setting and socio-economic historical context. If one wishes to seek the revolutionary working-class consciousness and hegemony exhibited by nineteenth-century western working classes in state socialist Hungary, one is likely to be disappointed. But it would not be on account of disinterest and selfishness on the part of Hungarian workers – characteristics one might find wherever wages are set by management and control is exercised by a highly bureaucratized system. Rather, the majority of Hungarian workers lacked revolutionary consciousness because the



society in which they lived also lacked the ingredients indispensable to produce such consciousness. Conversely, among both blue- and white-collar working youth, discontent was emerging which led to friction and, subsequently, to the abandonment of state and party ideology. However, soon after the abolition of state socialism at the end of 1989, Hungarian workers, together with their Polish, East German, Czech and Slovak, Bulgarian and Romanian counterparts, took to the streets demanding higher wages, better working and living conditions, as well as a return to normalcy in workplace management and industry in general (Brown 1991). This period was as tumultuous as the 1890–1920 period, and generated enormous interest among social scientists, creating a whole discipline to study the ‘transformation’ or the ‘transition’ of the former Soviet bloc (Abrahams 1996; Berdahl, Bunzl and Lampland 2000; Burawoy and Verdery 1999; Kideckel 1995).

In his classic *Workers*, Eric Hobsbawm elaborates on this: ‘Working-class consciousness, however inevitable and essential, is probably secondary to other kinds of consciousness’ (1984: 59). In the case of Csepel workers under state socialism, it is clear that local, occupational, generational, and gender identities crystallized in a collective consciousness that outweighed radical working-class consciousness. Hobsbawm’s statement could, I think, with few reservations stand not only for the Hungarian working class as a whole, but for industrial workers all over the world. But does the general well-being of workers and their offspring necessarily signify the withering away of the working class? Do rising living standards, the availability of consumer goods and western fashions, even for the children of semi-skilled manual workers, necessarily signal the annihilation of the working class and its consciousness? As a consequence of the dominant mode of workplace organization and the possibility of earning more money in an officially sanctioned second economy, do workers turn against each other?

The changing nature of state socialist industrial class and power relations is viewed respectively in several American sociological studies from the mid-1980s (Burawoy 1985, 1989; Stark 1986, 1989; Szelenyi 1988) which initially informed my thesis. Both Burawoy and Stark conducted fieldwork in Hungarian industrial enterprises in order to assess the intricacies of shop floor politics and management/worker power relations. While Burawoy sees workers, especially key skilled workers, as endowed with a certain degree of autonomy, effectively able to pose ‘considerable countervailing power’ (Burawoy and Lukács 1986: 733), Stark views workers’ power as based on the role they play in the non-state ‘second economy’ (1986, 1988). The sociologist Ivan Szelenyi, however, rejects Burawoy’s proposition, agreeing with Stark that, while the Hungarian working class has indeed become fragmented, it nevertheless retains considerable power (1988: 8–9). For him, ‘the ultimate and real source of countervailing popular power is self-employment, petty commodity production’ (1988: 8). However, it should be noted that Szelenyi’s theory is based on three principles: the embourgeoisement of the peasantry; individual strategies enacted to counter lack of

purchasing power deriving from the shortcomings in the official political economy; and that of the future viability of the 'Third Road' (neither Soviet communism nor American capitalism) – the vision of a mixed socialist economy for Hungary (1988: 9–22).<sup>15</sup> The rapidity with which Csepel joint ventures developed in the 1990s reveals that such a mixed economy prevails only to a limited degree.

## CONCLUSIONS

A critique of these views and answers to these questions require a closer examination of the reproduction of class and class relations and their generational aspects under different state formations in Hungary. The evidence for this is based on the research I conducted among Csepel workers. I hope to show the ways in which a small working-class community lived under constant threat and pressure from the state; and, in turn, how that community reacted to, served and turned away from the dominant ideology. I contend further that Stalinism and socialism not only created a working class of its own but, equally important, inherited a heterogeneous and dynamic working class (David and Kovács 1975; Gázsó 1987; Kemény and Kozák 1971; Makó and Héthy 1979). As we shall see, one of the major difficulties regimes, who were bent on making the working-class according to their ideologies, had was that workers retained the concerns and values of their predecessors which, in turn, were passed to succeeding generations.

An analysis of workers in Csepel – their factions, concerns and aspirations – and their working-class heritage is offered as a case study to extend these prior texts. For their true identities and class interests have been obscured by the dominant mode of rationalization projected through official and formal channels: school, party, religious institutions, party politics and management (Erdősi and Dankóics 1985; Szabó and Csepeli 1984). Rather than envisaging working youth as prisoners of their parents' disposition or disenchanting rebels against the system and their lot, I maintain that there is a more complex dynamic in this dialectic than has previously been argued. Moreover, in taking up these questions, it should be noted that Hungarian workers, like their East European counterparts, are involved in day-to-day struggles to maintain their position as wage-earners, family members and conscious social beings.

To conclude this discussion of working-class production, reproduction and consciousness, I should like to suggest that a more balanced view would include not only an acknowledgement of working-class values, but also a recognition of the existence of truly autonomous working-class institutions and political aspirations. Fresh insights into workers' lives, based on a concomitant view of production and a critical evaluation of political – both formal and informal – socialization, are far more likely to be useful in developing an interdisciplinary theoretical model concerning the hegemonic

state power that continues to block genuine progress in all aspects of workers' existence. As we follow young Csepelers' lives and daily activities, within and beyond the gates of the Csepel Works, we shall see that society did not necessarily function according to directives administered by Nazi sympathizers in the 1940s or by the leaders of the Central Committee of the Communist Party. Nor did rules such as the Collective Agreement of the unions and the regulations of the Communist Youth League suffice to produce fully committed cadres or factory robots. Furthermore, it will be shown that workers' living conditions are not only dependent on the internal workings of the Hungarian nation-state, but remain in a dialectical relationship with the interplay between, on the one hand, Hungary and the rest of the East-Central European countries, and on the other, the Eastern half of Europe and that of the rest of the world. In short, one might argue that the situation of young Csepel workers mirrors that of the Hungarian industrial working class as a whole. Young or middle-aged, blue-collar or middle-class, we come to see workers not as helpless individuals but rather as conscious individuals seeking to determine their own fate. I hope to demonstrate that young industrial workers are lucid, active human beings who influence each stage in the process of reproduction.

The following chapters allow the workers of Csepel to speak in their own voices, as they address the complexities of working class-consciousness and reproduction to which theoretical discourse alone cannot fully do justice.

## 2 HISTORICAL ETHNOGRAPHY/ ETHNOGRAPHIC HISTORY: PEASANTS INTO WORKERS

In response to long-standing debates between structuralists, symbolic analysts and materialists, the anthropologist Eric Wolf has claimed that anthropology must rediscover history, for, in his words, a 'theoretically informed history and historically informed theory must come together to account for populations specifiable in time and space, both as outcomes of significant processes and as their carriers' (1982: 21). This agenda, with its theoretical reliance on the 'mode of production' approach to understanding the present world by 'tracing the growth of the world market and the course of capitalist development' (1982: 21), has provided a significant point of departure for many 'historically-bounded' studies, an area still holding prominence for anthropologists, concerned as they are with social processes, cultural change and global transformations (Ahmed and Shore 1995; Hann 1994). Earlier, the economic historians Berend and Ránki had proposed a similar political economic framework for situating the development of capitalism in Eastern Europe in general and Hungary in particular (1955; 1974; 1985). Their argument corresponds with Immanuel Wallerstein's 'world-systems' theory and concerns the ways in which Eastern Europe emerged as economically backward in relation to the 'western core', with large masses of disempowered, proletarianized peasants transformed into a helpless, exploited industrial proletariat. According to Berend and Ránki, this process takes place in ways that seem at once generalized and homogeneous. 'Peasant' and 'proletariat' none the less provide useful categories for illuminating the transition from agricultural and nearly self-sufficient household production to another cluster of homogeneity altogether: the industrial working class.

Critical explanatory entities, including 'capitalism', 'nation', 'tradition', 'class', 'rural' and 'peasants', have also been examined from perspectives that engage the emergence of these categories not simply as observable realities, but as categories for analysing difference (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983; O'Brian and Roseberry 1991; Roseberry 1989; Shanin 1990). As I argued in Chapter 1, the category of youth, and with it the notion of working-class youth culture, has been re-evaluated by scholars from a range of disciplines. For most of this time anthropologists, however, have distanced

themselves. By analysing capitalist historical developments in their East-Central European setting, my primary aim is to argue for the utility of combining an 'historically informed theory', as Wolf has suggested, with the development of youth as a category of differentiation in a specific political economic cultural context.

The relative weight assigned to such categories must consequently be investigated as part of the same historical process that allows such clusters to be analysed and re-created by the investigator. Considering groups of animal herders as 'rural' or 'peasant', based solely on their proximity to the nation's capital, begs the question of the distances of removal required to qualify for these labels. Likewise, if 'peasant' is understood to mean one who works on the land and rears farm animals, then one might well question the number of hours of work a day and heads of cattle it takes to qualify for that rubric. If indeed Theodor Shanin is right that the category 'peasant' is nothing more than a mystification to those 'who are prone to become mystified' (1990: 73), one might equally well agree that 'the conceptualisation of peasant specificity rests on the admission of the complexity and degrees of ambivalence of social reality' (1990: 73). At the same time, such a re-evaluation begs the question about the very producers, their reproduction or socialization and age and gendered identities. In particular, who are these peoples whose definitions – both self and outsiders' – are so fundamentally tied to the labour process? To provide answers to these questions we must locate our analysis in an historically bound time and space, the ethnographic or fieldwork site; or, more bluntly, how the creation of this location intertwines with the making of the Hungarian working class, to paraphrase E.P. Thompson, or, alternatively, how this social development reveals aspects that provide a means to understand the history of a community.

The story of Csepel – both my anthropological re-presentation of a community formation and a part of constructed historical reality – enables us to understand better these compelling and entangled issues. In this chapter and Chapter 3, I take a retrospective look at Csepel and Csepel Island over the past century as they have been glossed in the political economic dilemma known as the 'problematical period', the transition from feudalism to capitalism. Rather than re-examining those debates, however, I shall concentrate on what seem to me to be the most salient historical and socio-economic developments that point to these critical areas of argument. In particular, I will emphasize three areas of concern: (1) that agriculturalism in Csepel was not simply a *longue durée* of homogeneity and isolation but, more precisely, a constant ebb and flow of populations, identities and changing relations; (2) that the arrival of industry and capital – known as the industrialization and urbanization processes – not only transformed local 'peasants' into a 'proletariat' as such, but also brought into being a different set of social, generational and gender relations to cater to the needs of industrial development; and (3) that Csepel's history and traditions

constitute a continuously renewed and renegotiated dynamic between the inhabitants themselves and those outside.<sup>1</sup>

#### THE DIACHRONY/SYNCHRONY OF CSEPEL

Anthropologists see the locale of a fieldwork site as bounded by markers such as village borders, geographical terrain and a people's sense of spatial referents. Accordingly, an argument might be made that Csepel, too, is a spatially circumscribed entity, for the island of Csepel is situated south of Budapest – or Buda and Pest as they were known until the unification of the two cities in 1872. Although the area is commonly referred to as Csepel Island, or *Csepel Sziget*, rarely do local people refer to themselves as Csepelers (*Csepeliek*, meaning town of Csepel proper), or 'Islanders' (*Szigetiek*, the remainder of the inhabitants south or Csepel). Making a distinction between those living in the town of Csepel itself and the rest of the island thus makes little sense as this geographical separation is more toponymical than real. Csepel Island is not very big; it includes just ten settlements: Szigetszentmiklós, Szigetcsép, Szigetszentmárton and Ráckeve in the east; Tököl, Szigetújfalu and Lórév in the west; Csepel in the north; and Makád in the south (Fényes 1843; Perenyi 1934). Csepel town proper is a part of these settlements. The island is in the shape of a string bean, the north–south axis extending a little over 28 miles (about 45 kilometres), and the widest stretch from one side of the Danube (Duna) to the other, no more than 6 miles (9 kilometres). The island has been surrounded by the river Duna since time immemorial; the Duna proper flanks the western side of the island and the 'Small Danube' (*Kisduna*), often called the 'Duna of Ráckeve' (*Ráckevei Duna*), flows on its eastern side. The waters of the Small Danube are rich in fish. Fishermen enjoy fat carp and catfish, but sturgeon (*viza*), once the pride of the river and an important source of fish on the world market until the eighteenth century, are now extinct. Although the heyday of riverboat traffic is long past, boats and ships continue to navigate the Danube proper.

The island rises nearly 100 metres above sea level. Its climate is similar to that of central Hungary, although beset by stronger winds. The soil is sandy and good for growing fruit, wheat and vegetables. Since the early Middle Ages, farming techniques have reshaped the contours of the island with its thickets, grassy floodplains and loess mounds. Its original bushy areas shrank considerably as the population increased and large sites were cleared for agriculture. Nevertheless, the panorama afforded by its varied terrain remains quite spectacular.

Wheat, corn, potatoes and barley have long been the principal crops cultivated on Csepel Island, while hayfields and market gardens occupy a considerable portion of the cultivated land. Large-scale viticulture and viniculture have not been of great importance until quite recently. However, Csepelers have owned sizeable vineyards on the other side of the Danube, taking

advantage of the sunny slopes of the Buda Hills around Budafok, Adony and Rácalmás. The red wine they produce is strong and full-bodied, made mostly of the *kadarka* grape. This species points to the Balkan origin of both the grape and its original cultivators, for the name derives from the Serbo-Croat 'skadarsk', meaning 'wine of Skodra' (Szombathy 1961: 18–19). Most settlements are located on the periphery of the island and are connected by two major paved roads along the north–south axis. Dirt roads linking the towns and the entire island were used for centuries by ox carts and horse-drawn carriages. Although its people were classified as 'peasants' in early chronicles, they were threatened annually by flood waters before regulation works were installed in the 1840s, as constant flooding and ice washed away ferries and harbours, forcing inhabitants to remain on the island or resort to ferries and boats to cross temporarily to the mainland. In a sense, then, Csepelers' identity was extended to include the river as a daily preoccupation – a source of transportation, food and information – but also a potential threat.

Thus, while the river itself could be an annoyance, it did not impose isolation from the neighbouring areas. For centuries, ferries (*rév*) connected the island to the rest of the country: one of the main ferry stations was at Ráckeve, the most important market and religious centre, while another was located at the northern tip, connecting the town of Csepel with the capital. Working the ferry was a profession in itself, one in which several families specialized until the beginning of the twentieth century when bridges were constructed. Even today, several ferries remain in operation, ferrying people and vehicles across the river. The ferries at Szigetujfalu and Lórév gave access to western Hungary, Transdanubia, whereas those at Ráckeve and several other points connected the island's population to the capital and to the vast *Kiskunság* region of the Great Plains.

Yet such a description scarcely begins to convey how this complex and varying 'ethnographic setting' might be experienced by its own inhabitants. Like the concept of an 'ethnographic present', or historical setting, the 'ethnographic setting' must be problematized. To take into consideration the formation of productive relations as a dynamic phenomenon, the spatial must be taken together with the chronological, as they are equally important in forming a people's knowledge of themselves and of others.

Since the thirteenth century, Hungary's geographical and political frontiers have undergone several, often drastic, alterations, none of which has spared Csepel Island. These have resulted in a continuous realignment of power relations and shifting identities. For centuries, the people of the island could watch river traffic transporting valuable goods northwards, linking the country to Bratislava (Pozsony, Pressburg), Vienna and the semi-core areas of the western world; and southwards, through Belgrade and to the Black Sea, connecting the various regions of the European periphery into a unified economic and trade network.<sup>2</sup> In this way, the island and its population were connected to the Habsburg Empire to the north and to the Ottoman Empire to the south. Unlike other towns, the island held a key

position because of its favourable location for harbours and shipyards. However, this potential was only realized in the nineteenth century with the onset of industrialization and the development of Budapest as the nation's commercial, banking and urban cultural heartland.

The nation's capital is situated at the northern tip of Csepel Island, like a crown ornamenting the monarch's head. In fact, Budapest has always ruled over the island, and until the end of the First World War, the royal house and its members owned most of Csepel Island. Old chronicles document Csepel's status as a royal dominion as early as the eleventh century. As a result, its ethnic composition and historical traditions went hand in hand with the transference of loyalties between royal dynasties.

The island of Csepel bears few imprints of the early Árpád dynasty (AD 900–1301), the first and only ruling house descended from the conquering Magyar tribes. A sense of early medieval historicity is quite forgotten today, however, and few associate Csepel with the royal house of Árpád. Historical records suggest that the Magyars, entering the Carpathian Basin in the ninth century, settled on its periphery, while the island itself was reserved for the royal house. The conquering Magyars – horsemen, according to historians – came into contact with the indigenous Slavic populations who were mostly incipient agriculturalists.<sup>3</sup>

As a function of its close proximity to Buda and Székesfehérvár, two seats of the royal household, Csepel Island housed hundreds of servants, craftsmen and guards serving the ruling dynasties. At the northernmost tip of the island (roughly where the state oil refinery and warehouse are today), a 'pleasure house' was built for the king's amorous escapades. The somewhat ambiguous sourcebook of anonymous authorship referred to in Hungarian historiography as the *Gesta* comments on the origin of the name of the island: 'Árpád appointed a very wise man, by the name Sepel [also Chepel], to be the royal stall master. Since he lived on this island, it was named after him' (Kubinyi 1965: 9). That the royal herd may have been maintained on the island is supported by the fact that the small town at the southern end of the island is called Lórév (meaning 'horse ferry') and that the taxation system of horses in feudal times was referred to as the 'horse-tax of Csepel' (*Csepel lótzied*).

During the long period between the eleventh and sixteenth centuries when the dominant 'tributary mode of production' (Roseberry 1989: 153; Wolf 1982: 81) was established throughout the region, instead of being transferred or sold as a fief to faithful noblemen, the island was kept as the property of the royal house. Although not incorporated as a separate county, it enjoyed a unique status in that it remained under its own jurisdiction, headed by the county judge (*ispán*). This period was characterized by the rapid growth of the Hungarian kingdom. Peasant sharecroppers (*jobbágy*) and serfs (*zsellér*) lived in numerous scattered hamlets throughout the island; nineteenth-century sources mention at least two dozen inhabited areas (Galgóczy 1877; Pápai 1890). A close-knit agricultural network was maintained as inhabitants brought their goods to the weekly markets and



annual fairs in the central towns of Tököl and Ráckeve, marketplaces that apparently enjoyed economic prosperity. The predominance of these towns was the result of the influx of foreigners, especially Serbian and Croatian merchants and cultivators. Csepel Island was among the first to accept foreigners during the reign of Sigismund (1387–1437) when, under the pressure of Ottoman expansion – after the Christian armies had been virtually annihilated at the battle of Nicopolis in September 1396 – Sigismund permitted the settlement of South Slavs first in 1404, then in 1421 and 1428 (Kubinyi 1965: 12). These populations (referred to as ‘Illyrians’, or more ethnocentrically as ‘Rác’ by Hungarians; in early documents as ‘Rácz’) were Serbs, Croats and Bosnians. Settling in Tököl, Lórév, Ráckeve and Csép, they added not only local colour and occupational specialization to the economic framework, but perhaps equally important, a different collective identity known by these folk ethnonyms.

Perhaps the most detailed description of sixteenth-century Csepel Island, as it underwent significant alteration, is found in the historical-geographical treaty *Hungaria* by Miklós Oláh, secretary of the deposed queen Mary of Hungary, who wrote in 1536:

Just below Buda there is an island called Chepel. This island was given as a gift to the Queen of Hungary. It includes the settlements Chepel, Thekel, Szentmarton and Kevy (populated by Illyrians), and some other smaller hamlets as well as the royal palace. The island has plenty of birds, especially pheasants, partridges, blackbirds, bustards and others, and rabbits, deer and even wild boars. It does not lack anything that is needed for either everyday life or pleasure; bushy areas, small forests, vineyards, good pasture, and land for growing wheat and vegetables. This place provided plenty of possibilities for hunting, fowling and other leisurely activities for my queen and king, when they needed some rest from the mounting problems troubling them. (quoted in Ikvai 1977: 137)

The fleeing South Slavic groups, however, were to find peace in Hungary for only a few decades. Under Ottoman pressure, after the disastrous battle of Mohács in 1526, the country was divided into three: the western and northern parts were under Habsburg and Hungarian control; the central portion, including Csepel Island, became known as ‘Turkish-Hungary’, and the eastern provinces and Transylvania remained largely independent. This tripartite division resulted in a massive restructuring of the country’s population and resources. In 1541, Ottoman rule was established throughout the region as signified by the Turkish local administration, known as *vilayet*.

But Ottoman rule did not prove to be beneficial to the island and its inhabitants; in 150 years, of the 16 settlements, ten were recorded by contemporary writers as abandoned, including the small village of Csepel itself (Bártfai 1938: 404; Pápai 1890: 17–18). In the 1690s, the Habsburg Empire gained a strong foothold in East-Central Europe and in the battle of Buda in 1689 won a decisive victory over Ottoman forces. The Turkish army was

forced to withdraw from Hungarian territory, leaving a trail of devastation in its wake.

#### EIGHTEENTH- AND NINETEENTH-CENTURY DEVELOPMENTS: THE INVENTION OF YOUTH

The depopulated tip of the island did not remain immune to the social, political and cultural forces reshaping the knowledge and identities of the people of Hungary. No sooner had the House of Habsburg established its hegemony than German colonists flocked into the areas of the newly expanded Habsburg Empire (Macartney 1962: 98; Verdery 1983: 89). It was during the reign of Karl, and in particular of Maria Theresa (1740–80) that these settlers arrived in large numbers, populating parts of western Hungary (Transdanubia), the Bánát region of southern Hungary, Transylvania and the area round the Buda Hills. These German speakers have been referred to variously as Schwab, Zipfer and Pressburger, indicating their presumed regional origin. Some older family members mentioned these ethnonyms to me as late as the mid-1990s, but only to evoke pronounced elements of their 'earlier' presence in Csepel, as opposed to Gypsies, who were the more recent migrant workers.

These new settlers, like their 'Saxon' predecessors (whose ethnic label may refer to any German-speaking settler) 500 years earlier, occupied a privileged position in Hungarian society, especially compared with other peasants. They were given land and received tax-free services; forced labour (*robot*) was either not required of them or amounted to only a few days a year; and the taxes they paid were low. Their privileged status laid the foundation for years of hostilities to come. Nevertheless, these prosperous communities had a profound impact on the cultural, political and economic landscape of Csepel Island. In fact, of its major settlements, only Makád and Szigetszentmiklós were predominantly Magyar; five settlements – including Csepel, Szigetscép, Szigetbecse, Szigetszentmárton and Szigetújfalu – had a German-speaking majority, and Szigetscép, Lórév and Tököl had a Serbo-Croatian majority (Pápai 1890: 18–19).

To legitimate the presence of these 'original founding fathers', a patent (called an *Urbarium*) from Prince Eugen of Savoy was issued in 1712:

To the letter of inquiry, signed by Johann Georg Utz, Augustin Schneider, and Benedikt Braun, written on behalf of their fellow countrymen, all of whom arrived here from Schwabia, the Honourable Prince Eugen of Savoy, with all his right and power, allow these citizens to take a homestead and start rebuilding the area of Csepel that now lies on the northern tip of his majesty's princely estate of Ráckeve, near the Buda castle, on the same spot where the ruins of the former royal palace stood. (quoted in Perényi 1934: 23) <sup>4</sup>

By the middle of the eighteenth century, the entire island was incorporated into the existing social and economic framework that characterized all of

Hungary. Although Buda remained the capital, close ties to Ráckeve, a small town that served as a market and religious centre, connected its people. Thus, Ráckeve emerged as the district seat for Pilis, a new administrative system organized by the Habsburgs who took great pains to eliminate all the traces of Turkish, or for that matter earlier royal Hungarian, systems of county administration, which accorded it the privilege of holding weekly markets and four major fairs each year.

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, unlike Ráckeve, the hamlet of Csepel experienced a fairly slow period of growth. This was the result of the landed aristocracy's tight control over the population and the unique status of the second serfdom that emerged after 1514 (Berend and Ránki 1974; Hilton 1976).<sup>5</sup> The strong multi-ethnic character of the small agro-feudal town was confirmed throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. According to regional statistics (*summarium*), 19 families inhabited Csepel in 1720: of these, twelve were South Slavic and seven German (Kubinyi 1959: 230). In the 1770s, Csepel's population was a mere 312, members of 42 families; of these, 26 were German, 15 South Slavic and only one family was recorded as Hungarian (Kubinyi 1959: 243, 253). Not surprisingly, the Hungarian family was called *zsellér*, the poorest and most exploited socio-economic group in the Habsburg Empire.

With the influx of German speakers, Csepel Island acquired a unique multi-ethnic structure. The South Slavs and the German Schwabs lived alongside each other, but without the ethnic friction or hostility that characterized later events. As we learn from Kubinyi's (1959) thorough historical analysis, peaceful inter-ethnic relations promoted prosperity and a stable balance of power between the ethnic groups. During this period, Csepel continued to be influenced by the socio-economic developments taking place in the rest of the country, but with the added local cultural difference of its status as a multi-ethnic milieu (Berend and Ránki 1974, 1977).

The village of Csepel was governed by a type of feudalism in which peasants and serfs paid tithes and taxes to landlords and the Church. Land was divided and allocated according to the *sessio* (section) system – one *sessio* was equal to one *cadastre* (*hold*, roughly a half-acre). Families with enough money could obtain several *sessio* holdings, with each holding subjected to taxes and services. The average size of the more prosperous freemen households up to 1848 was about 31–36 *holds* (Kubinyi 1959: 234). These 'wealthy peasants' formed the middle class of Hungarian peasantry up to the early twentieth century and were identified by native ethnographers as the 'true peasants'.

The confinement of Csepel (or 'the village' as it was known) was divided into small *sessio teleks* (plots) – the inner *sessio*, composed of single-family plots (house, garden, courtyard), held privately, and the outer *sessio*, with land further away, divided into croplands, pastures and forests – utilized in common according to the terms set down in the *Urbarium*. At the end of the eighteenth century, each family was required to pay a tax of one *forint* on

its house, about 18 *forints* in goods and ten days a year forced labour (Kubinyi 1965: 19).

Taxes were increased at the beginning of the nineteenth century, contributing to the further pauperization of the poor. At the same time, agriculture had become more productive and the resulting small surpluses were taken to Ráckeve and, from the 1850s, to the markets of Pest and Buda. Since all lands (including pasture) belonged to the royal house, animal husbandry was largely limited to subsistence-oriented production for most inhabitants. In 1828, when Csepel's population amounted to 762, there were just 25 cows, 73 horses, 90 oxen and no sheep in private ownership, a rather sad tally for a village of its size (Kubinyi 1959: 241, 243). Nevertheless, this demonstrates that Csepel had established itself as a separate entity from the rest of the island, both through the field-system and socially, with interdependent groups locked into a social hierarchy. At this point, the story of Csepel still resembles that of rural villages throughout the Habsburg Empire – an ethnically and religiously divided agro-proletariat, with males as household heads and females bearing the triple burden of home, children and agriculture, exploited by both the Church and aristocracy.

Although fully under way in the core areas of western Europe by the 1820s (Harvey 2001, Hobsbawm 1962; Thompson 1963), industrialization was half a century in the future for the people of Hungary. But with the onset of the nineteenth century, the story of Csepel begins to take on new characteristics, from population increase and transfer, realignments in the social structure and the influx of foreign capital and tradesmen, to technological advances, imbalances in power relations and the reallocation of resources between powerless and powerful, exploited and exploiters. This period of transformation was coupled with increasing poverty and collective responses to it, as exemplified in the outbreak of the Revolution and War of Independence of 1848–49, an event hailed by Marx and Engels as the 'springtime of the people'. Yet the revolutionary spirit of 1848–49 was not destined to leave a lasting memory in the minds of Csepelers, with the exception of a few intellectuals.

For more immediate events were to demand the attention of the populace: in 1831 a devastating cholera epidemic claimed 187,998 lives in Pest county alone, and in 1838 the Duna flooded much of the island, forcing massive relocation (Galgóczy 1877: 18). According to historical sources, the flood of 10 March drastically affected the village of Csepel and its people: of the 114 houses, 106 were totally destroyed and the remaining eight badly damaged. This natural disaster forced the people to relocate from the western shore of the Duna a few hundred metres inland where the central square of the district still stands today. A contemporary chronicler, Galgóczy, describes the newly built village:

The arrangement is completely patterned; brand new mud-brick houses with shingles are built alongside the two main streets. Beautiful trees ornament the front of each house, and are well tended by the elected village council. (1877: 18)

So it was that, in 1838, Galgóczy's village experienced a renaissance: the 114 households were given loans for relocation and reconstruction; and the majority were allocated additional land. This proved beneficial to some, disastrous to others. Poor *zseller* families who had owned no property or land in the former settlement remained landless following the relocation. Nevertheless, for most, prosperity and a general sense of well-being were to be the legacy. Like Buda and Pest (where the influx of foreigners boosted the population in 1838 to 30,001 and 56,577 respectively, thus reshaping the cities' contours), Csepel underwent a massive socio-economic and cultural transformation (Waldapfel 1948).

In physical shape, outlook and industriousness, Csepel became an exemplar, a microcosm of the Austro-Hungarian Dual Monarchy. Its conscious patterning – Roman Catholic Church, city hall, shops, parish house and gendarmerie along the main streets and the central square – adhered to the German *Schachbrettdorf* (chessboard-village) style (Rugg 1985: 165). Such acceptance of colonialism was expressed in the popular saying: 'Hungarians founded the state and Germans the cities.' Even today, the central square reveals the persistence of this settlement pattern as newly built houses replicate one another, a consequence of imperial orders regulating the lives of ordinary citizens of the Habsburg state. Elongated in shape, the houses' gable end faced the street, separated by an open court in the *Streckhof* manner (Rugg 1985: 112–13). By the mid- to late nineteenth century, Csepel was well on its way to developing into a small capitalistic entrepreneurial agro-town as its population continued to grow, as the following simple calculation indicates:

Table 2.1 Population Growth in Csepel and Buda-Pest, 1826–69

	1826	1846	1851	1869
Csepel	598	921	970	1,329
Buda-Pest	86,578	140,500	133,955	270,477

Source: Nagy (1975: 376), Vörök (1978: 187, 189).

The doubling of the population of Buda and Pest and its environs can be understood as concomitant with the penetration of foreign capital seeking new venues. Csepelers experienced this demographic explosion not only quantitatively but qualitatively. The town's multi-ethnic character, for example, altered substantially as the number of Germans increased marginally from 521 in 1832 to 650 in 1839; at the same time, however, the number of South Slavic speakers decreased from 190 in 1832 to 150 in 1839, the remainder being Hungarians who entered the thriving agricultural village (Kubinyi 1959: 246). The German families of Niederkirchern, Utz, Hut, Najpeger and Petz and the 'Rác' families of Zorinyac, Gyurac,

Versics and Agics had retained their privileged positions and were capable of consolidating family resources in order to become prosperous landowners and traders. One of the wealthiest German (or Schwab, as they referred to themselves) families, the Niederkirchners, owned 238 *holds* (about 340 acres); their 'Rác' counterpart, the Zorinyac family, possessed 65 *holds* (93 acres). The town administration and judiciary-executive bodies were controlled by – and served the interests of – these wealthy extended families. Until the end of the nineteenth century, the judge (*biró*) was selected from among either the wealthy German and/or the Rác families, with the understanding that if he were German, his associate must be Slavic, and vice versa (Perényi 1934: 38).

Clearly, prosperity in productive relations engendered a mutually beneficial multi-ethnic affinity between these groups, although it is clear that, at this time, Germans represented the majority. Hungarians (Magyars) began to move into Csepel in greater numbers only in 1846 and then as migrant labourers from the neighbouring villages, either from the southern settlements of the island or further away, in an effort to improve their dismal situation under the pressures of the urban laws. Albeit small in number, these Magyars worked for the rich Schwab and 'Rác' households as agricultural serfs, or *zsellér* (Kubinyi 1959: 247). Although no historical sources can be cited, it would appear that Csepel's leaders promoted an exclusivist and segregationist policy to allow only those Hungarians to move in who were needed immediately. Even in the 1880s, Hungarians numbered only around 100, a demographic trend that lasted until the turn of the century when industrialization changed the course of history for Csepelers. By 1900, over 2,000 people, 44 per cent of Csepel's population, identified themselves as Magyars, as opposed to 2,204 (44.1 per cent) who identified themselves as German-Schwabs (See Table 2.2).

As small-scale cottage and craft industries developed, the relationship between the two ethnic groups played a pivotal role in daily life. This productive economy determined family residence, socialization practices and new age-based social relations as well. As one might expect, this was based on ethnicity and an agricultural mode of production. Although most of the lower-class inhabitants spoke Hungarian, German was the preferred language of administration, while at home the populace spoke their respective mother tongues. Károly Pápai, a writer who travelled to the island in the late 1880s, published a travelogue monograph, *Csepel Island and its Inhabitants* (1890). His observations not only offer a unique ethno-historical document but shed light on the ideology determining the generational differences and socialization patterns of peasant children in a multi-ethnic milieu.

The various peoples on the island do not intermarry and do not understand each other's languages. Because of this isolation, the process of Magyarisation is rather slow. This seems to be the case especially with the 'Rác' population. In order to speed up this process, Germans send their children to Szigetszentmiklós to serve in

Table 2.2 Composition of Csepel's Population According to Religious and Ethnic Affiliation, 1869–1930

	1869	1880	1890	1900	1910	1920	1930
Roman Catholic	1,317	1,515	2,175	4,141	7,674	10,718	17,243
Greek Catholic	–	1	–	15	33	114	149
Reformed	4	7	53	284	865	1,562	3,508
Evangelical	3	1	18	63	262	516	1,163
Greek Orthodox	1	–	–	23	35	72	94
Unitarian	–	–	–	–	1	–	–
Jewish	4	2	–	1	–	–	–
Other	0.3	0.1	–	–	26	107	106
					0.3%	0.8%	0.5%
Hungarian <sup>a</sup>	–	101	565	2,015	7,672	10,547	20,827
		6%	25%	44%	83%	77%	91%
German	–	1,194	1,559	2,204	1,334	2,542	1,706
		78%	69%	48%	14%	18%	7%
Slovak	–	15	4	41	41	122	126
		1%	0.2%	0.9%	0.4%	0.9%	0.5%
Romanian	–	–	1	1	–	53	14
						0.4%	0.1%
Croatian	–	204	–	5	11	23	46
		13%		0.1%	0.1%	0.2%	0.2%
Serbian	–	–	108	13	37	53	41
			4%	0.3%	0.4%	0.4%	0.2%
Sokac <sup>b</sup>	–	–	–	239	7	129	49
				5%	0.1%	0.9%	0.2%
Other	–	12	9.4	501	54.6	120.9	92.4
		0.8%					
Total	1,329	1,526	2,246	4,568	9,156	13,589	22,901

Source: All data are calculated from contemporary statistics.

Notes:

- For 1869 there is no breakdown according to nationality or ethnicity.
- The ethnonym *Sokác* or *Sokci* refers to a particular Croatian group living in southern Hungary and the border regions of Croatia.

Hungarian households and, in turn, Hungarians send their children to work in German villages to learn the German language. (Pápai 1890: 20)

What is intriguing is the co-mingling of peasant producers in spite of antagonistic ethnic and religious cleavages. This paved the way for the creation of the future heterogeneous industrial workforce, which ignored its own class position until the latter acquired political and symbolic significance as the result of antagonistic class relations. The influx of the South Slavic and German settlers not only radically altered the economy and trade of Csepel Island, but the age-based social relations as well. The policies of the Habsburg rulers favoured the aristocracy and the landed peasantry, and therefore further entrenched the class nature of Hungarian society.



1 Children on Csepel Island, 1911 (Hungarian Ethnographic Museum, Budapest).

The role of youth was also traditional albeit with minute changes that signalled the exploited status of Hungary within the Imperial realm. Until the eighteenth century, the Hungarian language possessed only two linguistic categories to describe youth: *fiatal* and *ifjú* (interestingly, both etymologically connected to the term 'son', *fiú*, even though today the term youth refers to both sexes); and one for bachelor (*legény*). Within the slowly changing world of labour social categories were also considerably altered. From the 1700s, a host of new terms appeared to refer to youth and especially bachelors (*suhanc*, *siheder*, *serdülő*, *süvölvény*, *suttyó*), a shift in popular discourse indicative of the subtle social relations between adults and young men. This was facilitated by the emergence of several new institutions



and, especially important, the slowly developing intensive agriculture that characterized the regions incorporated into the Habsburg imperial economy. The first important institution affecting age-based relations was conscription of all men from the age of 21 into the Habsburg army. Second, was the educational system and the schooling of young men; through this institution they were formally socialized as loyal citizens of the Habsburg rulers. While this reflected the new politicization of social relations, in rural communities there were subtler and more intricate age- and gender-based differences separating those who were married with homes of their own from those who were not (Fél and Hofer 1969: 186–201).

In fact, at the end of the nineteenth century, Pápai and his predecessor, Károly Galgóczy, found the island to be a colourful, varied and exciting region south of Budapest. Twice a week and especially during one of the four annual fairs, Serbo-Croat villagers from Lórév brought their wines to market; Gypsies traded wooden tubs and utensils; prosperous German farmers from Csepel sold fruit and wheat, while 'Illyrian' shepherds from Tököl traded in sheep; Jewish peddlers from Ráckeve offered their wares, and from Makád, a disabled Magyar veteran of the 1848–49 War of Independence played the hurdy-gurdy (*nyenyér*), supervised all the while by loyal gendarmerie who patrolled the streets. Markets and fairs were popular venues for youth to socialize and find suitable partners.

Such local colour, masking a variety of occupations, religious affiliations, linguistic codes and ethno-specific behaviour, characterized not only Csepel Island but towns such as Pozsony (Bratislava, Pressburg) in north-western Hungary and Brasso (Hermanstadt, Brasov) in Transylvania, as well as other regions with equally complex heterogeneity and socio-historical amalgamation (Katus 1983; Verdery 1983). These features were the result of the 1867 political *Ausgleich*, the compromise that allowed greater freedom in internal matters and economic reorganization, a process that helped to reshape the traditional framework of the Dual Monarchy and its relations with the outside world.

None the less, at the end of the nineteenth century, the settlement of Csepel remained relatively small in comparison to Ráckeve or neighbouring Sziget-szentmihály. While the latter boasted plenty of Hungarian small craftsmen (tanners, coopers, cobblers, hatters, blacksmiths, butchers, tailors and felt-makers) and shopkeepers, Csepel had only three general stores, a cobbler, a tailor, a carpenter and one stonemason (Galgóczy 1877: 19). Since no bridge had yet been constructed to connect the island to Budapest, islanders were forced to use the makeshift 'Kvassay dam' built in 1872 for commuters to Pesterzsébet, and the tram to central Budapest. The first bridge connecting Csepel and Pesterzsébet was erected in 1896, the year of national celebration commemorating the foundation of the 'thousand-year empire of St. Stephen'. Yet it is clear that, despite these drawbacks, Csepelers were more prosperous than their southernmost neighbours in Szigetszentmiklós or in Makád: because their landholdings and houses were better tended and considerably

larger, their identity was more that of a *Burger* than a peasant. By this time, Budapest seemed closer to Csepel (both culturally and economically) than the largely peasant centre of Ráckeve to the south. Furthermore, as flour-milling, steamboat traffic and railway construction assured Budapest's place as the cultural, political and economic capital, it also began to represent modernity, industrialization and technological as well as material advances to Csepelers (Compton 1979; Sárfalvi 1980).

As a final blow to centuries of agricultural island economy, by the 1890s the upwardly mobile citizens of Csepel had begun to take their goods to Budapest rather than Ráckeve, a sign of upwardly mobile peasant entrepreneurship. The shift to Budapest markets was facilitated by the small-scale capitalist horticulture practised by another new group of immigrants known as 'Bulgarian gardeners' (*bolgárkertész*). Realizing the enormous potential for growth and land-leasing possibilities, they settled in Csepel in the early 1870s. With this complex multi-ethnic and agricultural milieu, and justifiably proud of its newly acquired township status (*nagyközség*) in 1900, Csepel was now on the threshold of a new era.

#### THE BELATED CAPITALIST PHASE

This text focuses on a community known mainly as agricultural and which, throughout its history, suffered the impact of powerful forces that emerged from beyond its borders, radically altering the make-up of the town and its inhabitants. These forces inexorably hastened the decline of earlier production methods to the point where industry overtook Csepel's agricultural heritage. This situation also facilitated the change in age-class relations among the country's agricultural producers whose strong reliance on household production units, traditional gender roles and kinship characterized most East European rural societies (Farnsworth and Viola 1992; Lampland 1995; Shanin 1990). Increasingly, young men gained in importance as their physical skills and strength were required for industrial work in the mines, railways, factories and building. Women and the elderly, on the other hand, were relegated to agricultural labour and household chores.

The late nineteenth century was a pivotal period in the development of capitalism in Hungary, during which time the country experienced continuous change and belatedly contributed to the capitalistic transformation of East-Central Europe (Berend and Ránki 1955; Sándor 1954). In comparison to other parts of the Habsburg Empire (Croatia, Serbia, Transylvania and Bukovina), Hungary was relatively well off (Berend and Ránki 1974). As such, it became both the breadbasket of Europe and a semi-periphery of the more heavily industrialized core countries of Western Europe, into which streamed Austrian, Jewish and German capital and labourers of varying backgrounds, accelerating a transformation hitherto unknown in the history of the country (Berend and Ránki 1985; Cole 1985).

By the 1880s, railway construction (and the booming capital goods industries of steel, iron and coal-mining to which it gave rise) had begun to provide an outlet for investment necessary for the establishment of industrial capitalism. While railways opened up the more remote areas of the empire (Transylvania, Slovakia, Bukovina, Croatia, Bácska and Bánát) to capitalist penetration, increasing industrial output throughout the Western European core provided new markets for western exports. Rural citizens – the discovered peasantry – dressed more colourfully and, with the availability of new materials, local and regional differentiation became more clearly demarcated.

The process of urbanization was related to the availability of a new youthful labour force as disenchanting village males from the hinterlands flocked to these industries, joining the growing proletarian labour force (Harvey 1985). With the rise of new industrial wage labour, commercial infrastructure made possible by the railways and steamboats, and opportunities for immigration, the peripheries of the Habsburg Monarchy increasingly became the locus of capital investment from the core regions of Prussia, Austria, Bohemia-Moravia, Germany and even France and England. The result of this transformation was that an ever-expanding population became linked to the world economy, dominated by capitalism (Hoppe and Langton 1994; Wolf 1982).

The expanding capitalist world system brought systemic changes to the Dual Monarchy 'by initiating alterations in occupational and social structure and in the degree of urbanization' (Rugg 1985: 137). Economic historians have pointed to changes in occupation between 1870, when roughly 80 per cent of the active population engaged in agriculture, and 1910, when the figure had fallen to 64.5 per cent. At the same time, with the influx of young men into the factories, the industrial workforce increased from 8.6 to 17.1 per cent. The number of workers engaged in transportation and trade also doubled: in 1870, it was a mere 2.9 per cent of the working population; by 1910, it was 6.5 per cent (Berend and Ránki 1974).

Clearly, by the beginning of the twentieth century, a new industrial society was in the making as working-class centres sprang up throughout the country, and towns such as the mining and steel-producing Miskolc, Diosgyőr, Salgótarján and Mecsek became truly proletarian. Budapest acquired the status not only as the 'flour-milling capital' of the country, but, with the establishment of major plants such as the Ganz, the rock engineering factory and the Tungstram electric factory, as the industrial capital. Consequently, it experienced substantive demographic change. Its population rose from 297,000 in 1869 to 1,098,000 in 1910, with more than 200,000 people living in the suburbs of Greater Budapest. From 1890 to 1910, those employed in industry nearly quadrupled from 35,000 to 110,600, most of whom were employed in the machine sector (36 per cent), paper milling (17 per cent) and steel and metal production (12 per cent). Between 1898 and 1913, the number of factories in Hungary rose from 2,747 to 5,521, and by the beginning of the First World War, the number of

workers rose to over 500,000; by that time, too, the iron and machine industry was the second largest employer (after food and flour-milling) in terms of manpower, machinery horsepower and gross production (Berend and Ránki 1955: 295; 1974: 128). Most of these, as well as the large banks, were in foreign hands (mostly German and Austrian).

The complex multi-ethnic nature of the Dual Monarchy contributed to the flow of capital and labour from poor agricultural regions to these developing industrial urban centres and North America. In the second half of the mid-nineteenth century the Hungarian gentry (*dzsentri*) celebrated two events: the Compromise (*Anschluss*), the legalization of the Dual Monarchy by providing the Hungarian Kingdom greater rights; and the Millennium of 1896, a year-long state celebration extolling the longevity of the Hungarian nation and the survival of the thousand-year empire of St Stephen, Hungary's first saint king. In this re-creation of the nation, nationalism and populism, together with anti-Semitism and hatred of foreigners and non-Magyar ethnic groups within the Monarchy, became the driving intellectual and artistic force, especially for the aspiring middle classes (Janos 1982). It was during this period that Hungarian workers learned a new word, *meló* (work), from Yiddish-speaking businessmen and merchants, and, despite its negative connotation today, the adoption of *meló* signalled that the spirit of industrial capitalism had arrived.

## THE WEISS FAMILY

The creation of certain business enterprises is often anchored to elites, leading families and prominent individuals. In Europe, as elsewhere, urbanization and industrialization were simultaneous and intertwined processes connected to prestigious and successful family businesses and crafts or, to use Gary McDonogh's fine expression, to a number of 'good families' (1986: 10–11). The story of the Weiss family and their economic role in building one of the largest industrial complexes in 1892 cannot be divorced from Csepel's destiny at the turn-of-the-century. Here I am concerned not with the history of one of the most influential industrial families, but more specifically with the impact of industry and the appearance of capitalism on the fabric of the village, its people and institutions, as they were elevated into a town of international stature.

The story of the Weiss family and the founding of the 'Manfred Weiss Steel and Metal Works' in 1892 is well documented (Baczoni 1977; Berend 1965; Bródy 1916; Varga 1981, 1983). Leaving aside the historical record, I shall attempt a brief characterization of the family, its origins, role and successes, as they bear upon an anthropological narrative of Csepel and its inhabitants.

The arrival of an entrepreneurial, influential Jewish family, the Weisses, is illustrative in many ways. First, the family's success is typical of the general pattern through which foreigners were able to assimilate to Hungarian

conditions. Second, the diversification of the Weiss family members' properties and monies embodies the ways in which capital-building crisscrossed the whole of Hungarian and East-Central European society, transforming not only industry but agriculture too. Third, by looking at the Weiss family's role in transforming Csepel, we are offered important insights into the ways in which unequal capitalist development and peripheral industrialization took place, influencing local conditions – topics dear to historians and historically-minded anthropologists alike (Donham 1990, Hoppe and Langton 1994, Roseberry 1989, Verdery 1983).

The Patent of Joseph II, issued in 1781, allowed Jewish merchants and bankers to settle throughout the empire, hence facilitating not only territorial but also hierarchical mobility. Gaining access to strategic resources during the Napoleonic Wars, this entrepreneurial class developed a driving force that was based on profit, accumulation of surplus capital and the welfare of members of the extended family (Varga 1983: 36). The origin of the Weiss family dates from these decades: by the beginning of the 1820s, it had established its first small-pipe manufacturing shops in Pest, while succeeding generations engaged in small-scale manufacturing production. By the time Manfred, the sixth child of Adolf Weiss, was born in 1857, the family were undertaking loan servicing and stocks for the newly emerging rail and flour-milling companies. By Hungarian standards, the family was considered wealthy in the 1850s, a decade that followed the disastrous events of 1848–49 and saw the re-establishment of Austrian hegemony over Hungary.

The patriarch, Adolf Weiss, allowed his sons to invest in the newly emerging industrialization plans. Having studied trade and economics in Hamburg in the 1870s, Manfred Weiss was well acquainted with the workings of western industry, commerce and business skills. He returned to Budapest after his father's death where, together with his brother Berthold, he launched a large-scale supply business for the Austro-Hungarian *Kaiserliche und Königliche* army. Nearly all aspects of this business, including transportation, commerce, hospitals and medical supplies, feed and foodstuffs for the army, became centralized in the hands of the Weiss brothers. By 1881, the annual cash flow of the army supply business reached an all-time high of 2.6 million *forints*. However, in the early 1880s, the marketing of American wheat in Europe and, consequently, the slump of European wheat prices brought fundamental changes to the flour-milling industry. The Weiss brothers were therefore forced to seek other investment opportunities, of which three – real estate, land and heavy industry – were identified as potentially profitable. Within a few years, the Weiss family had acquired large real estate holdings throughout Budapest and had gained a place in the ranks of the privileged national elites.

The first Weiss factory, founded in 1882, was a modest meat-canning operation (Baczoni 1977: 23–5). Aware of the army's needs for canned food, the Weiss brothers maintained strong ties with the supply division of the

Ministry of Military Affairs of the Austro-Hungarian army, by all measures the largest army in Europe. The shift from production of metal cans to the manufacture of bullet shells and ammunition was almost immediate. By 1892, the Weiss factory was producing not only canned foodstuffs (soup, vegetable, bread, coffee and meat dishes), but over 100,000 *forints* worth of rifle magazines and Mannlicher shells annually. By that time, the small factory in the Pesterzsébet district employed as many as 720 workers (over 100 unskilled hired hands, including women and young people) and deployed steam engines totalling 45 hp. Flexibility was important and, at times, even crucial. The Weiss brothers realized that during economic crises, traditional production methods and a static business mentality were counterproductive. In subsequent years, they expanded their network and capital expenditures, brought new technology to Hungary and enthusiastically engaged in other business ventures.

Berthold, the older of the two brothers, married the daughter of an important Austrian businessman, and Manfred took as his wife Alice, the daughter of the magnate Albert Wahl, executive director of the Fiume-Great Plain Railroad Company (*Alföldi-Fiumei Vasút Rt*). Subsequently, the Weiss family became allied by marriage with the powerful and wealthy families of Mauthner, Deutsch-Hatvany, Kornfeld and Chorin, all successful capitalists owning important real estate holdings and factories (Baczoni 1977; Varga 1983). In 1892, these families played an essential role in founding arguably the largest and most important corporate organization in Hungarian industry, the Association of National Industrialists (*Gyáriparosok Országos Szövetsége*, GYOSZ).

Another aspect of their progress was the acceptance of Jewish business families as members of the Hungarian aristocracy through prestigious 'noble' positions and titles offered by the Hungarian government, a move that elevated them to a level equal to that of the traditional landowning Hungarian classes (Lengyel 1990; McCagg 1972). Manfred Weiss, for example, thanks to his 'roles in Hungarian trade and industry as well as for his social and humanitarian acts', received Hungarian noble status (*nemes*) in 1896; in 1918, he was awarded the title of baron (Perenyi 1934: 84; Varga 1983: 55). He was thereafter known as Baron Manfred Weiss of Csepel, a symbolic but nevertheless important title.<sup>6</sup>

However, it was business expansion and involvement in other industrial development that enabled the Weisses to become one of the wealthiest and most influential families in Hungary. This process was advanced by limited state intervention and tax-free status given to new industrial ventures. In short, Manfred Weiss had become the quintessential Hungarian entrepreneurial success story, an East-Central European counterpart of the American Andrew Carnegie, the German Rothschilds and predecessor of the modern chief executive officer of the multinational corporation.<sup>7</sup>

## THE MANFRED WEISS WORKS

With regard to working-class development, the foundation of the Manfred Weiss Works and its vast industrial labour force constituted the single most significant event in the reconstruction of the industrial age and gender relations. It was the Rifle and Ammunition Company that forced the Weiss brothers to seek new locations for their expanding business ventures, for an explosion in 1890 required them to relocate the ammunition shop to a more sparsely populated area. On 12 January 1893, the chief judge of Ráckeve permitted the ammunition factory to be built in Csepel: '[A] building permit is issued to the above-named individuals with the understanding that all required plans, precautions against accidents, and the availability of first-aid kits will be kept in strict order' (Baczoni 1977: 24). Three factors contributed to the choice of Csepel as a possible future site for the factory plant: first, its proximity to Budapest; second, the frontage onto the Danube for shipyard and river traffic; and, third, and of perhaps greatest importance, the unindustrialized nature of this small community with its cheap, unskilled agricultural surplus labour (Adamovics 1982: 11).

Economic development went hand in hand with new social relations. In particular, local-level politics and a generational hierarchy were intertwined to forge a unique working-class culture. The creation of this new industrial labour force and the development of a conscious working class were directly related to the labour relations of the time and the radicalization of the workforce. The initial years of construction presented no major conflicts between factory owners and the original land-owning inhabitants of Csepel. The disruption of subsistence and market-oriented agriculture and the exploitation of local resources and manpower – typical of the initial phase of capitalist penetration – came slowly. Capital and class united as wealthy land-owning families realized that the factory would provide job opportunities for the landless. Several remembered those early years: 'We didn't really understand what was happening all around us and we didn't really care, either.' First, the original canning and ammunition shop was set up on an abandoned 10-acre pasture to the west of the town near the river, a makeshift wooden structure with minimal machinery amounting to a mere 4 hp steam engine. Only 30–40 men but about 100 young women supplied the unskilled labour force. As historians and anthropologists on factory work have revealed, female and child labour was quite common in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (White 1994: 71–2). As Hobsbawm writes: 'the paid labour of women and children was, in fact, only too often essential to the family budget' (Hobsbawm 1987: 199). As the Csepel case illustrates, Hungarian industrial developments followed this practice: the incorporation of children and young people into production was essential to industrial development.

Agricultural labourers were engaged in intensive but seasonal work, and, at first, household heads benefited from the temporary work opportunities

provided by the factory, just as the village leaders hoped. Such a shift from agricultural tasks (*dolog*) to factory work (*munka*) provided a previously unavailable (at least to such a degree and quantity) commodity: hard currency. Although money (*pénz*) was not unknown, in the form of the *thaler* until the mid-nineteenth century to the silver *forint* after 1857 and the gold crown after 1892, this cash was different. It was new, not only in size and shape but also in value, thereby differing from previous forms of currency in that it was earned as an industrial wage, a fixed salary received after certain hours and kinds of labour. What Marx originally termed as the basic condition for capitalistic development, the commodification of labour (Roseberry 1989: 207–8), in fact was achieved during the industrial take-off in capitalist Hungary (cf. also Lampland 1995: 11–12). In this process human labour became a special commodity to be sold, exchanged and valued or devalued according to market conditions. As a result, the pauperization and the alienation of workers were also firmly cemented (Kolakowski 1978: 288). With industrial labour, a new, selective generational mechanism was put into effect which separated young men and women, a mobile group who could be employed as wage-labourers, from their elders and agricultural counterparts (Kriegel 1978: 26).

To conclude this chapter it serves us to remember that class relationships develop through participation in production (labour), reproduction (socialization) and politics (ideology) in the context of historically-specific state political economic practices. Therefore, to reveal how capitalist commodification arrived in historical Csepel with immediate consequences for class, gender and generational aspects of social life is especially important. Long an agricultural community, larger changes attendant upon industrialization and urbanization came after 1896 when the factory expanded considerably, boosting production and requiring large numbers of labourers. New contracts with the Ministry of Military Affairs offered exciting possibilities to the Weiss brothers for surplus accumulation and, at the same time, brought about increased output and technological expansion. An additional area, 50 *holds* in extent, was bought from the village and new machinery installed, totalling 160 hp, required for the new copper smelter, iron furnace and metal shops for the fabrication of drawn sheets. 1896 marked the foundation of the non-ferrous metal works and heralded the beginning of a new era: the Manfred Weiss Works had acquired a virtual monopoly over non-ferrous metals in Hungary. As the most dynamic industrial-technological sector of industry, metallurgical enterprises were the best paying employment opportunities for youth willing to flee the misery of country life. Tens of thousands of poor families sent their sons and daughters to learn a real trade, to become industrial workers. Little did they know that industrial work, like agricultural labour, is backbreaking, dangerous and has its own set of miseries.

Enhanced economic production, however, was a direct result of national and transnational political developments and created mayhem for workers



and managers alike. By the turn of the twentieth century, supplying nearly 30 per cent of the military needs of the Dual Monarchy, the factory was a truly unique industrial enterprise: not only canned food, shells and ammunition, but military accoutrements such as helmets, utensils and kitchen wagons (*tábori mozgókonyha*) constituted the bulk of the goods produced. In 1902, when the factory was selling its superior products to Turkey, Spain, Mexico, Russia, Holland and Bulgaria, the value of its annual output was 9 million crowns (Perényi 1934: 82–3; Varga 1983: 48). On the eve of the First World War, when Csepel's population had increased to 9,156, the Manfred Weiss Works was employing more than 5,000 workers, had acquired over 250 acres of land, and was utilizing machinery of some 14,000 hp (Baczoni 1977: 7; Kiss 1984; Perényi 1934). Support for this local development came in the form of the technological expertise of the Rothschild steel works at Witkowitz, enabling the Manfred Weiss Works to establish Hungary's foremost steel-mill (Berend and Ránki 1965: 45; Czakó 1972: 8). As several Csepel family stories aptly testified, the weapons of mass destruction that were made in Csepel were used by their relatives during the war.

During the war years as agriculture and traditional coal and energy production experienced a precipitous decline, metallurgy at the Manfred Weiss Works peaked, increasing fivefold from its pre-war level. This was no doubt largely due to the modern Siemens-Martin steel foundry, updated machinery (new presses, Mannesmann tube- and pipe-forming) and shop-floor expansion. In 1917, about 1.4 million rounds of infantry ammunition left the factory on an average daily shift, an output achieved with the employment of an immense labour force of 27,000 (Adamovics 1982: 19). In the same year, 2.9 million artillery bullets were produced, close to 60 per cent of the total ammunition needs of the Austro-Hungarian infantry. By the end of 1918, the factory had become fully militarized. Producing strictly for the German and Austro-Hungarian armies, this immense war economy was generating a capital stock of 60 million crowns, an annual profit of 6 million crowns and a surplus of 72 million crowns at the disposal of Manfred Weiss. It is not without good reason that Weiss was called 'the biggest moneybag but an honourable and inconspicuous philanthropist'; his estimated personal wealth was reported to be approximately 700 million crowns (Bródy 1918; Varga 1983: 57–8).

What were the immediate consequences of such momentous political economic changes? The most obvious mark of the new era was the creation of a new industrial working class, a class that was preferably young and male. In 1914, as production became militarized, the category of youth took on an added significance: it too was politically as well as militarily more important to the state. Thus, as we have seen, changes in the political economy brought about alterations in social relations and vice versa. In analysing this process we are at the heart of theoretically informed history and historically informed theory, as Eric Wolf has proposed. This process provides the basis for the development of youth as a category of differentiation in a specific political-

economic-cultural context. At the same time this milieu provides the setting for ensuing generational and class conflicts. As the following chapters show, class and intergenerational relations deteriorated: wages were extremely low and working conditions so appalling that amidst such contradictions it is not surprising that young workers became increasingly organized and radicalized. The eventual intensification of social conflict and the emergence of a genuine working-class culture were unavoidable: their origins, causes and outcome, as well as their age and generational nature, will be discussed in detail in the next chapter.

### 3 THE DEVELOPMENT OF RED CSEPEL: YOUTH DURING THE MONARCHY AND UNDER FASCISM

Red Csepel lead us in our fight,  
Váci Street takes up your plight.  
(from the song *Red Csepel*)

Following the establishment of feudalism, Csepel sustained a series of interlocking politico-economic periods, beginning with the earliest centuries when the royal household owned the island and exploited its multi-ethnic inhabitants according to the rights granted them by the urbarial law. Much of what we know of this early phase superficially resembles comparable data on village life throughout the region under Ottoman rule and its Habsburg successor. In the subsequent epoch beginning in the early eighteenth century, the influx of German-speaking populations brought in its wake a political and economic transformation that gave way to small mercantile and entrepreneurial capitalistic rural production. These changes entailed an unprecedented degree of religious and ethnic heterogeneity on the island and a gradual local transformation, during which the original settlers became wealthy while the newly arrived, poor serfs – mostly Hungarian and representing various minorities – remained exploited. This political economic and cultural transformation continued in the final phase during the development of imperial capitalism, starting at the turn of the twentieth century and reaching its fullest development during the First World War. As several anthropologists have argued, in the development of European nation-states, capitalism and industrialism were not always congruous, suggesting that in many instances the former preceded the latter (Cole 1985; Donham 1990; Roseberry 1989). In the case of Hungary, as in the rest of the eastern part of the Habsburg Empire, industrialization and modernization constituted two distinct aspects of industrial capitalism, variously influencing parts of the empire and (unevenly) giving rise to agrarian upheavals, industrial strikes and nationalistic tensions. This period witnessed a shift from a rural to a semi-urban life-style, from agriculture to industrial wage labour, from a traditional village age-gender relations to a masculinized culture, and thereby further advanced the establishment of an ethnically and socio-economically mixed proletariat. The significance of this chapter lies exactly

here: to reveal how industrialization and urbanization created the industrial specification of age and gender hierarchization. In this new setting youth were pitted against a group of powerful men with economic and political power who exploited their relations with their younger cohorts. This example of the marginalization of youth by power-holders within their own society illustrates, too, the usefulness of age-specific analysis.

As I have noted in the previous chapter, this final metamorphosis brought in its wake enormous dislocations in the perceptions and life-courses of Csepelers, changes that fundamentally altered the tapestry of the island. Not the least important aspect of this transformation was the paradoxical situation created, on the one hand, by the development of the community as a bastion of industrialization boasting an unexpected population boom and an exceedingly high production quota, and, on the other, a large, heterogeneous youthful industrial labour force. Despite the diversity of backgrounds, religions, languages and regions, the class and masculine unity of the Csepel industrial workforce stands in stark contrast to the subsequent fragmentation and ultimate breakdown of the community. The difference between the vibrant working-class culture of Csepel and that of other outlying areas of Budapest such as the steel-mill towns of Pesterzsébet, Kőbánya and Újpest holds the key to understanding the specific conditions that gave rise to 'Red Csepel' and accounts for the powerful influence Csepel exerted on the working-class movement in twentieth-century Hungary.

#### ENTER THE WORKING-CLASS YOUTH: STAGES OF DEVELOPMENT

Most Hungarians have long been acquainted with 'Red Csepel' thanks to the popularity of a song written in 1931 by Antal Hidas (Csepeli Szabó 1977: 228–34).<sup>1</sup> Its recurrent exhortation 'Red Csepel, lead us in our fight' evokes images of working-class radicalism and even Hungarian Stalinism when Csepel was a hotbed of the 'official workers' movement. One old-timer fondly remembered his youth, together with Csepel's extraordinary status: 'Csepel always had the red epithet and this made us special. When we went to Pesterzsébet to a dance, the Csepel apprentices always had good dancers as partners. The boys from the other districts never dared to insult us.' Yet both the song and the workers have, as we shall learn, a much longer and more complex narrative to tell.

Despite its celebrated economic development and rapid industrialization, the 1920s and 1930s were unhappy and difficult decades. In addition to the dangers posed by factory work, and the belligerent, even dehumanizing tone that had come to characterize class relations, living conditions in Csepel were steadily deteriorating. New areas were allocated for small, expensive, but insalubrious housing to accommodate thousands of poor and foreign workers and their families. One of the poorest of these workers' quarters was

called *Jajtelep* ('Ouch quarter') where thousands lived like animals in dug-out shelters, and squatters populated the area of the Királyerdő, a bushy, sandy area southeast of the town's centre, while women and children worked as unskilled labourers for starvation wages. A group of workers led by Ferenc Bajáki complained to the Ministry that: 'Of 25,000 workers, only about 4,000–5,000 have decent salaries. Unskilled labourers earn 3–4 crowns per hour, unskilled women and children work a whole day for that amount' (quoted in Baczoni 1977: 49).

Industrial accidents were frequent, and accident prevention virtually unknown. Such carelessness cost the lives of ten children in 1909 when a storeroom filled with ammunition exploded. Ultimately this was a decisive factor in prompting labour leaders to speak out, urging management to change its codes and work practices. During my fieldwork in Csepel, I spoke to many older residents who had been maimed in factory accidents and recalled in detail the benefits of the union's assistance. These conditions fostered alliances among the proletariat and contributed to the emergence of a powerful working-class consciousness. Yet it was not only poverty and misery but also an awareness of the effects of that poverty and a concomitant loss of human subjectivity that contributed to heightened class antagonism and revolutionary consciousness among the workers (Kolakowski 1982: 287).

It was within ten years of the founding of the Manfred Weiss Works that factory management and workers first confronted each other, the workers having realized that drastic measures were called for if they were to live with a modicum of human dignity. Within a relatively short time, the absence of local and factory institutions prompted individuals to copy German and Austrian friendly, insurance and funerary associations: to combat the threat of the fires that regularly devastated makeshift homes, for instance, workers demanded from the leadership a voluntary firemen's association. To aid poor families, women and children, national religious societies were formed, a move no doubt prompted by the importation of similar ideas from the growing women's movement in Western Europe. Noted among them were the 'Marta Association' in 1893, the 'Social Mission Association' in 1908 and the 'Urania Society for the Protection of Women' in 1911 (Gyóni 1983). The 'Marta Association' was established by industrialists (through the GYOSZ) and supported by the wife of Manfred Weiss and the ladies of the Deutsch family.

These actions were soon adopted by many others: at the turn of the century, the Social Democratic Party (*Szociáldemokrata Párt*, or SZDP) was formed, along with the Union of Steel and Metal Workers (*Vas-és Fémmunkások Szakszervezete*) and, somewhat later, the Union of Construction Workers (*Építőmunkások Szakszervezete*) was established at the Manfred Weiss Works. Organized in these unions in 1905, workers openly attacked management, collectively demanding the reinstatement of a dismissed foreman.<sup>2</sup> As a result, many workers, especially union and SZDP members,

were dismissed and blacklisted. Membership of these two organizations – the ‘red factions’ as they were known in Csepel – had its privileges: financial assistance and benefits as well as solidarity with other workers. But more often than not, workers who joined were branded for life as ‘troublemakers’ and were ostracized by superiors and workers sympathetic to management.

Young men and women in particular were singled out, and often complained of cruelty from foremen, excessive work shifts and unsafe working conditions. As trade union membership grew, workers were radicalized in a situation that came to be known as the notorious February 1913 ‘strike waves’. For the first time in the history of Hungarian industrial development, working women played a pivotal role in a labour uprising when they initiated a major strike, demanding the reinstatement of several skilled machinists and lathe operators who had been fired from the ammunition shop because of union membership (Berend and Ránki 1965: 202). The management’s response was to dismiss those involved. This ignited new factory-wide strikes, and within a few days, the union leadership briefly gained the upper hand when management reinstated the dismissed workers.

Perhaps the most important event that emphasized the nascent power of working-class unity was the 23 May 1912 demonstration, which became known as ‘Bloody Thursday’. On this occasion thousands of workers from Csepel and neighbouring Pesterzsébet marched through central Budapest demanding equal rights, better working conditions and free elections. Their demands were answered with gunfire and swords, and the streets of Budapest were soon littered with the dead and wounded. By evening, the battle was over: dozens had been killed, hundreds wounded and jailed. From that moment on, whether in Csepel, Buda or Pesterzsébet, workers began to appreciate the efficacy of unified action.

The pressure from below was successful to the extent that it forced management to make concessions by agreeing to accept – for the first time in Hungarian history – a collective agreement proposed by the unions in 1913. Factory management consented to a number of demands: it hired unionized workers and set wages according to professional qualifications and quota production; initiated a nine-hour day, six-day week; and allowed workers to participate in ‘legitimate political strikes’ (Kiss 1984: 23).

Victory was, however, not without its drawbacks for the workers and intergenerational relations. While skilled blue-collar workers and white-collar personnel, both primarily male, benefited from the collective agreement, young men and especially young women were soon marginalized. With only basic skills, they were taken on for temporary work. Moreover, they were not eligible for union membership and consequently, when workers were laid off, they were the first to go (Baczoni 1977: 41).

## WORKING-CLASS YOUTH AND RITUALS

Anthropological studies have revealed the nature of work in agricultural societies and how farming economies ‘required a considerable division of

labour' (Pratt 1994: 36). In his survey Bernardi argues that formalized age-class systems are more characteristic of tribal societies, their importance being minimal in European complex societies (1985: 14). However, despite – or perhaps because of – his comparative data and African fieldwork experiences, Bernardi utilizes only a few scattered references from agricultural communities in the Alpine area and disregards other interpretations. In analysing working-class youth culture in Csepel, my aim is to provide Pratt and Bernardi with data with which to reconsider their findings. Both farming and industrial work entail an enormous variety of gender-based and age-specific organization of tasks and skills. Furthermore, in contrast to agricultural youth who, according to the Hungarian saying, 'get up with the birds and go to sleep with the sun', the lives of industrial youth were connected to neither season nor animals. However, the world of labour, as well as local and transnational power relations, are equally, if not more, complex and intricate (Hobsbawm 1984; Sassen 1999).

Children and youth in agricultural communities did not need to go to school to learn to work in the fields and care for the animals for they learned their work by helping their parents. In Hungary, as elsewhere in Europe, formal schooling followed industrial development as increasing numbers of skilled workers were required for the various industries and special factories. In Hungary, educational reforms introduced in 1867 played an important role in changing this system, although in certain respects, such as the admission of women to higher educational institutions (legalized only in 1895), it remained quite conservative. Even rural parents sent their sons to school to learn a 'real profession so they won't be earth-diggers for the rest of their lives'.<sup>1</sup> Children were sent to school between the ages of six and twelve, but in the villages, they were taken out of school to work when necessary. In fact, local schools rearranged the curriculum and timetable according to the agricultural cycle. As I have learned from my own family's history (Kürti 2000b), this was facilitated by the local teachers: for they too were earning extra money from market gardening and filled their pantries by raising hogs, chickens and cows. Hence many a village youth grew up illiterate or with minimal formal schooling. A potential way out was through industrial labour where, in contrast to agricultural socialization, an industrial trade was to be learned and skilled workers schooled (the phrase used in Csepel was *iskolázott*). Modelled after the Prussian educational system, Hungarian schools were similar to those in other Central European countries: on completion of elementary education (*elemi iskola*), children were sent to a vocational school (*tanonciskola*). Few lower-class parents could send their children to a 'civic' (*polgári*) school or, later, to the more prestigious grammar school (*gimnázium*). Graduation from a *gimnázium* was in fact a prerequisite for entering college or university, a fact that always limited a working-class youth's opportunities.

Such institutionalized age associations exerted a significant influence on social organization, production cycles and the continuation of gender

imbalances in shop floor politics as women were not allowed to become apprentices and young men were placed in a hierarchical relation to older workers. Throughout their vocational training young men were called *tanonc*, a largely obsolete term for student. This title changed to *inas* (servant, little serf) when males began work in the shops. After three years' study and work, males were promoted to *őreg-inas* (senior-servant), a position with more prestige and less opportunity for potential exploitation by older workers. At the end of their student years, a rite of passage – known by the German *Einstand* – marked their progress into the ranks of the *segéds* (apprentice, helper). The *Einstand* was ceremonial, renowned for rounds of drinks with older workers, and a dinner-dance at a local inn or at home (Nagy 1987: 230). The formalized system of age organization worked simultaneously at two levels: it achieved the necessary patterns of socialization into working-class life and consciousness and fostered a lasting age–class relation among youth of the same socio-economic background.

Once promoted to the *segéd* rank, the life of the young apprentice was closer to that of older workers: he could go out at night, drink with friends, visit girlfriends and smoke cigars or cigarettes. To improve his skills – the phrase among workers in Csepel is still 'to ripen' (*érelődjön*) – he had two further choices. One was to remain in the same job until he could progress to the level of *mester* (or *majszter* – master). The alternative was to go abroad, often for several years, to continue training and gain the experience considered prestigious in the metallurgical trades, that of machinist, mechanic, foundryman, smelter, machine-and-tool maker, lathe operator or driller (Nagy 1951). Most young workers stayed in foreign factories for months and even years, and often had to beg (*fehtolva*), as old workers recall. During those years away from home, they not only learned a trade but also learnt German, were introduced to union activities, experienced new lifestyles and were introduced to ideas current in Western European working-class circles (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983). The historian Flandrin offers an interesting historical and cross-cultural example of apprenticeship when he proposes that: 'Children of the people were driven out of the paternal home at the very beginning of their adolescence, and condemned to forced labour in the house of another person. The apprenticeship law of 1563 made this system general and this servitude obligatory in the country and the towns' (1980: 241). According to Flandrin, this was made necessary by the large number of children in a typical family household, though this was true only in exceptional circumstances by the beginning of the twentieth century.

The significance of apprenticeship cannot be overemphasized for, besides creating a solid structure for age–class hierarchy, it facilitated the internationalization of working-class culture and politics. Often apprentice students and young itinerant workers helped to sow the seeds of radicalism in Hungarian soil. After the unsuccessful 1905 revolution in Russia, the 'spectre of communism' counted many workers among its admirers. The ideas of Marx, Engels, Lenin and, to a lesser extent, those of Plekhanov,



spread like wildfire, so that by 1906, workers in Csepel greeted each other with the new slogan 'Long Live the International Revolutionary Social Democracy', an unambiguous reference to ideas made popular during the 1905 uprising. Later, 'friendship' (*barátság*) became the formulaic greeting to express workers' solidarity. Reading circles and 'library meetings' were formed to acquaint young workers with revolutionary ideas. An older machinist recalled these years: 'We recruited the young *segéds* and held evening readings and discussions, explaining socialist ideas to each other. We always tried to understand by comparing the socialist and the capitalist systems.' Such discussions were held in restaurants and taverns which soon became closely associated with particular ethnic, political party factions and sites of neighbourhood informal network meeting-places (Berend and Ránki 1965: 186; Hajdú 1982: 58).

In the making of working-class youth culture, the media of the time, newspapers and choral societies, were the primary sites of socialization. By subscribing to and carrying copies of the *People's Word* (*Népszava*), a radical and left-wing newspaper founded in 1877, Csepel workers expressed their common identity. A worker remembered: 'When you carried the *People's Word* you were marked. Everyone saw the banner-head sticking out of your pocket. When the policeman passed by we just pulled it out so it was visible. It made them really furious.' When the workers' choral society (*dalárda*) was formed in 1905, its repertoire consisted of the *International*, the *Marseillaise* and other songs popular in workers' circles (Weber 1977: 161). In addition to specially commissioned songs, popular and folk songs were rewritten to mesh with workers' holidays and other occasions, including strikes.

Apart from the *Einstand*, other rituals were either invented or borrowed from Western European working-class culture. One favourite was the *Blaumontag* – or Blue Monday – the practice of taking Mondays off to protest at the seven-day-week. Another was the 'communist funeral' in which those present at the burial of a friend wore a red carnation; at the end of the funeral service, which included the singing of revolutionary songs and speeches by colleagues, each mourner placed a red carnation on the grave of the deceased (Pesovár 1951: 26). May Day and *majális* (a festive picnic-like occasion held in parks or preferably in the woods) became the single most important celebration for Csepel workers, especially the younger age groups. Clearly, besides being an important venue for socializing, these holidays served as occasions for picnicking and dating. Their political aspects, however, outweighed the recreational. As one worker asserted: 'During May Day demonstrations we marched with red banners and chanted slogans such as "Live with rat poison" at the entrance of homes of aristocrats and capitalists.' Among workers in European industrial centres, such expressions served to cement and objectify relationships between working youth, their older colleagues and their respective organizations (Kertzer 1980: 16). Moreover, participation was useful in reaffirming one's collective sentiments to the factory and to fellow workers.

These traditions contributed to the formation of a unique working-class culture in Csepel in the first decades of the twentieth century and engendered a new radicalism among industrial workers. Other associations represented the interests of groups as diverse as the Craftsmen Association (*Iparosok Köre*, founded in 1906), General Association of Producers (*Általános Ipartestület*, founded in 1912), the small shop-keepers' Tradesmen's Association (*Kereskedők Köre*, founded in 1913), Civic Association (*Polgári Kör*, founded in 1912) and factory management's National Association of Foremen (*Művezetők Országos Szövetsége*, founded in 1912). Nevertheless, it was the progressive coalition formed by social democrats and the left wing of the unions whose impact on the working-class movement in Csepel was most notable. The Hungarian Young Workers' Independent Association (MISZ) had already successfully mobilized 10,000 apprentices in 1910 to demand decent working conditions and wages. Accordingly, members of these blue-collar workers' organizations were at the forefront in welcoming the Hungarian Bolshevik revolution of 1918.

#### THE FIRST WORLD WAR

The First World War and its tragic consequences left their imprint only briefly in Csepel. While light industry and agriculture were falling below their pre-war production levels and losing manpower at an alarming rate, Csepel was rapidly recovering. Apart from the Weiss factory, other smaller enterprises also employed large numbers of workers, among them the Steaua Romana Oil Company (founded in 1905), the Kovács Furriers, the Topits and Sons File Manufacture Company (both founded in 1906) and the First Sand, Brick and Cement Company (founded in 1916).

As production increased and the town attracted new residents from elsewhere, secure employment was difficult to achieve at the Weiss Manfred Works. Many workers remembered the friendly, informal tactics used to make connections and networks, among which a favourite was affectionately referred to as *szoknyaprotekció* (the skirt connection), that is, courting maids or cooks in the employment of engineers and managers (Pesovár 1951: 25). Those who could not find jobs at the Manfred Weiss Works were forced to take up less rewarding work at other factories, or, as a last resort, begged in the street. Young women and boys were employed as domestics and servants (Gyóni 1986: 381). Outside private employment agencies, or *Zubringers*, the queues were long and continued to grow, while at the same time, skilled Bohemian, Austrian and German guest-workers (especially engineers and technicians) were hired to fill prestigious, well-paid jobs. In 1910, 82.4 per cent of the industrial workforce in the nation's capital were Hungarian; 9.5 per cent were German and 3.6 per cent Slovak (Kende and Sipos 1986: 57). This Greater Budapest statistic was replicated in Csepel, with its multi-ethnic composition.<sup>4</sup>

As we have seen, the rural underclass viewed life in Csepel as an alternative to starvation and poverty, and these migrants were instrumental in initiating the new squatter settlements that sprang up around the town. For Csepel had begun to resemble a dormitory community as families and single men arrived by the hundreds, a less radical alternative to emigration to North America. Tenants (or *lakó*) found housing in workers' quarters or in boarding houses. Skilled workers' families, well-to-do landlords and shopkeepers (*boltos*) supplemented their income by renting rooms and shacks, often to as many as eight to ten boarders.

After 1914 and the dislocations attendant upon war, single-parent households were not unusual. Families divided by the loss of jobs and the consequences of war managed nevertheless to make ends meet, while orphans and criminals roamed the streets. To combat this dire situation, and in response to the growing dissatisfaction of radical workers' groups, in 1916 factory management and the town's magistrate requested the militarization of the factory and the presence of a strong local police force (*rendőrség*). These actions, together with managerial encroachments in the realm of pay increases, social benefits and upward mobility, were considered by most workers to constitute a serious assault on their rights and aspirations. For them, a single strategy of defence seemed feasible: joining the opposition. Thus, despite its different trajectory from that of British and Western European working-class developments, the emergence of a unified working-class interest was achieved in Hungary within a relatively brief period (Polanyi 1964: 174).

Such progressive workers' ideas were firmly connected to the visible, even palpable, exploitation of the workers. While socialist ideas and revolutionary thinking were initially linked to agricultural unrest and nurtured by intellectual circles in Hungary, among industrial workers other special institutions dating from as early as the 1880s contributed to the formation of a unified working-class movement. On the one hand, foreign blue-collar workers resettling in Csepel were influential in transplanting the ideas of Marx, Engels, Plekhanov, Bukharin and Lenin to Hungarian soil. On the other, the Hungarian system of apprenticeship was an element in this process.

In order to facilitate a better understanding of the radicalization of Csepel workers, I will briefly describe young workers and their vocational training in these early years.

#### THE REPUBLIC OF COUNCILS IN 1918–19

As we have seen, by 1918, the Manfred Weiss Works was the largest industrial complex in Hungary, covering 250 hectares (about 500 acres). Its workforce numbered an astonishing 22,000 men and 6,000 women; its shops and buildings grew to 216; and it boasted machinery of 30,000 hp

(Berend and Ránki 1965: 52). However, radical leaders were not pleased with the increasing emphasis on war production, and the bloodshed and suffering caused by the war. They organized strikes in January and again in July. In retaliation, hundreds of young and middle-aged machinists and lathe operators were jailed or dismissed. The factory militia, composed mostly of Bosnian soldiers (Czakó 1972: 12), had difficulty maintaining order. However, as the war came to an end and the old government collapsed, management made some concessions to the Social Democratic Party (SZDP) and the unions. When the bourgeois revolution broke out on 31 October 1918, the Manfred Weiss Works had already come under the control of the radical unions and the SZDP.

At the outbreak of the 1918 revolution, Csepel workers exuberantly joined in implementing the programme of the liberal bourgeois government of Mihály Károlyi. However, promises to nationalize industry, introduce land reforms, issue a new currency and improve living standards were not forthcoming rapidly enough. By the end of October, Csepelers had already established a ruling workers' council composed of 40 skilled workers from different shops, a few administrators and one engineer, the SZDP member Géza Berend (Baczoni 1977: 8). To many radical youth this was indeed a jubilant moment: within a few weeks, the factory was nationalized and became the property of the 'people of Csepel'. Former directors and managers were forced to leave and, in a few cases, foremen thought to have treated young workers cruelly were penalized.

With the nationalization of the Manfred Weiss Works, Csepelers experienced a new form of property ownership. What older members of the Social Democratic Party recalled as 'the situation in Csepel under the people's rule' was in reality the rule of the commissariat, or the political directorate. Not only production but other aspects became the concern of the new leadership, the workers' *direktórium* (executive directorship), ideas that followed the Soviet pattern. To combat absenteeism, theft and slow-downs (*amerikázás* or 'Americanization') a Red Guard was formed to keep order in the factory. Trusted young men were selected for this job.

For radical workers, the transformations within the factory gates were far from satisfactory. In November, the traditional councilman (*virilista*) institution (an election based on tax-paying status) was abolished and replaced by a more democratic system, the people's council (*néptanács*). On 8 December, under pressure from the 'workers' council' the local Communist Party organization (*Kommunista Párt*, KMP) was formed. This was an extremely controversial step even during its inception (Kiss 1984; Varga 1981). The formation of the KMP was decisive for it both united the most radical factions in Csepel and determined the direction of the communist movement in Csepel as well as in Greater Budapest. On 30 December 1918, its youth faction, the Hungarian Communist Youth Organization (KIMSZ) was created, an organization that laid the foundation for all subsequent leftist youth organizations for decades to come. Communist leaders knew that by

organizing thousands of youngsters working in the factories it would provide a legitimating force in the eyes of their families.

With the formation of the KMP, and a relatively unified and centralized political leadership, reforms were implemented at once. Most importantly, the working day was reduced to eight hours, the dream of socialist trade unions ('Eight hours of work, eight hours of rest, eight hours of sleep' was their slogan). Rent reductions eased the plight of exploited young workers, while health insurance benefits helped accident victims. The town came under a new governing body, the 53-member revolutionary Military, Workers' and Peasants' Council, 41 of whom were elected from the workers, seven from peasants and five from an intellectual background (Berend and Ránki 1965: 245).

The country's call to arms mobilized thousands for the defence of 'genuine democracy and revolution', as it was called. However, the Manfred Weiss Works lacked the necessary manpower to keep up production quotas and, by the beginning of 1919, there were only 6,551 workers left on the shop floor. In order to assist single-parent families, workers drafted into the Red Army were given financial support almost equal to the minimum wage. On 21 March 1919, the Károlyi government was abolished and a Republic of Councils was declared, a date that marked one of the 'Revolutionary Youth Days' in the official communist youth movement in the 1970s–1980s. The revolutionary council of the proletarian dictatorship in Csepel was immediately active: the land holdings of the Church and the telegraph company were nationalized. The latter was of symbolic significance for it was through its telegraph mast that communication with Lenin was achieved, thereby adding to the symbolic fashioning of the radical leftist image of the town. The local newspaper interpreted this act as follows: 'Comrades, from the Csepel–Moscow exchange, you can see the unification of the Soviet and Hungarian proletariat who are able to fight with renewed power against their common oppressors' (quoted in Berend and Ránki 1965: 242).

The Béla Kun government order of 26 March 1919 introduced the nationalization of industrial enterprises employing more than 20 people, a policy that followed the pattern introduced by Csepel workers. At last, the 'factory dictatorship' of Csepel had been legally recognized. Production was speeded up and, on 8 April, Vilmos Böhm of the Revolutionary Government Council announced: 'Production at the Csepel Works is under way and we may be proud of its increased ammunition quota' (in Kiss 1984: 30). Now the ammunition, guns and supplies were being produced for the Hungarian Red Army, fighting the royalist forces of Admiral Miklós Horthy and the Anti-Bolshevik Committee.

The 1919 May Day was celebrated lavishly in Csepel with new symbols replacing the old religious ones: every house was decorated with a red flag, a steam engine was painted red and statues of Marx and Lenin were carried through the town (Baczoni 1977: 89). The communist elite wanted a complete transformation of the social order. All workers' funerals became

'atheistic': no priest officiated, revolutionary songs were sung and masses of red carnations provided symbolic colour. All these symbols contributed to the 'invention' of working-class traditions so salient elsewhere in Europe at that time. One element, however, separated Hungary from Western European working-class radicalism: it became a legitimating structure of the newly invented state. This transformation clearly added to the political formation of workers '*as a class*' (Hobsbawm 1983: 285). Socialized into this new class relation, young workers received a new identity, that of *ifjúmunkás*, a word combining the former agricultural category 'youth' (*ifjú*) with that of 'worker' (*munkás*). This was not only a matter of semantics: it reflected the complete class-conscious nature of political identity: youth who were fully aware of their heritage, role and function in the new political economy of the Hungarian state. But unlike in Western Europe, Csepel workers transformed ritual into political action when schools, theatres and cinemas were nationalized, admitting poor children free of charge, and initiated lectures and free library services to enrich their lives. The first women's choral group and orchestra were founded during these tumultuous months, rationalized through the new slogans: 'The eight-hour work day has been established, so now educate yourselves' and 'Culture is yours now, enjoy its benefits.' Clearly, in the minds of the revolutionaries, both recreational activity (culture) and work (productivity) had to be nationalized, centrally organized and, at the same time, available for all. The revolutionary leaders, Kun, Böhm and Szamuely, were no dreamers of the stature of Lenin. Yet, in the matter of two months, the workers had transformed a dystopian world into a material reality ahead of schedule, for even in parts of the Soviet Union such changes were yet to be implemented (Stites 1989: 38).

Not everyone was pleased though. The new 'factory council', lacking experience and connections, was unable to maintain production, as funds were scarcely sufficient to keep workers at their machines. Young workers protested at conscription into the Red Army and some did manage to escape from Csepel with their entire families. Those who were still working complained of the lack of consumer goods and low working morale, blaming communist leaders for the chaotic state of affairs. Many felt bitter that the original social welfare fund, roughly 6 million crowns, had been distributed to poor families and to social programmes such as the building of the *Munkásotthon*, the Workers' Culture Centre (Baczoni 1977: 70–1). Further friction was created by communist ideals and religiosity as many workers frowned upon the militants' treatment of church officials and, especially, the nationalization of church property (Baczoni 1977: 88).

Moreover, the nationalization of industry caused panic among owners and executives of factories and their white-collar sympathizers. For example, when the news reached Manfred Weiss, he tried to commit suicide, an act that shocked many denizens of Csepel. To spare the factory founder further exposure and atrocities, the Weiss family took him to Vienna for hospitalization (Varga 1983: 62).

However, unlike in the Soviet Union, the Bolshevik revolution in Hungary was short-lived. Foreign intervention and internal strife militated against its highly ambitious plans and hindered the implementation of its democratic as well as utopian policies. By November 1918 only 471 workers remained in the Manfred Weiss Works, and by November 1919, lack of coal had halted production altogether. Shops closed and shopkeepers left for neighbouring settlements to await the outcome. Schools were likewise closed, and the once bustling town was all but deserted.

In the neighbouring town of Ráckeve, well-to-do Csepelers, farmers and shopkeepers united against the 'workers' dictatorship' and, with the help of a small army unit, attacked (Baczoni 1977: 88; Vigh 1979). Since the original Csepel Red Guard had been sent to the front, the reactionary forces faced a relatively simple task. Taken together with the collapse in July 1919 of the Red Army under the united forces of western, Romanian, Czech and royalist Hungarian armies, this situation contributed to the nominal reinstatement of the monarchy. After 6 August, all the reforms of the proletarian dictatorship had been eliminated.

By October 1919, supported by wealthy farmers and the bourgeoisie, royalist forces had regained the upper hand in Csepel, as in the country as a whole. Antagonism was especially acute between working-class youth and university students as large numbers of the latter wholeheartedly supported the restoration of the aristocratic right and the Horthy government (Ladányi 1979: 90–1). The ensuing years were bloody ones (Beke 1989; Ladányi 1979). Workers who had enlisted in the Red Army were persecuted and jailed, and three members of the workers' council (Mór Kertész, Rezső Szladek and János Zwick) were executed (Baczoni 1977: 9). Richard Stern and many other radical managers were forced to leave the factory for good. Géza Berend emigrated to the United States, and other members of the workers' council left for the Soviet Union through prisoners' exchange programmes.<sup>5</sup> About 1,200 workers were put on the blacklist (*feketelista*) and thousands of others faced the insecurities of unemployment and harassment. Restoration of the capitalist bourgeois order had begun.

#### CSEPEL DURING THE INTERWAR PERIOD

When a much-weakened Manfred Weiss returned to Csepel in 1920, he was faced with disorder and devastation. The occupying Romanian royal army had dismantled his factory. Its most valuable machinery had gone and its once highly skilled labour force had been decimated (Berend and Ránki 1965: 57). Now he began the immense task of rebuilding. Seemingly miraculously, he succeeded in returning Csepel and the Manfred Weiss Works to the industrial map of Hungary. But the two years of strenuous work took their toll and the founder of the steel town died in 1922 and was succeeded

by his sons, Alfonz and Jenő. Thus Csepel initiated a new epoch in the period known as the 'White Terror' (*fehér terror*) of the Horthy government.

To Csepelers, the years following the proletarian dictatorship were, to say the least, onerous, for the Horthy regime and the decades of political and economic boom-and-bust cycles that followed altered the texture of their life. Yet despite the 'White Terror', throughout the interwar decades, industrial specialization and the influx of diverse socio-economic groups were important elements in making Csepel the most progressive and radical core of the Hungarian working-class movement. Despite persecution, the communists continued to organize underground.

Following government orders, the factory was forced to cease production of military equipment and ammunition. Nevertheless, it developed into a *mindenes* (jack-of-all-trades), producing steel pipes as well as household items, pots and pans, ovens, wire and nails. The Manfred Weiss Works of the interwar period may indeed have corresponded to the 'wolfish hunger after surplus value' that Marx described as the hallmark of industrial capitalism (Kolakowski 1978: 291).

The successful reconstruction of the Manfred Weiss Works was soon replicated in other areas as several new companies were established in the town: the Hungarian Clothing Manufacture in 1921; the Neményi Brothers' Paper Mill, the Vacuum Oil Company and Hungarian-Belgian Petroleum Company in 1923; and, finally, in 1925, the Shell Oil Company (Perényi 1934: 84–92). The establishment of commercial associations such as the *Hangya* (literally 'ant', in reference to the collective working spirit of the members) and the General Commerce and Trading Company provided ample evidence that a new business spirit was in the making.

Small family businesses also thrived as many formerly rich peasant families re-established businesses in Csepel, thereby expanding their farms, production and profit margins. Their sons, however, did not join the ranks of the industrial proletariat. One of the wealthiest Schwab families, the Niederkirchners, opened several restaurants, butcher shops and grocery stores.<sup>6</sup> Almost every son went into the family business. Such private businesses proliferated within a relatively brief period, and statistics for 1931 reveal a number of new shops and small enterprises: a furniture store, a gold and jewellery shop, three printers, eight tobacconists, a lumber mill, a dentist, two estate agents, a picture-framer and three coffee houses (F. Szabó 1931: 304–19). The diversification and expansion of these businesses indicate that Csepel was well on its way to restoration, if not a renaissance. These changes also reflect a substantial realignment in its social structure: a radical workers' town, it became at the same time a home for wealthy shopkeepers, family businesses and street vendors.<sup>7</sup> Now there were openings for young men and women to learn an occupation and become proprietors or work in the service industry.

Following the restoration of the capitalist order, new immigrants arrived, marking yet another beginning for the town. In the period following the proletarian dictatorship, the town experienced a gradual demographic



change: from 1920 to 1930, its population increased from 13,990 to 22,901, doubling from 1930 to 1940 to reach an all-time high of 46,208 (see Table 1.2). In the words of one historian, this numerical increase 'can be explained through the process of *Landflucht*, in which the poorest agricultural populations from the most poverty-ridden areas of Hungary flee to industrialized Csepel seeking steady employment and secure wage-labour' (Kiss 1984: 39). The phenomenal population explosion in Csepel was one of the consequences of the war: the creation of a growing reserve army of labour and the repatriation of populations from the successor states.

After the Paris and the Trianon Peace Treaties of 1920, Hungary lost important coal and mining resources, her northern territory to newly created Czechoslovakia, her eastern regions to Romania and the southern regions of Bácska and Banat to the newly created Yugoslavia. With these losses, Hungarians also experienced collective group suffering and mourning marked in rituals fostered by the extreme-right aristocratic and religious circles of the Horthy regime. These privations notwithstanding, the country benefited from the partition: its territory became more manageable, its population ethnically more homogeneous and, as refugees from the successor states flooded into the urban and industrial centres of post-Trianon Hungary, its economy was on the upswing. Peasants from the extraordinarily poverty-stricken and underdeveloped northern and western counties – so beautifully rendered by Hungary's foremost populist writer, Gyula Illyés, in his autobiographical novel *People of the Puszta* – also moved to the newly emerging industrial centres. To them, the booming factory town of Csepel seemed a logical choice, a potential salvation from the miseries of landed estates. The communist poet Aladár Komját (1891–1937) captured this mood in his poem 'Hungary's Proletariat Marches' in 1937.<sup>8</sup>

Committed leftist intellectuals expressed the utopian pro-urbanist belief that industrial working-class communities hold the key for the disempowered. Many celebrated Red Csepel for providing the answer to social malaise. And surely, by the mid-1930s, the increase in production was followed by longer working hours as the factory management institutionalized overtime, with three daily as well as weekend shifts. The steady production demands helped to forge a strong demand for labour; and this situation in turn enabled the factory to acquire even tighter control over the lives of employees and their families, who relied increasingly on wages and employment.

Yet despite a population boom and flourishing business, Csepel was in dire straits and nobody felt this more keenly than young workers, women and the elderly, social categories that were the first to be marginalized as the result of industrial recession. The town's infrastructure lacked basic necessities: most roads remained unpaved; and the local transportation system built to cater to the factory in 1912 was inadequate (the railway, tram and bus did not come to Csepel until the late 1920s and early 1930s). Women and children suffered the most. One Csepeler remembered: 'I was only a small girl when I had to go to the shops. Sometimes it took me hours

to come back home. I had to carry the whole week's provisions on my back.' Health services were minimal as the small factory hospital was not constructed until 1916. Before 1934 there was only one local doctor and, until the 1930s, only three pharmacies. Available since 1912, electricity was beyond the means of most families whose households were illuminated by paraffin lamps. Sewerage was unknown; hence, public sanitation was far from adequate. Parcels were not distributed to the needy until 1923 and 1926, and the number of families living below the poverty level rose from 600 in 1923 to over 1,500 in 1930. Alcoholism and suicide rates in Csepel were as high as those in Budapest, which led the country in these 'proletarian sicknesses' (Kiss 1984: 48). Indeed, one worker recalled his youth as at best full of contradictions:

Once work was over, me and my mates always ended up at the local beer-garden. A few pints always helped to wash down the dirt and grime. It happened that we visited several of these places on the way home. Pay-day was dangerous; sometimes a large chunk of the salary was blown by the time you staggered home.

While this situation cannot be generalized to the entire blue-collar labour force, alcoholism was widespread and exacerbated the already harsh realities associated with a working-class life. This behaviour and hierarchy contributed to the enormous suffering of women; domestic violence and increasing poverty were its immediate results. With regard to education, the school system was in a shambles despite the general educational policy of Kunó Klebelsberg, the Minister of Education and Religion, who is credited with sweeping educational reforms after 1920 (Sárközi 1980). The new education system placed heavy emphasis on nationalism, Christianity and irredentism. The Christian nationalist and post-Paris peace treaty slogans with which children started every school day are telling: 'No, no, never [will we give up Transylvania]', 'Truncated Hungary is not our country, Great Hungary is our heaven' and 'God, Nation, King'. Celebrations of this new nationhood were replete with the tricolour symbolism, neopopulist state holidays and stage shows identifying the kingdom of St Stephen and his great mythical empire, Hunnia (the never-existing country of Hungary), initiating youth into the heterosexual roles they had to fulfil in order to serve the country without a king. As the historian István Deák writes: 'To be a youth in Hungary in the 1930s meant to live with the memories, triumphs, defeats, paraphernalia and lingering nostalgia attached to the Habsburg monarchy' (1990: ix).

In spite of so much political propaganda, social benefits and positive developments in labour relations came slowly. In Csepel, a small nursery was erected in 1917 for the children of managers and engineers, and expanded in 1931 when a kindergarten was finally constructed. At the outbreak of the First World War there was only one small school for children between the ages of 6 and 12. A secondary school, for those between 12 and 14, was opened in 1915 but was not expanded substantially until the 1920s.

Educational funding supported vocational training. In 1912, the Manfred Weiss Works launched its own vocational training with two instructors and 40 students. As a sign of the changing world of labour, by the 1930s, approximately 200 students were receiving vocational education each year; and for the first time, female students were accepted as vocational apprentices in 1924.

While religion played an increasingly important role in the political control of the rightist Horthy government, at the local level it factionalized workers. Yet religious institutions served as a safety valve, especially for the Germans and the Rác populations, who were kept under a strong and centralized Catholic hegemony. Like Italian workers, as described by David Kertzer, Catholicism and Communist Party membership divided 'people into two hostile and, to an extent, socially autonomous worlds' (1980: 2). However, in the case of Csepel's working classes, while Catholicism excluded those on the left, other denominations welcomed workers who managed to keep their religious identity and party affiliation separate.<sup>9</sup> Originally a Catholic town, it was not until the beginning of the twentieth century that Csepel experienced a religious revival. The smaller denominations, of Jews and Baptists, built their houses of worship in 1908 and 1909 respectively. In 1927, Protestants built their first Reformed church, a decision facilitated by the influx of large numbers of Protestant refugees, especially from the successor states of Romania and Czechoslovakia. In the same year, the Evangelical church was completed; and, in 1933, construction of the second Roman Catholic church completed the religious institutions, which, with the notable exception of the Jewish synagogue, are still used today.

#### NAZISM AND THE POLITICS OF AGE-SET RELATIONS IN CSEPEL

As will have become evident from the foregoing discussion, Csepel and its working classes were extremely poor, a situation exacerbated by centralized government control over production and by the emergence of the extreme right as a major political force. One factor contributing to their pauperization was the tax-free status accorded by the state to most newly-created businesses, a situation similar to that of the Manfred Weiss Works in the first decade of the century. In contrast, from the 1930s onwards, the town had benefited from only modest financial support. With its small annual budget, Csepel was unable to keep pace with the demands of its growing population even as it attempted to raise funds to support its infrastructure by the inauguration of a church tax (*egyházi adó*) and an auxiliary local tax (*községi pótdó*). This effort on the part of the local elite caused widespread dissatisfaction among workers and heightened friction between them and the town, in particular its rightist Christian mayor, János Koncz. His proposed annual budget for the fiscal year of 1942 is especially telling: while the total amount available to the town was 1.7 million *pengős*, the budget called for 2.3 million

(Koncz 1941:1). Although minimal social and health programmes appeared in the budget, additional expenses created an unnecessary burden for citizens (for example, 300 *pengős* for the maintenance of police dogs).<sup>10</sup> Despite such poverty, brothels (*bordélyház* or *kupleráj*) and other places of ill-repute continued to flourish. As one older worker remembered, not without nostalgia, 'the town had been known during these decades as a place with 200 spots where one could start the morning shift with a swig of plum brandy [*pálinka*]'.

In this new political-economic climate, Hungary's position vis-à-vis the Third Reich was ambiguous, to say the least, particularly in its early years. Apart from the periods of the Teleki (1939–41), Kállay (1942–44) and Lakatos (September 1944–October 1944) governments, which attempted to maintain a detached or non-aligned status, the governments of Regent Horthy were pro-Nazi: they supported Hitler wholeheartedly. Economically, there was little doubt that Hungary had joined forces with Nazi Germany when the administration of premier Gyula Gömbös (1932–36) took office. Their close alliance could be found in the dynamic growth of metallurgy, production of agricultural and electrical equipment, and especially aluminium processing. In 1935, an aluminium smelting plant was put to work at Manfred Weiss Works, creating new opportunities for development and profit (Berend and Ránki 1985: 120). Indeed, innovation and expansion were characteristic of the new profile at the Manfred Weiss Works. By the mid-1930s, it had become the largest company in Hungary, producing bicycles, tractors, trucks, sewing machines, furnaces and other electrical appliances. 'We produce everything from horseshoe nails [*patkószeg*] to ammunition [*lővedék*]', as the popular Csepel saying went.

However, living conditions continued to deteriorate after the mid-1930s when the Wall Street crash made its presence felt in Hungary and Csepel. The loss of agricultural and industrial jobs, rising prices and inflation contributed to the crisis. The *pengős*, the currency introduced in November 1926, was quickly devalued (Berend and Ránki 1981: 68–9). At the Manfred Weiss Works, the working day was reduced, overtime eliminated completely and, in some factories, such as those producing bicycles and sewing machines, production stopped altogether (Hoffmann 1961: 159).

The growing number of unemployed and the shrinking pay cheques of the few fortunate enough to work reflect the massive degree to which Csepel was affected by the world crisis. In the early 1930s, skilled workers earned around 30 *pengős* a week, and women and youth about half that. Unskilled female workers received a meagre 4–5 *pengős* a week. By the early 1940s, skilled workers worked an average of 220 hours a month, roughly equal to six working days a week of nine hours a day. In 1940, a skilled machinist, lathe operator or foundry man could earn more than 60 *pengős* a week (Baksay 1960: 519). On the whole, however, the wages of skilled workers at the Manfred Weiss Works were slightly above the national average, a privilege earned by the strenuous efforts of the trade unions.

The work tempo and insecurity of employment intensified conflict not only between workers and managers but between the workers themselves. Young, unskilled females especially complained of low morale and the physical punishment inflicted by foremen to keep them at their machines (Hoffmann 1961: 161). Unemployment in Csepel remained high; families continued to apply for welfare to receive a 'certificate of poverty' (*szegénységi bizonyítvány*), the document entitling family members to food rations and shelter, while the allocation of beggars' licences also rose.<sup>11</sup> As Hungary's working-class poet, Attila József, wrote, 'Poverty is our national sickness.'<sup>12</sup> He and his populist counterparts captured powerfully the desolation of working-class existence, and it was not without justification that an interwar Hungary of nine million was labelled 'the country of three million beggars'. Those who sought to improve their situation by breaking away from the drudgery were forced to obtain loans to buy houses in the more prestigious quarters of Csepel. In turn they worked to send their children to parochial schools. Under the pressure of official Magyarization, such families were forced to Hungarianize their names, as were many pioneer Schwab and Slavic families and Jewish shopkeepers.

As the process of 'reagrarianization' of Hungary was realized, once again class antagonism between the peasantry and industrial workers was exacerbated (Polanyi 1964: 188, 242–3). As a result, the 1930s saw radicalism intensify and popular support for the Social Democratic and Communist Parties grow throughout the country. Radical intellectuals and students were influenced by liberalism and democratic socialism. Several such loosely formed groups were established: these included the 'March Front', a literary and artistic group named after the month of their first meeting in 1937 (Salamon 1980: 22–3), the populist writers' circle from the 1930s, and the 'Bright Wing' generation, a reference to the marching song of the People's Colleges movement (Borbándi 1983; Kardos 1980).

Yet Csepelers faced more immediate concerns: to combat hunger and unemployment, underground communists devised a nationwide system of financial support for poor families called Red Aid (*Vörös Segély*). An anti-alcohol campaign was launched, while tourism and hiking clubs were organized for young workers and their families (Baczoni 1977: 208–10). In 1931, the radical underground newspaper *Red Csepel* appeared, and soon acquired status as a medium for disseminating important news and Marxist-Leninist ideas. As a result of mounting discontent, strikes and demonstrations were staged between 1930 and 1933. Radical anti-state and anti-government actions were organized on a daily basis. More and more young people were drawn into the illegal radical activities of the left. For example, the Csepel youth brigade of the Communist Party, referred to as the Young Communist Workers' League (KIMSZ), was blamed for painting the 1848 War Memorial bright red, an act of youthful rejection of the Horthy government and its support for capital.

For radical workers, the Workers' Home – originally built in 1920, although for some time even earlier workers and union organizers had been actively engaged in building a cultural centre (Drucker 1964: 8–9) – was a site of political and cultural activities. Exhibits, workers' choirs and brass bands, nature rambles, readers' and writers' clubs, theatres, youth clubs and anti-alcohol campaigns counted among its many activities, while other, more political efforts included organizing strikes and enabling the local cell of the illegal Communist Party to operate within its confines. As in Western Europe, the beret or workers' cap (*svájci sapka*, literally the 'Swiss cap') was a visual symbol everywhere as Csepel workers marched through the capital, resisting arrest and wreaking havoc. As such, it was an important centre of grass-roots activity organized and conducted by the workers themselves (Drucker 1964: 40–2).

Whereas the Workers' Home was a cultural and political institution uniting progressive youth of the left, the Cultural Centre was created to unite Christian, fascist and conservative groups of the right, signalling the division of youth along political lines. And there were signs on the horizon that neo-fascist and extreme rightist religious circles were slowly gaining the upper hand (Erőss and Eszenyi 1955; Ormos 1987). United in nationalist, anti-Semitic and racist organizations such as the EME (Union of Awakening Hungarians), MFP (Party of the Defenders of the Magyar Race), MOVE (Hungarian National Defence League) and MNYSZ (Hungarian Arrow Cross Party), and parading under the mantle of semi-liberalist national socialism, these groups reflected the fact that the ruling political tapestry was monochrome in composition. The right targeted skilled as well as semi-skilled workers as potential members. At the same time, the Gömbös government hardly welcomed radical 'communist actions' and, during this period, even the bourgeois Csepel citizenry asked for police reinforcements (*csendőrség*) and wanted them kept on a state of alert. In 1932, Hungary's fascist leader Gömbös visited Csepel to restore order to that 'despicable communist nest'. But 'Red Csepel' proved to be virtually impenetrable. Its second wave of radicalization produced a number of young martyrs: Ilona Bagi, Géza Sebestyén, József Sutor, Lajos Drahos and István Bajáki, whose memory was preserved in street names, schools and public squares until the end of state socialism in 1990. Many other communist and social democrat leaders were arrested and executed. Others, more fortunate, went underground or found their way to Moscow.

Csepel's chaotic situation was reflected in its fragmented political, ethnic and generational make-up. The ruling classes were heterogeneous: among its ranks were well-to-do Jewish businessmen, prosperous Catholic Rác and Schwab farmers, Bohemian and German engineers and factory managers, and Hungarian (Magyar) shopkeepers. Their political power, however, was achieved through party alliance. From the beginning of the interwar period until the 1936 election, the Christian Democratic Party controlled political life. Together with the Christian Youth and the MOVE, this party was founded

in 1920, in response to the influx of a large number of Transylvanian refugees from post-Trianon Romania (Perényi 1934: 124–8). It is likely that similar conservative associations such as the National Unity Party (NEP) were also formed to counter the powerful Social Democratic and Communist Parties.<sup>13</sup>

Strong Christian and paramilitary youth organizations sprang up across the country to facilitate political education and socialization (Cornelius 1998). European states during the early decades of the twentieth century were surprisingly uniform in their attitudes to youth: all attempted to 'nationalize' them (Becker 1946, Gillis 1981, Koon 1985, Wilkinson 1969), or, in the case of the Soviet Union, to 'Sovietize' them (Gorsuch 2000). By combining popular culture, sports, consumerism and education, youth culture had a uniform outlook. Gendered fashions, songs and music, summer and winter camps, training and the Christian work ethic were all invited to create subservient national citizens out of youthful participants. In Csepel, reflecting the dominant trend of 'divide and rule', most important among the political groups were the *Cserkészzet*, *Levente* and *Hubások* paralleling the *Wandervogel* in Germany and Boy Scouts in the West (Laqueur 1984; Springhall 1977, Wilkinson 1969). As Wilkinson noted with reference to British youth movements of the 1920s and 1930s, it is important to realize that continental movements became 'vehicles of overt political protest or instruments of party political manipulation' while in England they did not (1969: 4). In interwar Hungary, most youth groups could not function without state support and legitimacy. The Horthy regime did, nevertheless, support the participation of Hungarian youth in the international Boy Scout movement and bringing the 1939 World Jamboree to Gödöllő was a major achievement. The role of the official youth movement was to create a *generatio aequivoca* (generation of equal birth) which would unite under an extremist Christian-fundamentalist ideological banner to serve the interests of the state and its ruling elites. Aside from the Boy Scouts, perhaps most widespread among the male population between 12 and 21 was the *Levente* whose principal function consisted in providing a quasi-compulsory paramilitary training with strong Catholic undertones. The Catholic Young Men's Organization (KALOT), Catholic Agrarian Girls' Organization (KALASZ) and the Protestant Christian Youth League (KIE) were important religious-political organizations which aligned the youth movement according to religion and gender.<sup>14</sup> Ethnicity, too, was an ingredient. In 1938, the original Schwab farmers of Csepel enjoyed their own *Volksbund* organization under the aegis of the *Volksbund der Deutschen in Ungarn*, with their respective youth factions forged in the footsteps of the German ethnic revival movement initiated by Jakob Bleyer after the First World War (Paikert 1967: 115–16). Thus, youth organizations and relations not only reflected general political attitudes, but religion, gender, occupation and specific age-set ideology as well, in a pattern similar to that of youth factionalism in other European countries.<sup>15</sup>

Perhaps the local elections of 1936 are the best signal of the politicization of the workers and youth in those days. In fact, they reveal the political legitimacy of fascist political rule and its institutional framework, even though the Christian Socialists did not poll enough votes to win. Three parties stood in the election: the newly formed Local Civic and Workers' Party, the Small Craftsmen Party and the Social Democratic Party. With a considerable number of workers disenfranchised, the Civic and Workers' Party, representing the interests of small shopkeepers, craftsmen and the middle class, won a landslide victory. Neither the Social Democrats nor the traditional Christian Socialists gained important votes (Kiss 1984: 87).

By the time the steel-town celebrated its centenary in 1938, it had become clear that the extreme rightist parties had triumphed. On the other hand, and despite its illegal status, the Communist Party was succeeding in working underground to unite radical workers and disrupt local hegemony; however, its efforts were not sufficient to change the course of history. The victory of the right was not unique to Csepel, but occurred throughout Hungary and, for that matter, Central Europe as a whole: as the deadlock of the world-market system became evident, fascism emerged as a 'revolutionary tendency directed as much against conservatism as against the competing revolutionary force of socialism' (Polanyi 1964: 240). With this change in political power, the workers of Csepel faced a new dilemma: they could enjoy increased economic prosperity and production, but – and perhaps more importantly – they had to endure the complications of state involvement in their lives.

When national elections were held a year later, three parties received the majority of votes in Csepel: of the total 5,195 votes cast, 1,614 went to the Hungarian Revival Party (MEP), 1,515 to the Arrow Cross (*Nyilaskeresztes Párt*) and 1,214 went to the Social Democratic Party; the rest were divided among four smaller parties (Borsányi 1989: 94; Kiss 1984: 85–7). The victory of the conservative and the moderately liberal parties over the Social Democrats can be explained in several ways: foremost among these is the fact that most working-class people in Csepel either belonged to the banned Communist Party or were not registered voters. One worker recalled: 'As an apprentice I was working in the steel-mill when I was told by the foreman that work comes first and the factory second. He assured me that commies and lefties don't make it to master-workers. So, me and my mates decided to keep quiet.' Apart from intimidating youthful workers, factory management assisted the strong cultural revival of the Schwab population in Csepel, another important factor that determined the voting pattern of the 1939 elections. Caught up in the spirit of the Third Reich's propaganda, and supporting their *Volksdeutsch* status, many Schwab Csepelers felt obliged to vote for the Arrow Cross Party in a situation comparable to the plight of the Saxons in Transylvania (McArthur 1981: 135; Paikert 1967: 249–56). This suggests the ways in which government politics influenced local-level political socialization and working-class consciousness.



Such explanations lead inevitably to the question: how was it possible that Red Csepel's population of 50,000 accounted for only about 10 per cent of registered voters? The answer, it would appear, lies in the bureaucratic infrastructure of the local government and its laws permitting only 'citizens' and individuals of 'good standing' to be registered voters. Those who wanted to register were required to show 'local citizenship status' (*közszégi illetőség*). This depended, among other things, on secure employment, payment of local, state and church taxes, and ownership of a house(s) and landholdings. Only the 'respectable citizens' of Csepel – males, middle-class, middle-aged and good Christians as well – were permitted to vote. It goes without saying that these criteria were scarcely flexible enough to allow thousands of recent migrant workers, youth and women to vote.

The atomization of working-class youth and factionalism among the citizens of Csepel went hand in hand with the rightist national policies of the government and the boosted production cycles in the factories. This new militarization of Hungarian industry was legally accepted in the government patent, issued during the Győr Programme of 5 March 1938, which followed the Austrian *Anschluss*. Although the Manfred Weiss Works manufactured munitions, after the 1933 contract with the Ministry of Military Affairs they were produced exclusively for hunting rifles (Berend and Ránki 1965: 71). However, it was to the Győr Programme that a total of one billion *pengő* was allocated for the subsequent five years, of which approximately 600 million were to be spent on weapons and 400 million on the army (Baksay 1960: 512). In 1939, as in 1916, the Manfred Weiss Works came under military supervision. Nevertheless, the war economy did not require the full five years to achieve its aims and, by 1940, the target plan had been fulfilled, causing a general 30 per cent increase in industrial output throughout Hungary. Tanks, army trucks, rifles and munitions issued forth from factories in astronomical numbers as more and more youth were fully employed, a situation similar to that in Nazi Germany, where Hitler's policies solved large-scale unemployment and, at the same time, created a loyal workforce and military.

When Hungary entered the war in 1941 as an ally of Nazi Germany all goods produced at the Manfred Weiss Works were destined for the Axis military machinery. With the building of an aircraft factory located in Sziget-szentmiklós, a village neighbouring Csepel, the whole island of Csepel was to enjoy another important industry providing more jobs for workers seeking employment. These factories were commissioned to begin assembly-line production of Messerschmitt planes and Daimler-Benz motors for the *Luftwaffe* (Berend and Ránki 1965: 87). Undoubtedly, the Manfred Weiss Works, together with the other major industrial plants of Rába, Ganz and Mávag, benefited from the war and state contracts.

The prime mover behind all this production was the state, whose orders constantly grew in magnitude, even far beyond the size that could be covered by output. Government orders were supported by financing for war investment, and by

extending large loans to factories working for the military. Of course, this meant that larger and larger parts of the national income were being channelled into the budget and to military expenditures. (Berend and Ránki 1985: 160)

Despite the poverty and social malaise described above, Csepel's population continued to increase as the industrial firms provided jobs and, for the time being, security. Even though most young men were drafted into the army (except those who worked in the militarized units of the factory), by 1943 Csepel's population had reached 53,000. As in the first two decades of the twentieth century, this growth was not the result of natural increase but rather of an exodus from the hinterland as well as from other industrial centres experiencing plant closures and falling production. As a result of the 1940 Vienna Arbitration, just as in the wake of the Trianon Peace Treaty, Hungary again received a large number of refugees from the 'liberated successor states' of Czechoslovakia, Romania and Yugoslavia. While most found jobs at the Manfred Weiss Works, the paper mill, the clothing factory, the shipyard, the aircraft factory and the oil refinery employed others totalling approximately 10,500 additional workers. Csepel was in such need of workers that they were recruited from the nearby districts of Kőbánya, Soroksár, Pesterzsébet, Budafok and other settlements on the island. In 1943, the total number of workers at the Manfred Weiss Works was 32,132, although some estimates put this number as high as 40,000 (Baksay 1960: 512). The following figures illustrate the class, age and gender divisions for 1940 and 1943:

	1940	1943
Management	196	272
Skilled workers	8,626	12,110
Semi-skilled workers	9,412	11,519
Unskilled workers	4,445	6,902
Child workers	1,007	1,329
Total	23,686	32,132
Male workers	17,379	25,105
Female workers	6,307	7,027
Total	23,686	32,132

These figures suggest that the war economy was playing an important role in bringing young males and females from diverse socio-economic occupations into the factory at a moment when production was determined by extreme ideological considerations. Thus, the *Blitzkrieg* on the battlefields translated – if I may take such a liberty – into *Blitzarbeit*, or rapid, forced work tempo of a labour force consisting of about 38.5 per cent skilled and 61.5 per cent semi- or unskilled labourers (Baksay 1960: 513; Kiss 1984: 74). As production moved full speed ahead, the workers and their families could not

have anticipated the approaching dangers, despite the fact that their jobs and regular pay cheques were secured.

On 19 March 1944, when the German army occupied Hungary, as many as 65,000 people were living in Csepel, of whom roughly 44,000 were industrial workers. Together with the dozens of farmers and the 700 small producers and shopkeepers, administrators and intellectuals, they constituted Csepel's wage-earning population.

In order to maintain control over such heterogeneous working masses, factory management and town administration alike intensified attacks on the Social Democratic and Communist Party members. In 1943, these organizations sustained one of their most serious losses when police discovered an underground cell. In the ensuing raid 241 members were arrested and jailed (Czako 1972: 19). In vain did the Hungarian government, in concert with the small military elite organized under the Hungarian Independence Movement (*Magyar Függetlenségi Mozgalom*), attempt to sign a last-minute armistice with Moscow on 11 October 1944 (Szent-Miklossy 1988: 89–93). On 15 October, following the arrest of the Regent, the country came under the terror of the Arrow Cross and the *Hungarista* (Hungarist) commandos led by the extreme reactionary Ferenc Szálasi. Jews, communists and leftist sympathizers were rounded up and taken away. Many of the Social Democrat and communist Csepelers met their fate in these months, among them the successful organizers István Pataki and Robert Kreutz, adding to an already long list of casualties whose names were later appropriated by the Stalinists, enlisting them for the cause of building communism.

These deportations and the subsequent military mobilization inflicted a serious blow to the island's people and economy. The German military high command made certain that all factories were under its control, an important aspect of which was the takeover of Jewish businesses.<sup>16</sup> This fate befell the Weiss family's own property as its members were taken to concentration camps, and the factory, together with the properties of the Kornfeld, Chorin and Mauthner families, were 'sold' to the SS. Kurt Becher, Himmler's representative in Hungary, handled the repossession of the Manfred Weiss Works (Berend and Ránki 1965: 92). Only after a series of meetings between the Nazis and the Weiss family did the Nazis allow family members to seek refuge in Switzerland and Portugal (Bacconi 1977: 143–4). In return, the family received payment and was forced to admit the 'sale' of its property. Too late and in vain, the Hungarian government attempted to halt transfer of the factory to Nazi hands.

In September 1944, after the Soviet Red Army had crossed into Hungary, the newly acquired German properties were shipped to safety in Germany. The factory, now under the control of the German Industrial Commission (*Deutsche Industrie Kommission*) and renamed the Csepel Works, was disassembled, as had become common in other industrial towns in Hungary (Berend and Ránki 1985: 173). Fearful workers opted to leave the troubled town or offered resistance. By the end of 1944, with only a few hundred

people working, production ceased; machinery, buildings and raw materials were placed on ships and freight cars and transported to Germany. Radical workers found themselves unable to stand idly by, and with the aid of the decimated KMP formed an underground organization called the 'Committee of the Thirteenth', which succeeded in slowing down the shipment of machinery and the demolition of the factory. Concerned for their livelihood, they were successful in resisting the Arrow Cross members involved with these transactions. The outlawed left was, when all was said and done, instrumental in saving the factory from total dismemberment.

Meanwhile bombings and battles around the nation's capital intensified as the Red Army approached. Both on account of its concentration of industries and its shipyard, the town was heavily bombed in several major attacks. By January 1945, Csepel's population had fallen to 30,000 and dropped far below that figure in the months that followed. Hundreds of Jewish families from Csepel Island were sent to Auschwitz, Dachau and Mauthausen, although many in Csepel were saved through the collective efforts of progressive communists and intellectuals. While the Nazi army was withdrawing, members of the German *Volksbund* and its sympathizers also departed, thereby contributing to the decimation of Csepel's German-speaking indigenous inhabitants. As workers and their families tried to escape a certain death, their departure created devastation and, ultimately, the total collapse of the community.

#### THE REMAKING OF RED CSEPEL

As several scholars have emphasized, nation-state formations and class processes need not be congruous. The case of Csepel as an industrial stronghold through the last decade of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth is a good illustration for the making of a working class and a state-making process going hand in hand. Csepel's population was never a homogeneous one, despite the literature to the contrary on the nature and styles of the Hungarian peasantry. If anything, it can perhaps best be characterized as a conglomerate of various socio-economic groups engaged in productive and market relations. These groups had boundaries fixed in social identities that were ambiguous and politicized according to immediate local-level needs as well as state interests. With the introduction of factory work, processes of industrialization and urbanization were launched, creating communities previously unknown in Hungary. Consequently, the industrial working class in Csepel was not formed by capitalism alone, just as peasants cannot be said to be natural descendants of feudalism alone. The relationship between the two groups was neither clear-cut nor unidirectional. Some rural villagers did migrate to Csepel to join the industrial workforce; but rarely do we find sons of prosperous Csepel farmers becoming machinists or mill-workers. For while the regime endeavoured to

create cleavages especially along occupational, religious and age lines, the sheer number of workers guaranteed the working-class nature of the community. Through specific channels of socialization, youth were placed in a hierarchical relationship with older workers and the management creating unique forms of age-based culture patterns. These young workers ensured a large, politically sensitized and active reserve army of workers.

It would seem, then, that the emergence of working-class culture and radicalism was rooted in the life-styles and the antagonistic productive relations between workers and management, hostilities between rich landlords and unskilled labourers, and conflict between local Csepelers and migrant subordinates. These differences, however, were minimal when it came to discrepancies between the blue- and white-collar labour force. Their exploited status and the low level of blue-collar economic existence – quite apart from the lack of creature comforts, schools, infrastructure and constant threats of unemployment – go a long way to explaining the workers' grass-roots political activism and spontaneous rebelliousness. While after the turn of the twentieth century rural protests (such as those in southern Hungary, known for this reason as the 'Storm Corner') by the country's highly exploited under-classes were an everyday occurrence in the island of Csepel, such communal agro-proletarian political movement was non-existent.<sup>17</sup> Instead, Csepel provided a natural setting for diverse populations and age groups to construct a class-based culture with its own agenda based on common cultural and political conditions. Through recreational activities, institutions and informal relations, workers forged a vibrant culture, the symbol and ideology of a class willing to defend itself against its oppressors. It is obviously impossible to know what might have become of this working-class town had the course of events not altered so dramatically, for two events were decisive in the lives of Csepelers, as for countless others: the Second World War and Stalinism. In the next chapters I will consider the impact of these events, analysing first the shaping of Stalinist Hungary and then the transition to state socialism, with their concomitant ideologies that so dramatically reconfigured age, class and gender relations and political socialization.

## 4 VANGUARD YOUTH: FROM STALINISM TO STATE SOCIALISM

In Chapter 3, I proposed that specific historical circumstances placed Csepel at the heart of working-class tradition in Hungary. During these early years of capitalism, Csepel youth were not solely passive subjects of the ruling class, but were influenced by such diverse ideological streams as religious and party institutions and trade union organizations, all of which provided ample opportunities for socialization. Rather than serve capitalist interests, by controlling the ranks of youth for the job market and providing the skills required by the factories, they created a vital working-class culture of their own. Two caveats obtained: first, through the efforts of the Communist Party (KMP) and the Social Democratic Party (SZDP), radical, anti-capitalist and communist ideas took hold in workers' minds. The institutions founded by these parties gave momentum to workers' movements and subsequently facilitated a collective but official workers' identity, thereby subverting rather than reproducing dominant power relations. Second, workers' efforts took the form, by and large, of underground, grass-roots movements on the periphery, enabling working youth to join the ranks of working-class organizations of their own accord – an important consideration with regard to the voluntary aspects of working-class alliances. After the Second World War, the establishment of an official workers' movement and the elimination of previous relations of production dramatically altered the workers' future, as well as that of East European industry as a whole – a direct consequence of Soviet domination and Stalinist dictatorship in Eastern Europe (the 'Soviet bloc'). The historian Walter Laqueur explains:

Political developments in these countries during the first post-war decade were very similar, and it became the custom to regard them as a unit. But, apart from belonging to the Soviet sphere of influence and being subjected to the same treatment after 1945, there were considerable differences that should not be ignored. (1992: 67)

What is needed, then, to balance and complete the picture is a detailed analysis of the changing nature of the reproduction of class relations under the influence of Stalinist culture and Stalinist political socialization. In this chapter I take up the distinctive character of the reorganization and reproduction of the workforce from the period of transition from pre-war capitalism to post-war Stalinist and state-socialist systems. These political-

economic reorganizations fundamentally altered the nature of working class-relations and the way in which political socialization affected youth throughout the Soviet bloc.

LIBERATION AND TRANSITION: THE FIRST THREE YEAR PLAN, 1945–49

The foundations of totalitarian rule in Eastern Europe were laid immediately after the war, a period when the economy was reconstructed, the war-torn country was rebuilt and a brief experiment with parliamentary democracy was attempted (Berend and Ránki 1974: 342–63; 1985: 177–97). Once consolidation of the system was achieved, new and dynamic socio-economic and political processes came into effect. On 1 August 1946, the ‘bourgeois



2 Stalinist reorganization. Entrance to the Csepel Works, 1948. The sign reads: ‘Freedom, Friendship – Here only organized workers work’ (author’s collection).

currency', the *pengő*, was replaced by the *forint*. On 4 November 1945, the country voted in its first free elections after the war. The results were unexpected: the Smallholders Party won 57 per cent of the vote; the Soviet-backed Communist Party 17 per cent. It had begun to seem as if Hungary, despite occupation by the Soviet army, would be allowed to establish a truly democratic multi-party system while maintaining its relative independence.

This brief period of transition, however, was the time for Stalin and his party bureaucrats (the *apparatchik*) to make their move to construct Bolshevik-style and Soviet satellite states in East-Central Europe. Between May 1945 and December 1947, the Communist Party increased its membership from 150,000 to 864,000, constituting a massive show of support and a popular base for its legitimacy. After two years of struggle, political and religious factions were eliminated and the newly created communist Hungarian Workers' Party (*Magyar Dolgozók Pártja* or MDP) became the country's only party.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, large landed estates were confiscated and redistributed to needy peasants. Pre-war teachers, bureaucrats and white-collar workers were suspected of antipathy towards the new regime and were 'b-listed'. This dreaded phrase meant that everyone in work had to be checked as to his or her trustworthiness. The communists, consciously or not, were copying the example set by the Horthy regime in 1922 when leftists and communist sympathizers working in education, culture and the civil service were fired. Under such state terror, no serious opposition to communist rule could emerge. By the end of 1947, and with the 96 per cent of the votes cast for the leftist coalition parties in the second post-war election, which was marked by intimidation and Soviet surveillance, Stalinism and state control were fully established.

The generational disparity of the pre-war period was seen as a relic of its bourgeois past, its religious ideology to be replaced by a communist consciousness based on a new division of youth into a politically correct age-set.<sup>2</sup> Between 1945 and 1949, all those under 24 years of age – nearly three million out of a population of 9.5 million in Hungary – were courted by competing party interests in dozens of youth organizations,<sup>3</sup> but only about 12 per cent of those under 24 were card-carrying members of these parties, and were divided into four affiliations: religion, trade unions, social democrats and leftist parties. Gender was an added feature, for several youth groups – interestingly enough, not only the religious but the trade union groups as well – consisted of separate girls' and boys' organizations (Gál and Szarvas 1981).

It soon became clear that the communists would not allow the proliferation of youth organizations and, following the Soviet model of the *Komsomol*, a single organization was created. The young János Kádár – Hungary's powerful future leader – now appeared on the scene at the Csepel propounding a radical proposal to eliminate 'reactionary' and 'rightist' factions by propagating a single-party system Works (quoted in *Fogaskerek*, 12 February 1948, p.1). Even once radical organizations, such as the March





3 Political meeting of cultural activists at the Csepel sports complex, 1948 (author's collection).

Front, were forbidden to operate in the new political system (Borbándi 1983: 441–9). Consequently, in March 1950, all youth organizations were banned and a single youth group established. To reflect the new nature of power relations and the symbolic elevation of labour into the communist state ideology the new youth organization was named the Workers' Youth Association (*Dolgozó Ifjúsági Szövetség*, or DISZ; Petrus 1984).<sup>4</sup> In order to create a working-class communist generation the regime was eager to be the prime mover, together with Moscow, of the socialist international youth movement and sent hundreds of trusted cadres to its biennial world meeting (VIT). It seemed that the triumph of communism following the war was a victory both by and for the youth in the newly created Soviet bloc.

In tandem with this political reorganization of age–class relations, industrial enterprises, private businesses, banks, railways and schools were nationalized. To assure production and the payment of reparations – Hungary was required to pay \$300 million compensation on account of its wartime alliance with Germany – and to follow the Stalinist blueprint for implementing communism, state intervention in all aspects of industry, labour and socialization was considered necessary (Felkay 1989: 33–5).<sup>5</sup> Consequently, factories were centralized under a new system of trusts. Each was required to meet target plans set by the National Planning Bureau and the Chief Economic Council. Since about 8 per cent of the reparations were to be paid in machine-tools, a particularly heavy burden was placed on metallurgy and especially on the machine-tool industry. The weight of this burden, together with Stalinist centralized planning, motivated the radical

reforms enacted by the new political order of the Csepel Works and heavy industry in general (Adams 1984).

For Csepel, the war ended on a different note from that of its imprint in other parts of the country: there, it meant the end of its inhabitants' lives in the place they had called home. As the Soviet army approached the nation's capital and the war drew to a close, many members of Csepel's Schwab (*Sváb*) population retreated with the German army; likewise, many engineers and skilled workers chose to take their families to Germany. In all about 4,000 left (or were forced to leave) as machinery was also shipped to Germany (Berend and Ránki 1965: 387). Others – those with stronger ties to their town and its people – chose to remain. Older inhabitants rationalized their decision by saying: 'We've been through one war and Csepel survived that.' While evacuating Csepel, angry and desperate Arrow Cross members attempted to blow up the few remaining factory buildings and the town hall, actions prevented by the town's remaining inhabitants, especially women and young men, who feared the loss of their livelihoods. Yet surprisingly few Csepelers lost their lives in this last-ditch struggle.

But neither communists, democrats, nor concerned patriots were in a position to help their town escape its fate. Csepel, proudly described in a local newspaper only a few years earlier as the 'Hungarian Essen' was virtually razed in the bombings of the summer 1944 and during the last months of vicious fighting. When units of the Soviet army entered Csepel on 9 January 1945, they found a desolate place. There were virtually no signs of life; roads had disappeared under debris; bridges had been destroyed; hundreds of corpses were strewn everywhere; houses lay in ruins and smoking factory buildings signalled the end of the war. Of 8,300 houses, 1,123 were totally destroyed, 893 badly damaged and another 1,000 were in need of repair (*Fogaskerék*, 14 July 1946). Homeless orphans, the 'fatherless generation', roamed the countryside in search of food, shelter and parents.<sup>6</sup> The total value of material losses was estimated at over 25 million *forints* (*Magyar Dolgozók Pártja* 1949: 4). Roughly 80 per cent of the factory buildings and 40 per cent of the machinery and raw materials were either destroyed or removed (Berend and Ránki 1965: 402). To make matters worse, Hungary and the other East European nations were not included in the western allies' Marshall Plan.

As in 1918–19, complete chaos characterized this period, as the Third Ukrainian Division of the Soviet army took control of the town, assisting in relief work during much of 1945. The factory – or what remained of it – became the property of the 'victorious Red Army'; and the town was placed under the jurisdiction of a military platoon, assisted in its efforts to restore order by the Committee of the Thirteenth. Those who returned were offered food and clothing in return for helping to bury the dead, clear away rubble and repair the roads. A war memorial was erected to commemorate Soviet soldiers who had died during the battles in Csepel, a monument that still stands today. As a token of Hungary's debt, for the next 30 years regular

visits by Pioneers, KISZ members and Communist Party activists to this monument were a required state celebration on festive occasions. To promote the process of reconstruction and information dissemination, Csepel was granted its own newspaper, aptly named *Fogaskerék* (Cogwheel). Its first issues dealt with fascist sympathizers and conservative elements, among them many former Manfred Weiss Works managers, religious leaders and *Volksbund* Schwabs, who were rounded up and taken away, an act of vengeance that was also the fate of ethnic Germans in Hungary for decades to come (*Fogaskerék* 1946). This period is remembered today as the 'years of fear', a phrase frequently used by older Csepelers.

As in previous industrial boom-and-bust cycles, it was only a short time before people began to return, and the town became vital once again. As workers were enticed back, the Manfred Weiss Works also came back to life. Within a few months of liberation, Csepel's population had reached 42,000. A month later, 5,000 workers, 'spurred by the new work ethic, eagerly engaged in the "May Competition" [*Májusi munkaverseny*] and helped to achieve full reconstruction by the end of the year' (*Fogaskerék* 1946: 1).

With the help of the Soviet military units, full production was achieved at the Csepel Works by the end of 1946, with a labour force of 18,000. According to the first post-war company statistics the breakdown of occupational categories was the following: 7,457 skilled workers; 5,087 semi-skilled; 3,837 unskilled labourers and 2,101 women (Baczoni 1977: 268–9). However, since few women were skilled workers, most were relegated to work in offices and as janitors. The occupational hierarchy was very different from the pre-war system in that administrative and managerial jobs doubled; a total of 2,117, or 12 per cent of the workforce, were white-collar (Baczoni 1977: 269). The proportion of engineers and specialized skilled workers (referred to as technicians) was also increasing: 124 had engineering diplomas and a further 520 technicians' diplomas (Adamovics 1982: 67). With the influx of the new workers, Csepel began look like its pre-war self: the number of job vacancies increased and workers earned above-average pay and had adequate housing. The average hourly wage at the Csepel Works was 1.3–1.4 *forints*; but at the steel-smelter, foundry-men earned as much as 2.35 *forints* an hour, while lathe operators earned a maximum of 1.6 *forints* an hour (Baczoni 1977: 269). Women and youth were, however, at the bottom of the newly emerging industrial ladder as their average wage was below 1 *forint*. The status of vocational students was even worse: they worked for an hourly wage of 0.4 *forints*. As a result of Stalinist policies and rapid centralized planning, Csepel was assigned the symbolic status of a small-scale replica of the socialist state, as more young women and men were recruited from the countryside and offered the opportunity to become 'educated industrial workers'.

Together with the formation of such an idealized socialist labour force, the building of centrally planned 'socialist cities' was of prime importance for the new government (Compton 1979; Hamilton 1971; Turnock 1978) and Red

Csepel became a legend of socialist reconstruction and victory. Older Csepelers vividly recall the socialist slogans that were popular in those years: a now faded sign, still visible in the steel-smelter shop when I visited in 1990, exhorted: 'In this country only those who labour will have a place. Work! This country is yours; you are building it for yourselves.' Few questioned such activism and most, coming from the war-torn countryside, embraced wholeheartedly what these slogans embodied. Csepel's emergence as a 'model socialist town' was enhanced by the new apartment blocks that replaced the bomb-damaged workers' quarters and the construction of parks and cultural institutions to cater to the needs of 'socialist families'. In this way, the Stalinist state took control of material culture and the domestic sphere in order to achieve specific social and political goals (Buchl 1999: 181). Streets and squares were renamed as aristocratic and pre-war names fell into official disfavour. The names of distant and hence more 'neutral' historical culture heroes (Hunyadi, Zrinyi, Kossuth, Petőfi and Dózsa) replaced them. Communist and socialist martyrs were idolized; old signs disappeared overnight, to be replaced by Béla Kun Street, Ilona Bagi Street and Lenin Road. The socialist reconstruction, or as it was then called 'rejuvenation' (*ujjászületés*), however, meant far more than renaming streets to suit a new ethos.

Changes in the structure of city government reflected a revolution in the entire fabric of Hungarian society, as 'communist' mayors, police chiefs, judges and city council members began to proliferate. Local municipal governments were ordered to restructure their residential areas, expanding their control not only over the populace but the whole social sphere. New areas of the *Királyerdő* (Royal Forest) – many belonging to Csepel's prosperous farmers before the war – were allocated as private family plots. At the mercy of these new ruling bodies, bombed-out workers' quarters and pre-1945 squatter settlements underwent a process of *szanálás* (restructuring) in which outdated, poorly built and insalubrious structures were demolished and replaced by modern apartment complexes. Abandoned houses belonging to former Schwab and Jewish families were taken over by the state and allocated to large, poor families (*Fogaskerek*, 26 May 1945: 1). Between 1945 and 1949, during this 'restructuring' (a precursor of Gorbachev's *perestroika*) a total of 1,887 working-class families were allocated homes (Berend and Ránki 1965: 393). Substantial low-interest bank loans were approved for young workers and shops were stocked with consumer goods. Such privileged economic resurgence was dramatically different from the situation in the rest of the country, which was suffering from hunger, privation and the drive towards collectivization, a dreaded policy that was known in Hungarian by the much-hated term *tagosítás*.<sup>7</sup>

Such alterations to power relations and the social structure could not have been achieved without the compliance of elites, a group that changed their former alliance and identities to serve the communist state.<sup>8</sup> However, the new state elite could not achieve its task without the workers' active

participation. Under the coalition formed by leftist factions, Csepel youth were placed in the forefront of these reconstruction activities (Petrus 1984). Young workers were urged to form 'village brigades' (*falujáró brigádok*) to assist in rebuilding the devastated countryside and provide labour for the harvest and, undoubtedly, to re-educate the masses of 'untrustworthy peasants'. The agrarian reform was introduced to redress the situation and inspire agricultural youth to leave their parents' world and forge a communist state.<sup>9</sup> This was clearly a mild precursor of Mao Zedong's Cultural Revolution in 1966 when students 'were encouraged by the Cultural Revolution's leaders to demolish the old buildings, temples, and art objects in their towns and villages, and to attack their teachers, school administrators, party leaders, and parents' (Spence 1990: 605).

On a smaller scale, Stalinist euphoria resulted in 'salami tactics', according to one ironic saying, planning first the elimination of the radical opposition and then of members of the moderate opposition. In the words of a former high-ranking official: 'We ate salami, while the rest of the country was sliced as salami.' As more factory shops resumed work, thousands of young couples were recruited from the countryside, including many former Csepelers. Single men and women, and those who could not afford to build their own houses, were lured to Csepel by the free, comfortable housing provided by the factory in newly erected workers' hostels. In the words of a former activist, by relocating from the countryside: 'we were looking for a decent standard of living and a way out of the one-way-street life of the countryside.' In reality, they were co-opted by the state to build state socialism and, in turn, they legitimated it.<sup>10</sup>

Following the ideological agenda, the infrastructure was reorganized according to the principles of socialist urban planning (Compton 1979). Paved roads were built, power lines and water mains repaired and extended to include the new *lakótelepek* (apartment complexes) (Beregszászi 1959). Schools, crèches, kindergartens and clinics were also erected, creating a sense of communal and co-operative living, along the lines of Soviet socialization patterns (Buchli 1999: 28–30). Free schooling and health care were introduced as basic rights. Key workers and their families were awarded holidays on the former estates of aristocrats, such as those at Lake Balaton where not only leisure activities but political education (described in the next chapter) were the order of the day.

Why was Csepel such a phenomenal success story and how did it recover in such a short time? According to the Romanian political scientist Pavel Campeanu (1989), the fundamental goal of Stalinist reorganization was to establish systematic – and ultimate – domination, while at the same time, existing relations and structures were distorted by state ideology to the extent that they became 'outmoded', 'retrograde' and wholly inconsistent with building communism. Thus the establishment of Stalinist rule throughout Eastern Europe can be seen not simply as yet another form of dictatorship or, for that matter, megalomania running amok: rather, it can be more

accurately viewed as a constant struggle between the old and the new orders during which economic and cultural relations were distorted in the extreme. These deformities were to have deleterious consequences for Hungary and her neighbours for many years to come. As it was, young people in search of stability and comfort felt confident that the Stalinist state was on their side.

Csepel's re-creation in the Stalinist mould followed a careful plan. As we have seen, the Manfred Weiss Works – renamed 'Mátyás Rákosi Works' after Hungary's new Stalinist ruler Rákosi (1892–1971) – gained a prominent position thanks to its metallurgy. All goods were produced to fulfil state contracts: '95 per cent of the production of the Manfred Weiss



4 May Day demonstration, 1949. The slogan reads 'Unity in Reconstruction. Vote for the Independent Hungarian People's Front' (author's collection).

Works, one of the biggest iron, steel and engineering companies, was shipped to state authorities' (Berend and Ránki 1985: 186). Complying with state-enforced quotas, in turn, it received state loans and credits to maintain its privileged position.

Volatile and ideologically charged labour relations completely altered the nature of work and working-class life. Young workers were co-opted to work in extended and weekend shifts known as 'communist Saturdays', an idea borrowed from the Soviet *subbotnik* experiment with volunteerism to boost industrial production. In addition, overtime and extra work shifts allowed them to take home considerably larger pay cheques than their peers at other, less fortunate, factories. Finally, it was in Csepel that Soviet Stakhanovism was first imported to Hungary. This system was originally implemented in the Soviet Union in 1935, influenced by the American scientific work-management of Taylorism (Shlapentokh 1988; Siegelbaum 1990; Sur 1943). Its excesses notwithstanding, the Stakhanovite movement revitalized industrial production in Csepel and in Hungary as a whole; and in turn, helped to redefine the concept of Red Csepel.<sup>11</sup>

The implementation of Stakhanovism in Csepel was the single most important event in perpetuating the image of a new, Stalinist Red Csepel and helped to rejuvenate – if only in distorted fashion – a contemporary sense of working-class consciousness among young workers. It was the young communist Gyula Muszka, a lathe operator in the Machine-Tool Factory, whose name came to epitomize Red Csepel and the Stakhanovite movement there. In 1949, as a special gift for Stalin's seventieth birthday, Muszka and other young workers produced more than 1,000 per cent above the quota (Berend and Ránki 1965: 453). This, however, was not sufficient for the 'noble occasion'. A contemporary newsreel tells us how Stakhanovism worked:

December 21, 1949, is the 70th birthday of the Great Josef Stalin. As one of our workers' greatest joyous festivities since the liberation of 1945, the young workers of Csepel established a special Stalin-shift by calling upon all young industrial workers to participate in this nation-wide work competition. From among the Stakhanovites of Csepel, Nándor Knechtel, latheman, established a 3,052 per cent quota; however, he was beaten in this noble spirit of his shift by József Vinnyék, who produced 3,120 per cent.<sup>12</sup>

For such an extraordinary achievement, the young workers received the prestigious Hero of Socialist Labour prize (*Fogaskerek* 1949: 4). In subsequent years, many of these distinguished former Csepel workers were assigned to other factories as directors and party cadres. Despite – or because of – their privileged position, they were feared by locals and often referred to as 'the Csepeler commies'. As an historical curiosity and to illustrate the advancement of these Stakhanovites in the communist hierarchy, it should be noted that one of Muszka's Stakhanovite compatriots was Ede Horvát (*Vas és Fémipari Dolgozók Szakszervezete* 1950a; 1950b), whose nickname in the

1980s was 'Red Baron'. He was, until 1990, executive director of the Rába Works in Győr, known in the West for its trucks and wagons, and was considered to be a good example of the fashionable concept of the 'socialist mixed economy' from 1989 to 1990.<sup>13</sup>

Despite this work ethic, mass production in the newly organized factories was sluggish at first. Following the Soviet model of Stalinist enterprise management, a new leading body was formed. Law Decree 32 of 1950 declared that the enterprises would occupy the lowest level of the economic and state apparatus and be entirely subordinated to the state administration, an extension of the ruling Communist Party (David 1989: 57). Team members were appointed by the Ministry of Heavy Industry and selected from local workers and MDP cadres. Shop floor organization, known as the 'four corners of shop floor leadership' (*üzemi négyszög*), was adopted, in which representatives of the MDP, the trade union, management and the workers' council planned each step of the working process (*Fogaskerék* 1948: 3; Héthy and Makó 1989: 8–22). As a result of the new system of management and shop floor production, as well as the newly purchased technology, workers became more specialized and skilled in their trades while, at the same time, a politically determined occupational hierarchy was introduced. As a symbolic victory for the adaptation of the Soviet model, the Csepel Works was awarded a statue of Lenin, which was erected in front of the main gate. It would become a site of confrontation and workers' disenchantment for many years to come.

The overtly ideologized Stalinist work tempo could not have been achieved without winning over the 1.5 million industrial workers under 30 years of age. This was accomplished through the abandonment of the pre-war apprentice system (*inas-segéd*) and the implementation of a specialized educational system known as *iparitanuló képzés* (literally 'industrial-vocational student training') and workers' re-education training, *szakmunkás képzés*. Many workers remembered this semantic shift with a great deal of sarcasm:

From one day to the next, we were told that from now on we could not call our apprentices *inas* but had to address them with the politically correct term *iparitanuló*. But as soon as we left the meeting and returned to the shops we called them *fiatal urak* [literally young misters]. This did not go down well with them either. But we teased them anyway.

These nation-wide changes in schooling and socialization were felt immediately.<sup>14</sup> In 1949, there were 1,600 vocational students at the Csepel Works and a total of 462 young workers received vocational diplomas annually; by the mid-1950s these figures had tripled (Adamovics 1982: 66). A new educational system was created to replace the capitalist one but strangely, though not unexpectedly, it incorporated de-skilling as well as re-skilling. On the one hand, the tasks that the apprentices (*segéd*) were allowed to do were greatly reduced. On the other, 're-skilling' processes (*átképzés*)



helped to increase quotas as well as the work tempo by giving simpler and homogeneous tasks and skills to young workers. Since Stalinist industrial reorganization also meant full employment, workers who lacked adequate skills were hired as semi-skilled and unskilled labourers (in Hungarian, these were referred to as *segédmunkás*, *alkalmimunkás*, *betanítottmunkás* and *kisegítőmunkás*). This internal hierarchy, however, further atomized the labour force and aggravated the practice known as 'labour hoarding'. However, with such a large workforce, compared to pre-war years, the results were impressive: 1948 production was valued at 560.7 million *forints*, of which the steel-mill alone produced 220.9 million, and the Non-Ferrous Metal Works 96.5 million *forints* and the rest of the factories 243.3 million *forints* (Berend and Ránki 1965: 109). Undoubtedly, this was the result of the implementation, in January 1949, of COMECON when up-to-date Soviet machines replaced some of the old machinery. The guiding principle, as János David observes, was 'the rationality of a central bureaucratic planned economic system that rejected market conditions' (1989: 57). However, as we shall see, this proved to be a serious mistake for Hungary in the long run.

The example of Stakhanovite 'recovery' and the speedy – but often irregular – economic production cycles at Csepel did not fall on deaf ears. In the next few months, enterprises and agricultural collectives around the country felt the politicization of labour, creating a sense of economic urgency phrased, in the words of the Stalinist leaders, as 'catching up with the West'. The MDP and its youth organization, the DISZ (the Hungarian Working Youth Organization, reorganized in 16 February 1950), espoused the establishment of Stakhanovite brigades throughout industrial production. Stakhanovite workers became the symbols of 'socialist men and women' and served as examples in the creation of the 'new socialist personage'. The Rákosi Works and the Csepel Textile Works (the former Neményi Brothers' Textile Factory now nationalized) initiated a competition to boost production. Many former 'model' or 'shock' workers today interpret this as the 'true battle of the sexes', for the former employed thousands of men and the latter thousands of women. Gender imbalances notwithstanding, women in textile production also received medals; the two most common were the 'Hero of Socialist Labour' (*Szocialista Munka Hőse*) and the 'Red Flag Medal of Work' (*Munka Vörös Zászló Érdemrendje*). Posters, films, poems and songs (fashioned after the Soviet *chastuski*) were under the ideological – or *kulturpolitika* (cultural political) – sway of 'socialist realism'. Csepelers had clearly entered the mature phase of the Stalinist era.

Clearly, the establishment of Stalinism and central control over the economy fundamentally changed Hungarian society. Its declared communist political economy had four principal theoretical foundations: Communist Party rule, representing the interests of the working classes; socialization of the means of production; replacement and supplementation of the market mechanism by central planning; and the elimination of private

property with the introduction of socially equal redistribution of goods, services and national income (Berend and Ránki 1985: 199–200; Wylczynski 1982: 2–3). In contrast to such an ambitious agenda, centralization and one-party rule impinged on the life of every citizen in the country. New industrialized centres were created following the model of the Stalinist system of socialist planning (Dawson 1987; Sampson 1982); and those that had existed before socialism were reorganized. A former machinist in Csepel remembered:

As bosses came and went, we knew that real power emanated from one place only: the central Communist Party headquarters. We addressed everyone as comrade (*elvtárs*) but the real comrades were sitting in Budapest in the White House, the party building on the river.<sup>15</sup>

Thus, the idea of the 'communist firm' (Sawyer 1979) took on an overtly political meaning as, under the party's rule, cadres were responsible for making decisions in all matters. Youthful energies were harnessed for the time being. The new form of address, comrade, which created no distinction between older and younger workers, placed an ideological lid on the generational conflict.

Whether they wished it or not, as Stalinist development proceeded, Csepelers found themselves in the midst of this distorted transformation of Hungary. Because Csepel, with its model 'red heritage' and its monopoly on metallurgy, was singled out as a socialist industrial centre, it was required to break totally from its bourgeois past and capitalist culture. In this regard, both blue- and white-collar Csepelers unquestionably reaped the benefits of rapid reorganization, as evidenced by their upward mobility from poor peasant and semi-skilled status into the skilled socialist labour force, and by general improvements in living standards. At the same time, they absorbed mistakes and miscalculations on the road to forced development during the Rákosi cult and the succeeding Kádárist era (Berend and Ránki 1985: 204).

Among the vestiges of the 'bourgeois past' singled out for elimination in the new state were 'retrograde' peasant culture, religion and religious holidays (Lane 1981). Priests and devout church members especially were the subject of extreme prejudice and were used by the party as scapegoats for Csepel's social ills. Working youth were ideally suited to carry out the task: to the leaders they were innocent, 'since youth are not burdened and infected with the legacy and traditions of the past like the older generations are' (Farkas 1952: 521). But this generation, at the same time, 'is under the influence of cosmopolitanism: for the imitation of western dances, fashion, and *jampekedés*; even pushiness, carelessness in education, and softness while facing difficulties may be detected in their behaviour' (Farkas 1952: 522).<sup>16</sup> Thus, the leadership felt justified in imposing strict measures to implement stringent educational and youth policies in what Roger Bastide has called 'planned acculturation' (1974: 73), but in reality was an extremist form of political socialization.

A January 1950 Council of Ministry document, and those that followed it throughout the early 1950s, had important consequences for the workers of Csepel. Aimed at creating a unified system of centrally planned socialist industry, their main directives can best be summarized by the concepts modernization, standardization-unification and rationalization (Bernát 1985: 103; David 1989: 57). The Rákosi Works was reorganized into four large production units: the main factory, the general production factory, the steel-mill and the non-ferrous metal works. These units worked under the Csepel Trust, which received its plans and directives from the respective ministries. As problems surfaced, ranging from profit distribution and raw material shortage to unnecessary state intervention and over-ambitious economic plans, a subsequent decentralization plan was introduced, creating 15 major production units as semi-independent factories (Adamovics 1982: 70–1, 145). Target plans were assigned to each factory according to the concept of ‘plan-bargaining’, a mode of decision-making reached by Ministry planning offices and factory/trust managements.

The newly reorganized firm experienced fundamental changes in its organization, hierarchy and production processes. Even today, workers recall the slogans of the Rákosi era exhorting full commitment to the goals and means of socialist production; one such was ‘those who don’t work shouldn’t eat’ (*aki nem dolgozik ne is egyék*). In a bizarre misappropriation, fragments of Attila József’s poetry extolling the virtues of work were utilized and pasted in the factories. The fragment I saw in the late 1980s informed young workers how to work, but censored the poet’s original intention by omitting the first two lines:

[Though others will reap the benefits  
Of your work – Don’t be angry!]  
To work you must always try,  
Like the star punctually and beautifully,  
Crossing the vast sky.

Such contradictions notwithstanding, work (*munka, dolog*) now became strictly ‘socialist work’, following the party’s directives and was the noun, verb and adjective of Stalinist myopia. The union and the Hungarian Workers’ Party (MDP) urged workers to submit suggestions and innovations; and those who did were rewarded handsomely from the newly implemented bonus system.

Under constant central pressure, once again, Csepel experienced most intensely the changes brought about by agglomeration. As before, young men and women came from the countryside, increasing not only the labour force but the population of Budapest as well. By the end of the 1950s, the central industrial zone of Budapest employed a total of 442,900 industrial workers, amounting to almost 70 per cent of Hungary’s industrial labour force. In 1956, the Rákosi Works employed almost 34,000 workers.

Incorporated into Budapest as its twenty-first district, Csepel's population grew from 42,000 to 50,000. Caught up in the city's spirit of massive reconstruction and new life-styles young workers flocked to the nation's capital in their thousands. Regardless of their regional and ethnic identities, between 1950 and 1956, the DISZ enjoyed the growing support of 'communist youth'; though actual participation and breakdown varied between urban and rural youth and between occupations in various industries. Nevertheless, under pressure from the Communist Party, the youth association increased its membership from 512,461 in 1950 to 813,520 by autumn 1956.<sup>17</sup> While this appears impressive, it is also deceptive. As we will see in the following chapters, membership of and participation in the Communist Youth League, as well as political commitment, meant different things to different young people.

The local youth association successfully launched a campaign espousing a new work ethic and communist morale.<sup>18</sup> One former functionary reasoned that: 'This was a direct result of the negative consequences of the personality cult as well as the advancing influence of the right among youth.' From this it is simple enough to discern that former functionaries – of whom 68.5 per cent were working class in origin but only 10 per cent were women – did not wish to take on such responsibility. As a former DISZ member asserted, serious internal conflicts and contradictions plagued the youth group:

There was lot of one-sidedness and disinterest on the part of our leaders. Everything we did was according to written directives from Budapest. Once you elected a functionary, it was almost impossible to criticize him, or – Marx forbid! – remove him. We were under constant pressure to memorize Marxist-Leninist slogans and on the job we were told to work harder and better.

Just how this pressure worked can be seen from the local organization's tactics. The pages of the Csepel DISZ's monthly newsletter, for instance, listed the names of outstanding workers and, at the same time, castigated those who failed to achieve their quota. These latter were caricatured as *tunya* ('Simple Simons'). Pictures of outstanding workers were posted on bulletin-boards throughout the factory, while the names of the 'Simple Simons' were sometimes read out at meetings. Important announcements – such as new quotas, names of outstanding young workers, rallies and revolutionary music – were broadcast on the factory's public address systems.<sup>19</sup>

The shaping of these new workers paralleled the new Communist Party ideology that eschewed 'love' and 'camaraderie' for the greater good of 'internationalism' and the Soviet Union. The Hungarian Stalinist nation-state was legitimized as a 'workers' state' whose leaders had acquired mythical proportions, a feat achieved by the few and well-paid intellectuals. Both the Hungarian party chief Rákosi and Stalin were idolized as 'fathers', inspiring novels, poems, films, songs and posters describing their heroic deeds for the 'socialist patria' (Kürti 1991a). In the words of one slogan: *Rákosi a legjobb apa, szereti is minden fia* ('Rákosi is the best father to all his country's sons').

This ideological transformation can be read anthropologically as the Stakhanovite masculinization of Hungarian culture, which rejuvenated industrial production and fostered the implementation of social policies. Equally extraordinary were the measures taken to curtail women's rights, sexuality and family life, and the general subordination of women to men concomitant with the solidification of a masculine gender model (Attwood 1999; Pető 1998). Foucault's observation (1980: 33–4) is applicable to Stalinist-totalitarian states as well, where constraints were placed on fertility and reproductive behaviour. Young people and females were viewed as essentially masculinized workers (*munkás*), an image reinforced by the blue overalls so visible in the media of the 1950s, and aided by the ungendered Hungarian language.<sup>20</sup> Their individualistic desires and sexual pleasures were thought to be in need of taming by the newly conjured citizen of the Stalinist state, replacing the purportedly selfish, egotistic, bourgeois personality. Young women were to bear children for Rákosi's 'homeland': *Asszonyinak szülni kötelesség, lánynak dicsőség* – 'For a married woman to bear a child is an obligation, for a girl, it is an honour' according to yet another slogan. Mothers were identified as progressive and socialist, and received maternity leave, supplementary consumer goods and 'multiple-child bonuses'.<sup>21</sup> Abortion was made illegal, childless families were surtaxed and contraception was available only in extreme circumstances in the progression towards a communist utopia. At the same time, women were encouraged to be educated – often only at the Marxist-Leninist High School of the Communist Party – and to take an active role in local and state politics. A national women's organization was created (following the earlier Soviet pattern of the *zhenotdel*) to address the needs of all women in Hungary. Known as the Hungarian Women's National Council (MNOT), this body played a supportive role, but eventually became over-bureaucratized and politicized, lacking any real or lasting social impact or efficacy.

These ideological and economic incentives and pressures were extremely successful: in 1952, 1953 and 1954 there was a population boom of the so-called 'Ratkó kids', named after the Minister of Health, Anna Ratkó. The demographic changes during the early 1950s are instructive indices of Stalinist redefinitions of gender roles and the ways in which these patriarchal tendencies simultaneously undermined and elevated the status of women. It may be argued that the Rákosi regime and the Communist Party had embarked on a monstrous course of irrationality in its quest for target plans and quotas in industrial production. These perverse 'number-crunching' strategies deployed by the state and applied to both the factory and the womb served the state's utopian goal: the creation of a communist nation-state in Hungary.

In conjunction with these pressure tactics on gender identities, cultural life was also drastically reorganized. The era's fashionable epithet was 'Fight, struggle' (*harc*) translated as faithfully serving and fulfilling party incentives,

while another popular slogan was: 'Forward for the establishment of socialist culture' (Drucker 1964: 48). This meant spending as much time as possible with fellow DISZ members. Young pioneers greeted each other with 'Forward' (*Előre*) – both as an exhortation and a sense of direction about the coming of the future communist society. Collective sporting activities soon became the ideal way of educating oneself and keeping fit. Outstanding athletes and club members were awarded honoraria, such as 'Prize for the Socialist Culture' and most prestigious of all, the 'Kossuth Prize'. To further inculcate awareness of Stalinism, clubs and 'culture circles' were created under the aegis of the Workers' Home (*Munkásotthon*). Women's and workers' poetry circles, brass bands, a youth folk dance ensemble, choirs, hiking and nature clubs, retired workers' associations and Esperanto clubs were established to serve the recreational needs of the people.<sup>22</sup> Local theatre was reorganized out of the pre-war workers' theatre to stage hundreds of 'socially accepted and redeeming' plays (Berend and Ránki 1965: 461), many of which followed the tradition established during the Republic of Councils and ensuing decades (Drucker 1964). While some intellectuals were relocated to the countryside and to re-education camps in the areas of Hortobágy and western Hungary, 'socialist culture and progress' became synonymous with hard-working Stakhanovite men and women unselfishly – and co-operatively – building a socialist nation-state. The many contradictions notwithstanding, it looked as if youth had been tamed to become the true vanguard of the Communist Party. Remarkably enough, the image of youth and the future were fused into a common theme as exemplified by the Democratic World Federation of Youth anthem, extolling the 'rhythm of the future' being that of youth. For Csepelers, this meant an added responsibility: Csepel = Youth = Future was the equation, as in the poem by the contemporary writer, Endre Gyárfás, who wrote 'My Csepel, my youth'. This line aptly summarizes the way in which youth became not only an ideal in a society with many ideals but an overtly politicized generational category, which continuously pontificated about the future by fundamentally relegating present realities to the sphere of ideology.

#### CSEPEL IN 1956

The October 1956 events took place, in the words of one worker, 'as if lightning had struck Csepel'. Youthful Csepelers were caught off guard, although signs on the horizon warned of approaching dangers (Kecskemeti 1961). Workers remember that 'dissatisfaction was common because of the tight control of party members and managers over workers; it seemed that the party took control of the whole factory and life in Csepel' (Berend and Ránki 1965: 459). As workers still claim, a major source of tension was the enormous bureaucratic machinery created by the Rákosi regime to support its over-centralized planning and production system. The pages of the local

paper provide ample illustrations of the extent to which, up to 1956, workers were presented with endless statistics of target plans, competitions and derision for their lack of socialist work morale. One Csepeler expressed the general discontent as follows:

The Communists nationalised all the factories and similar enterprises, proclaiming the slogan: 'the factory is yours – you work for yourself'. Exactly the opposite of this was true. They promised us everything, at the same time, subjugating us and pulling us down to the greatest misery conceivable. (Lomax 1978–80: 31) <sup>23</sup>

One of the causes concerned the high-level political reshuffling. Changes followed rapidly after the 14–25 February 1956 Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in which the cult of personality and the errors of Stalinist policies were denounced by Nikita Khrushchev. In July, Rákosi was demoted for his hard-line policies and 'personality cult'. Many others were singled out, labelled as 'revisionists', 'Rákosi sympathizers' and 'reactionary elements' for hindering production and the building of communism. An older worker remembered those tumultuous days as follows: 'We didn't know who was what. One day you were labelled a socialist worker; the next day a good communist; by the end of the week you could be labelled reactionary; and the next week you were singled out as a revisionist.' Several factors contributed to the mounting tension: the rising cost of living, the introduction of Imre Nagy's 'national communistic' programme and the fervour created by the intellectual journal *Literary Gazette* and the university opposition group, the 'Petőfi Circle'.

But the question still remains: who were the revolutionaries? 'Religious leaders, former Arrow Cross members, dissatisfied social democrats, hooligans, and reactionary elements were all waiting for this moment', wrote the historians Berend and Ránki (1965: 469). It is an ironic twist of fate that in the late 1980s, these 'hooligans' were re-named 'true revolutionary youth' by the Antall government and as a result, the Csepel Historical Museum had to issue new captions for its permanent exhibits. Nevertheless, Csepelers themselves are still sharply divided as to the exact labelling of those who participated in the street fighting on various sides.

In Csepel district alone, workers were in the forefront of pushing for their demands. June 1956 witnessed the first strike in Hungary, when thousands of workers demanded wage increases, the return of normal working conditions and a better system of food distribution in the district. However, while the strike was quickly resolved through emergency measures, others broke out throughout the country. In the first weeks of October, several university students gave speeches in Csepel agitating against the worsening socio-economic conditions. On 23 October, when demonstrations took place in Budapest, a number of Csepelers joined them. On the same day, about 50 young workers provoked a skirmish with factory management demanding trucks and guns for the street fighting. The directors and the Workers' Party leadership responded by calling for military reinforcement to defend the

factory. Armed militia and Soviet tanks appeared at noon on 24 October, causing, in the words of one participant, 'immediate and enormous resentment on the part of the "revolutionaries" as well as those who had not yet taken sides'. Under heavy popular pressure, the factory management withdrew the Soviet tanks and, consequently, from 24 October to 11 November, the Csepel Works and the town itself were under 'counter-revolutionary rule', a phrase used during the tenure of János Kádár by many intellectuals and historians (Berend and Ránki 1965: 477). It was clear that the Soviet Union would not allow Hungary to break free from its domination.<sup>24</sup> Thus, Hungary's fate remained in Soviet hands for 30 more years.

The generational and class aspect of the 1956 uprising and its outcome should not pass unnoticed. As one observer commented, the mere 'sight of students marching kindled people's emotions' (Feuer 1969: 299). And, as Bill Lomax explains, 'the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 was first and foremost a social revolution in which the main motivating force – before, during and after the uprising of October 1956 – was the industrial working class' (1978–80: 28). Indeed, Hungarians had seen no street demonstrations since 1948, especially none in which anti-Stalinist, anti-Soviet and anti-government slogans were heard. As Paul Kecskemeti observes, a true 'peer-group solidarity' was felt:

When some children got weapons and went out to fight, this apparently started a teenage epidemic: the others felt they could not remain behind. They found that they could easily establish contact with any group – workers and peasants as well as government officials, professionals, and army officers ... As soon as word was out that the first Workers' Council was organized – at the Incandescent Lamp Factory on October 24 – within three days, a network of councils covered the entire country and general strike ensued. (1961: 117)

Many (often misrepresented) interpretations have been offered with regard to the three weeks of fighting, rampage and killings. Even today, older workers speak reluctantly of the 'events', so adding to the mystification of 1956. What is clear, however, is that Csepelers experienced the uprising in ways similar to earlier socio-political crises: the factory stopped production and street fights broke out daily, and looting and disorder followed. Thus, in those days, Red Csepel literally meant 'bloody Csepel'. In those days, the term 'street kids' (*utcai srácok*) meant full participation in fighting on the streets against the Soviet tanks and the Hungarian state police. These, largely nameless 'kids' were given several monuments in Budapest in the 1990s for their heroism and sacrifice.

In Csepel district, after the first shots were fired on 23 October, the communists immediately left town or went underground. A few unfortunate members of the MDP and factory management, such as Lajos Kalamár, who was caught and shot dead on the spot, realized too late the abrupt change of power and remained in their posts. Other leaders, AVH (internal security) and policemen were victimized in a modern-day political 'witch-hunt'.



Armed workers controlled the streets and, totally under the spell of their newly acquired power, engaged in a relentless search for commies, secret policemen and police informers ('*komcsik*', '*ávosok*' and '*spiclik*'). Shops, public buildings and vehicles were either burned down or blown up by street-fighters using primitive Molotov cocktails. Schools were closed; public transportation and services came to a halt. When work finally resumed at the factories, on 15 November, it was clear that Csepel had paid heavily for its part in the uprising. The total death toll was 92 (64 men and 28 women); and 271 houses and 540 apartments had been badly damaged (Berend and Ránki 1965: 478–79).

Order was not restored, however, until 11 January 1957, when the last demonstration took place between those supporting the new Kádár government (and the foundation of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party, or HSWP) and those vehemently opposed to it. In the shadow of Soviet tanks, this brief skirmish ended with the victory of the HSWP, an event that brought Csepel under its total control. However, by this time many thousands, mostly blue-collar youth and lower management personnel, those who had participated in the events and their sympathizers – in the Csepel expression 'those who had butter behind the ears' (comparable to the English phrase 'wet behind the ears') – had fled, thus escaping trial. The total value of material losses resulting from the 1956 uprising was placed at 600 million *forints*, while the labour force was reduced by 4,539, or roughly 13 per cent of the total workforce (Adamovics 1982: 75; Berend and Ránki 1965: 481).<sup>25</sup>

#### REFORMING THE SYSTEM: YOUTH AND STATE SOCIALISM BETWEEN 1957 AND 1968

Although the events of 1956 were to linger in the minds of Hungarians for decades to come – for during the three weeks, 2,500 were killed, about 500 were executed, more than 10,000 jailed and blacklisted, and some 200,000 emigrated to the West – recovery was achieved by mid-1957. The Rákosi–Gerő–Farkas Stalinist government had gone, and János Kádár had emerged as First Secretary of the HSWP and leader of the new government. State socialist hegemony was achieved by the formation of the HSWP and through the re-politicization of working youth by segmenting them into age categories. This new grouping had a twofold division: those between 7 and 14 years of age were classified as children; and between 15 and 30 they were the youth. For the latter category their new identity was given through the Communist Youth League, the KISZ, replacing all previous political factions for those under 30. The children (*gyerekek*) were assigned to the Young Pioneers and the 'Little Drummer' (*Kisdobos*) organization.<sup>26</sup> The only other legally recognized non-party body was the Patriotic People's Front (HNF) for politically trusted adults with their power relegated to cultural matters.

To achieve this new socialist, internationalist and working-class identity, the regime employed a swift and uncompromising tactic. By June 1957, there were 21 KISZ organizations in Csepel alone, with a total of 617 members, putting the district once again in the national limelight (Eperjesi 1981: 50). Economic recovery after the 'counter-revolution' paralleled the 'storming of youth' by the Kádár leadership. For recovery in its generational aspects meant the recovery of 'lost youth'. By the end of the same year, 170,000 young men and women were enlisted in the KISZ nation-wide following the call of the Csepel workers; within five years, the figure was 708,000 (Eperjesi 1981: 94). It seems beyond doubt that the new institutionalization of age – those between 14 and 30 – under the aegis of the KISZ had provided Hungary's ruling apparatus with an exclusive and even decisive edge in forming a new hegemonic hierarchical system (Campeanu 1989). Moreover, Kádár's 'political skill and his understanding of the people and conditions ... enabled him to gain the cooperation and eventual respect of most Hungarians as well as the international community' (Felkay 1989: 3). This assured his rule in Hungary from the end of 1956 until 22 May 1988, when he was dismissed from his post as General Secretary of the HSWP.

Csepel's political and economic life once again attained a privileged status for the factories were classified under a single HSWP cell separate from the district, allowing them to conduct their own affairs independently. In turn, the political economy of the factory was wholly under the rule of the Communist Party leadership. But, as we shall see, independence was not without its price, for in addition to political reorganization, the most important task facing the Kádár government was economic recovery and the implementation of reforms. While its primary objective of radical economic reform had not yet been realized, the introduction of gradual, partial reforms – continuing socialist industrialization and rapid agricultural collectivization from above through implementation of the so-called 'controlled market mechanism' – was quite successful (Berend and Ránki 1985: 229). The first period of the state socialist era was characterized by oscillation between highly centralized, bureaucratic and decentralized policies. The factory was reorganized under new leadership and given a new name, the Csepel Steel and Metal Works (Csepel Works or CSM). Once again, life returned to normal, and Csepelers were ready to start yet another era. The industrial workers were again under direct attack, first through occupational restructuring and, second, through the repoliticization of age-set relations and hierarchy.

This included a new centralization policy introduced at the Csepel Works under the period referred to as the Second Five-Year Plan (1961–65). A new trust, consisting of 19 independently producing factory units was created to monitor production, allocate resources and engage in foreign trade for all production units. The Csepel Trust united 14 additional outside firms and three independent rural factories (in Sárospatak, Mór and Nyírbátor). In this way, the HSWP leadership attempted to integrate the rural population with

the industrial urban core. In the factories, the Soviet pattern of shop floor organization, the socialist brigade movement (*szocialista brigádmozgalom*), was put to work organizing each shop and office into small (10–15-member) brigades responsible for short-term plans. Incentives and bonuses show the success of brigade formation: while in 1963 there were only 740 socialist brigades, by 1965 this number had grown to 1,154. These brigades, each with one leader, were named after communist heroes and martyrs, primarily from the pre-war era. Their duties included production in excess of target plans, meeting quotas before target dates and voluntary weekend duties, a system resembling that of the Stakhanovites a decade earlier. Under this new shop floor management, production grew at an annual rate of 4 per cent. Between 1961 and 1965, a total of 100 million roubles and 60 million dollars of exports was produced, mostly in machine-tools, non-ferrous metal products and steel goods (Adamovics 1982: 82).

In this period, the Csepel Works increased its labour force. In the late 1950s, 35,000 workers were employed, among them 8,294 females of whom more than half, or 5,261, were blue-collar, or 'physical labourers' in Hungarian (Timar 1987). By 1963, by Hungarian standards Csepel had become a mega-city of steel-workers with 65,000 inhabitants and 40,000 employees at the Csepel Works alone (Berend and Ránki 1965: 482). The former, multi-ethnic milieu of German, South Slav and Jewish Csepel was no longer a reality. The only non-Magyar speaking group was the Roma (known as *cigány*, Gypsy) mostly unskilled labourers (the *segéd* or *betanítottmunkás* mentioned earlier) in the factories and living on the outskirts of the district. Since the socialist state did not recognize them as a nationality as such – the common designation was 'minority group with ethno-characteristics' – ethnicity was no longer an issue in the eyes of the leadership, in a situation that lasted well into the 1980s when ethnic identity was resuscitated by the intellectual opposition.<sup>27</sup>

The age breakdown of the Csepel workforce reveals the concern with which the Kádár government viewed youth, for of the total industrial workforce, 9,000 were under 28 and 4,000 were members of the Csepel Works' KISZ organization. This number, as a former *apparatchik* recalled, 'placed Csepel on the map of Hungary for good. You only had to mention that you worked in Csepel and people immediately bowed their heads.' While the HSWP and its youth organ united a large number of workers, more than 90 per cent of the total workforce belonged to the steel-workers' union, an organization also under the direct influence of the HSWP. This relationship, as workers commented, was necessary (union dues were mandatory despite the fact that membership was supposed to be voluntary), though it was an open secret that so-called 'collective bargaining' was neither collective nor bargained: for it was far from inclusive and functioned as a top-down mechanism. Youth were not encouraged to serve in the higher echelons of the trade unions; such positions went to older, more 'trusted' cadres.<sup>28</sup> In

the Csepel firms, I have never met a trade union leader who came from the younger generations.

As real wages increased and the shortage of consumer goods characteristic of the 1950s disappeared, Csepel was once again revitalized. Between 1957 and 1960, a total of 2,244 homes were built for workers and their families. None the less, 4,800 applications for homes were made, and 1,600 workers were forced to live in the seven workers' hostels of the Csepel Works. While all homes had electricity, only 25 per cent had gas and 17 per cent internal plumbing. Altogether 12 schools and two secondary schools (*gimnázium*) served youth. Four kindergartens and five crèches were built to meet the needs of the major sections of the town. Clinics and a new hospital were added. Three cinemas were built, and numerous restaurants and coffee shops were opened. As the town grew more prosperous, subsidized projects proliferated. Although not yet capable of competing with the inner-city, Csepel became an environment, especially along the Duna shore, relatively superior to the abhorred 'apartment-complex cities' in other districts. As summer cottages and fishing-huts were built along the eastern shore of the river, a new socialist working class – referred to variously as the New Class, the 'peasant-workers' or the 'awkward class' because of its rootedness in the countryside and its rural mentality – was clearly in the making, not only in Csepel but throughout the country (Rakovski 1978, Szelényi 1998). However, as elsewhere in the Soviet bloc, decision-making and economic power were concentrated in the hands of the party apparatus and the managerial class. The new local elite were allowed to thrive, as party cadres, white-collar workers and private businessmen were given permits to operate small family businesses on the side. Hungarian society was undergoing a structural transformation in which the gap between the haves and have-nots became more pronounced, a development that ran counter to the official ideology of equal pay for equal work (Ferge 1980; Hegedüs 1977, Szelényi 1998).

#### THE NEM AND THE 'NEW SOCIALIST WORKING CLASS'

By the mid-1960s, however, it had become obvious that radical reforms would be required to redress the asymmetries and imbalances in production, export and profit. Albeit less grave than a decade earlier, another crisis was inevitable, for many reasons, among the most important of which was re-entry into the capitalist world-system (Chase-Dunn 1981; Frobels, Heinrichs and Kreye 1980). Over-ambitious plans, the slow transformation of produced goods and their low value in the world market, and state financing of production units not profitable on their own, were contributing factors. The New Economic Mechanism, introduced on 1 January 1968, was intended to reverse these trends and put Hungarian industry back on track. Among the basic features of the NEM were an easing of central control over industrial

and state enterprises, implementation of indirect methods of state control over the firms and the establishment of market relations and market prices.<sup>29</sup>

By the end of the third five-year plan (1965–70), it was generally acknowledged that the original ideas of the NEM had been useful only to a certain degree in helping Hungarian industry recover from its slump. The new market price system, centrally initiated market ventures and progressive taxation aided the metallurgical sector in meeting its plans and achieving considerable momentum (Berend and Ránki 1985: 243). The importance of up-to-date technology was recognized and plans implemented accordingly (Grootings 1986). While the largely independent Non-Ferrous Metal Works expanded its investments by creating and deploying new electrodes and copper wires (Adamovics 1982: 95), the Machine-Tool Factory introduced the first numerically controlled (NC) and computer numerically controlled machine-tools (CNC), a decision that determined the course of the next decades in machine-tool industry in Hungary as well the role these machines played in international trade (Adamovics 1982: 101; Poznanski 1988: 596–8).

Concomitantly, these changes in technology and labour organization substantially affected the structure of the workforce, to which young people contributed more than ever: by 1973, more than one million of the 4.6 million under the age of 30 were working in industry (Makó and Héthy 1979: 297). In thrall to 'doing better than the West', developing heavy industry and machine-tool technology required technical, or 'polytechnical', training, which was given preference by the Kádár regime over liberal high-school education, a hard-line change that reflected a general tendency in Eastern Europe (Kozma 1985; Ratner 1980). As we shall see in Chapter 5, with regard to vocational training, this had detrimental repercussions.

New profit regulations and the allocation of basic funds (reserve, welfare, investment and profit-sharing) allowed factories to direct resources to where they were most needed. Flexibility was important to the developing machine-tool and non-ferrous metal industries, which benefited from such programmes. Incentives were also given for new market relations. The NEM was responsible for introducing the idea of enhanced socialist market relations which facilitated trade between Csepel factories and their East German, Vietnamese, Polish and Soviet partners. Undoubtedly, the visit of Leonid Brezhnev to the Csepel Works on 30 November 1972 influenced the rearrangements of such 'friendly socialist relations' (Baczoni 1977: 353), a pattern that continued until 1986 when Mikhail Gorbachev – the last Soviet leader – visited Csepel.

With such a symbolic seal of approval, a temporary momentum and a modest economic upswing were now inevitable: by the early 1970s, the annual growth of industrial output had reached an impressive 5.5 per cent at the Csepel Works (Adamovics 1982; Czako 1972). During the fourth five-year plan (1971–75), the Csepel Works was able to produce a total of 72.6 billion *forints* worth of goods and machinery, of which 75 per cent was for

home consumption and the rest for export to 70 different countries. The Soviet Union retained its lending role, for one-third of all socialist rouble exports were directed towards Soviet markets. However, as high-level factory managers admitted, by 1975 'capitalist market relations' provided more profit and opportunities for expansion. In that year alone, 2.39 billion *forints* came from the latter and 1.98 billion *forints* from COMECON trade (Adamovics 1982: 110; Reti 1988: 521). In the words of a sales manager: 'Hungarian technology achieved something the Soviets did not plan: quality and quantity of products. Our market credibility surpassed that of the Soviets.'



5 Leonid Brezhnev and János Kádár meet in Csepel, 1979 (author's collection).

Following such dynamic growth in industrial production, Budapest, together with its immediate environs, ensured its dominance in Hungarian economic and cultural life (Bernat 1985: 333–7). This central industrial zone experienced unchecked growth and development; and nearby, largely rural areas doubled and tripled in population under the process of agglomeration. Comprising only 1.7 per cent of the area of Hungary, with some 44 settlements, its population of 3.1 million (of Hungary's 10.6 million people) contributed some 30 per cent of the total national industrial production (Bernat 1985: 336). The Greater Budapest agglomeration was the result of both the influx of the rural population and the development of local conditions, which prompted city leaders to curtail the mobility of workers by limiting the right of residence to valid work permit holders (*munkakönyv*).

While some of the outlying settlements preserved their former infrastructure, others became strictly commuter zones. By 1970, Budapest, with its magnetic attraction for labour, had a population of 1,280,000; at the same time, Csepel's population grew to 71,129. The central industrial zone was most attractive to those from the eastern, Great Plain regions of Hungary. However, the inner-city residential areas were not able to provide homes for this large workforce. As a result, the outlying districts of Budapest, such as Rákos, Kispeszt, Erzsébet, Budatétény, Békásmegyér and Pesterzsébet, initiated massive housing projects.

This agglomeration did not leave the district of Csepel untouched: between 1966 and 1970, some 500 homes were built by the Csepel Trust alone, a figure considerably fewer than in the previous five-year period. This slow-down had serious repercussions, especially in the form of 'housing hunger' which became more acute. Younger workers, while complaining about the lack of housing, admitted, however, that during much of the 1980s, there were two kinds of housing shortages: real and artificial (*igazi és kicsinált*). The dynamics of this crisis can be seen in the following interview:

After we got married we went to the district housing commission and asked for an apartment. We were told that the waiting list was about four to five years. After that we discovered that my wife's neighbour had an empty apartment in the same block which she did not use, for, being an elderly lady, she lived with her son. Then we paid her an extra 10,000 and she leased her apartment to us on a temporary basis.

Be that as it may, Csepel was going through the same housing shortage experienced elsewhere in the country. As young couples tried to move out of their parents' household (*szülői fészek*, or the 'parental nest') to establish their own homes, the search for housing became acute, resulting in artificially inflated prices and 'hoarding' of apartments by families and agencies. The outlying areas of Csepel were in a more fortunate situation than the central district: they could provide plenty of land for housing, especially along the Small Danube. Nevertheless, the values of young people concerning family size changed as a consequence of the tightening labour market and housing crisis. Most young couples were reluctant to have children and those who did stopped at one, or at most two. Abortions were quite common, which lent credence to the nationalistic argument of the emerging intellectual opposition concerning the 'inhumane' policies of the Kádár government (Kurti 1991a).

In the wake of the NEM reorganization, the Csepel Works remained one of the major state enterprises in Hungary (after the state railway), but its workforce was gradually decreasing – from 34,435 in 1970 to 30,768 in 1975 (Adamovics 1982: 111). This was the result of both a demographic shift and a switch to new technologies reshaping hierarchical mobility and occupational segmentation; for while 21,426 workers were still blue-collar, the white-collar workforce increased to an unprecedented 9,342.

By the mid-1970s the NEM reforms, despite their modest successes in revolutionizing production and work organization, were facing official disfavour and even political 'counter-attack' from orthodox Politburo members and 'the anti-reform drive of 1973–4 accidentally coincided with the world economic shock of the oil crisis and its immediate consequences' (Berend and Ránki 1985: 246). Here I will comment on only the most important of these as they bear upon our subject.<sup>30</sup> Among the most devastating effects of these events were price hikes (70 per cent by 1980), a slow-down in trade with both the East and West, and the accumulation of a large deficit and a huge international debt. In 1979, the Kádár government introduced another wave of economic reforms to combat these external economic shocks and their internal repercussions, an attempt that resulted in only more inflation and mounting foreign debt (Balassa 1986; Kissné 1987; Marer 1991).

As Hungary was slowly reincorporated into the world economy (Chase-Dunn 1982), industrial prices were, for the first time in its post-war history, aligned to world market prices, resulting in inflation and smaller subsidies to non-profitable enterprises. While the abolition of various ministries and the creation of a single Ministry of Industry can be seen as a 'recentralizing' effort, it gave a certain amount of leeway to enterprises forming their own production units, policies and market relations. Large enterprises were eliminated nationally, and out of the 32 large trusts, 188 independent firms were founded (Tari 1988: 58).

For the Csepel Works these reorganizations meant yet another transformation: in 1982 the Csepel Trust was eliminated, and out of the gigantic industrial complex, new and independent factories were established. Workers recalled the insecurities associated with this. That economic difficulties were imminent was also signalled by party reorganization: the independent factory HSWP was placed under the district HSWP's rule, a move indicating the elimination of overt central party control over the political economy of the Csepel Works. It should be noted that this process of decentralization and liberalization of the economy had been under way in Hungary since the early 1980s, as evidenced in policies ranging from the issuing of stocks and bonds, allowing western companies to begin their own or joint business ventures, and reaching its apex in the implementation of a personal income tax in 1988.

As the reorganization of the mid-1980s changed the nature and structure of heavy industry, resulting in redundancies and de-skilling, steel and metallurgy faced a massive crisis. Although the rusty steel-mill ghost-towns of Michigan and Pennsylvania had no parallels in Hungary in the 1980s, the changes that resulted from this crisis indicate that Csepel and its counterparts elsewhere may proceed in a direction similar to that of its American precursors in the 1990s (Sziraczki 1988: 400). For this new crisis had two major components. First, heavy industry experienced a major shock as the result of the world economic and oil crises of the late 1970s and early 1980s. Second, external economic shocks reverberated, in turn, throughout the



whole of Hungarian society. As major steel and metallurgical enterprises were caught in this turmoil, the industrial labour force was further divided and segmented. Consumer prices increased, and single-parent families, women, youth and the elderly especially suffered (Andics 1984; Hanák 1983; Széchy 1987, Vajda and Zelenay 1984).

While in 1970, 81 per cent of the population of Csepel worked in their own district, by the mid-1980s this percentage had halved and the district became a 'dormitory', forcing citizens to commute to work. Although people still flocked into Csepel, and the 'socialist town' continued to build residential areas (between 1970 and 1975, 950 homes were completed), residents were faced with a new set of realities. Just as during previous production cycles, once again, their factory had no use for them, forcing them to seek employment opportunities outside the Csepel Works and, indeed, outside the district. Young people turned to 'fashionable jobs', either in the service sector or especially in the private sector (Perlai 1985). Their disaffection created an ironic yet quite real contradiction between the promises of the socialist state – full employment and free benefits – and the daily realities: job insecurity and unemployment especially for young people.

In 1982, when the Csepel Trust was split into separate factories, each with its own plans, budget and marketing, factories for the first time experienced the problems of independence: the crunch of increasing prices, both in terms of raw materials and expenses, and the accompanying tensions created by the fluctuating labour market. An added difficulty was the question of developing marketing and a suitable foreign trade. Until the early 1980s, special state agencies – such as the METALLIMPEX for metallurgical enterprises – dealt with foreign trade (Inzelt 1988: 116–17). Under the new system, firms gained foreign trading rights (*külkereskedelmi jog*), permitting them to develop their own marketing/trade departments. This shift facilitated the creation of new jobs in Hungarian industry and a 'hunger' for highly trained white-collar employees (Inzelt 1988: 127). The *melós* or manual labourer (*kétkezi munkás* to use the Csepelers' term) was, indeed, slowly fading away.

As the result of democratization and liberalization of the economy, factory management was placed under the new system of company executive councils (*vállalati tanács*). Rather than accepting an appointed factory director, the VT now had the right to hire one according to its own needs, and members of the VT were both elected and appointed. An important result of severing ties with the Ministry was that the factory was cut off from vital state subsidies which had served to rescue it from unprofitable trade agreements, pay for extra labourers kept in reserve and level out funds lost to inflation and changes in the world market. Csepel factories were now compelled to make a profit in order to retain profit, an unfamiliar yet timely concept. Many firms eliminated the tight political structure of party control and introduced company stocks (Kissné 1987: 309), while others invested in joint ventures with western firms (Inzelt 1988: 247).

Under this system, new markets, products and technologies were sought, unprofitable labour and production processes eliminated and outdated machinery scrapped (Csepel 1986: 1). From this point on, the surplus labour force (Berend and Ránki 1985:243; Radice 1981:138) was eliminated in Csepel, to the dismay of thousands of workers. As state socialism was singing its swan song, factories competed for better educated and more highly skilled workers, and there was no longer a need for either the *melós* or the 'heroes of socialist labour'. Instead, what was needed, as managers assured me, was a young, energetic and well-educated workforce able to cope with the requirements set by the new age of international economic relations and the computer age. This required that both blue- and white-collar workers make themselves desirable enough to sell themselves on the competitive job market, a reorganization attempt at the heart of which was the concept of 'socially useful labour', for most semi-skilled and unskilled workers had become a burden for the Csepel factories.

The Csepel Works now had room only for skilled and, especially, highly skilled technicians, engineers, machinists trained in computer technology (NC and CNC mechanics), administrators, marketing consultants and managers.<sup>31</sup> Without pressure from party cadres and slogans, older workers were urged to retrain and acquaint themselves with western technology. Administrators with German, English and French language skills became valuable assets in the Non-Ferrous Metal Works and Machine-Tool Factory. Under the sway of the new thinking, firms now had to prove that they deserved the prestigious designation of 'Outstanding Firm' (*Kiváló Vállalat*).

With such transformations under way, the once enormous industrial labour force shrank: from 26,272 in 1980, to 22,044 in 1981 of which 15,550 were blue-collar and 6,494 white-collar (Tóth 1981: Table 2). According to the generally decreasing trends of industrial production, the management devised a scheme to reduce the workforce to 20,091 by 1985 (Tóth 1981: Table 2). However, even they could not foresee the enormous dislocations resulting from the internal crises associated with the realignments of the new international division of labour within the capitalistic world economy (Frobel, Heinrichs, and Kreye 1980). A massive flight of young blue- and white-collar workers from heavy industry into the service sector and information technology took place, a trend that became the rule throughout Eastern Europe, reorganizing the existing class structure (Lado and Toth 1988; Mako 1988; Szelenyi 1986–87; Zagorski 1984). This shift coincided with Kornai's model of the intensive period of socialist economy characterized by chronic labour shortages (Kornai 1982:109; Sziraczki 1988: 412–13).<sup>32</sup>

By the end of 1986, barely more than 10,000 employees remained at the Csepel Works, and its management found certain jobs, especially manual ones, difficult to fill. As one manager lamented in 1986: 'Young people must be lured back (*visszacsalogatni*) into our industry. It is a real challenge. We need recruiters who talk the language of today's youth.' As far as

management was concerned, however, a wage increase was, obviously, a proven – but as we shall see, not the only – way to retain workers. The average monthly salary in state industry increased from 4,436 *forints* in 1980, to 7,995 in 1987, well above the inflation rate (KSH 1988: 58). However, by 1989, the national average monthly salary of those working in industry had reached roughly 10,5000 *forints*, well below the inflation rate, a development that fostered the creation of an economically disenfranchised workforce that was becoming increasingly young and female (KSH 1990: 30). While middle-aged Csepel workers did not, as a rule, earn as much as miners – by all counts the best-paid blue-collar workers in Hungary during the final years of state socialism – the average blue-collar wage in 1987 was 7,788 *forints*, and this had more than doubled by 1990 (KSH 1988: 68; KSH 1990: 30). And, as several of my informants assured me, by adding earnings from the legalized informal economies, skilled workers' wages could be treble this figure.

To see how young workers fitted into the industrial production cycles and, at the same time, were able to benefit from them, we need to consider, however briefly, the emergence of the informal second economy, a direct result of Hungary's 'shortage economy' as discussed by the economist Janos Kornai (1982:12).<sup>33</sup> In order to keep abreast of the competitive labour market, to retain much-needed skilled workers and provide them with extra earning possibilities, a new wave of reforms was introduced, legitimizing various forms of the second economy within the state socialist sector (Csikos-Nagy 1987; Galasi and Sziraczki 1985; Gustavsen and Hethy 1986; Laky 1987; Marer 1991; Sampson 1987; Stark 1988). These reforms were diverse, yet acknowledged the fact that people worked in after-job shifts, using company machinery and materials and, in return, received considerably higher wages than from their main hours of work alone. As Berend and Ránki suggest, workers 'may form special small enterprises within the state and make contracts with it. They can use the firm's machinery and equipment, and work after hours for the firm, in accordance with the terms of a regular contract' (1985: 249; cf. also Noti 1987: 71–8).

The most common form of second economy in Csepel during the 1980s was the *vállalati munkaközösség*, the VGMK, or the intra-enterprise economic association, a pattern that lasted until 1991 when such units became superfluous. By 1986, more than half the workers at the Csepel Works were involved with VGMK production, work units composed of 10–30 workers led by an elected counsellor. They rationalized their participation by pointing out the difference in earning potential between the VGMK and socialist brigades over regular overtime work. Taking part in the VGMKs posed major difficulties for younger workers, who were required to spend extra time in the factory. Nevertheless, at least one-third of those under 30 were able to benefit from VGMK production. They enjoyed not only the economic benefits, but the chance to participate in the workings of their firm, its organization and future. Consequently, young Csepelers reaped the short-term benefits of the policies

of decentralization, a process seemingly inherent in the mature phase of socialist economy (Csikos-Nagy 1987: 140–1; Dobb 1970: 57; Kornai 1985: 117–20). However, the VGMK provided new values and identities for those engaged in it, for a sense of collectivity and competitive working allegiance was fostered among those who belonged to such teams, contributing to the atomization of the collective spirit and generational consciousness among peers of the same age–class. As we shall see, animosity between younger workers and their older counterparts was another by-product.

In short, this chapter has described the enormous changes that young workers experienced following the establishment of state socialism and during its eventual collapse and the way in which the ensuing state socialist policies attempted to change all that. No policies, no regimes could, however, foresee the difficulties that were to come. The notion of youth was once more politicized to meet the economic and social challenges that fundamentally reshaped social relations and the world of labour. Following the 1956 revolution, the genie of autonomous youth culture was out of the bottle. Just what this entailed will require answers based on an examination of young Csepelers' socialization into production, their lives and world-view.

## 5 EXISTING STATE SOCIALISM: SOCIALIZATION AND YOUTH

The communist leaders knew all too well what Angela McRobbie has written about youth in general, that it is a 'major point of symbolic investment for society as a whole' (1993: 31). As the editorial of the official Hungarian Youth Review (*Ifjúsági Szemle*) put it:

Every society needs the strength of its young, their will to act and their sensitivity towards everything new. Present-day Hungarian society which is compelled to move towards its high aims in more difficult circumstances, which require ever greater efforts, has a particular need of the energy of the young and the innovating spirit typical of them. All of this, however can be put to the service of social goals if our young people can see at every step that society looks on their most pressing problems (acquiring a home, the burdens of founding a family, conflicts at work and at school) with the understanding and a readiness to help and tries to ease these through specific measures. (*Ifjúsági Szemle* 1985: 3–4)

In European societies, ideas about controlling and monitoring children and youth are rooted in Christian beliefs and values. Beginning with the modernist period, however, regimes on both the right and left took it upon themselves to control and monitor young people. Central to the tenets of these controlling regimes was the belief that youth had been corrupted by the previous regime, or are capable of being corrupted, and thus must be brought under control and re-educated according to the needs and wishes of the new state. Contemporary newsreels and official photos reveal heads of state – whether Mao Zedong, Fidel Castro, Leonid Brezhnev, Nicolae Ceausescu or János Kádár – honoured as symbolic patriarchs by laughing pioneers, strong young athletes and respectful young workers amidst a profusion of bouquets of red carnations. Yet, regimes and elites have always been wary of the realities and the abilities of youth to express their desires and aspirations through a specific culture and often in forms recognized as counter-cultural. The Kádár government was clearly apprehensive of the generational power, which the 1956 uprising had so clearly demonstrated, of which this youthful cohort was capable. For this reason, the regime was bent on creating the 'scientific foundations of youth policy' (Békés 1985: 18). In Chapter 4, I described production and reproduction as interrelated processes with youth in their midst. In the minds of party leaders, no institution could exist without a systematic plan, an ideological charge to

recruit, educate and retain youth according to its needs. For Hungarian factories, such mandates were a primary issue following Stalinist reorganization and, again, after 1957, when state socialist elites implemented new institutional and ideological structures.<sup>1</sup>

The ways in which young people were recruited into the labour force and provided the means necessary to maintain the system, in spite of the upheavals and economic cycles described in previous chapters, are determinative features of the demise of statist socialism, as is the party's influence (or its lack) on the consciousness of youth. In Chapter 1, I argued that the identity and class relationships of working youth are shaped by the mutual and dynamic interaction of participation in production (labour/work in the state and non-state sectors), reproduction (socialization of the formal and informal spheres) and politics (ideology). All this, as I have argued in Chapter 2, must take place in the context of historically-specific state political economic practices. In Chapter 4, I argued that Stalinism and state socialism were established first by eliminating all previous parties, youth organizations and religious organizations and, second, by creating new power relations which placed youth at the centre of communist ideology and production. In this chapter, I discuss the nature of the recruitment process and then analyse the Csepel Works, in order to demonstrate how young workers formed an essential, albeit politically marginalized, segment in this new socio-economic climate. Their responses to state-controlled formal institutions will be discussed by incorporating excerpts from many of the interviews I conducted in Csepel to reveal the often striking differences in the way in which sources of distinctions among young workers contributed to their ultimate indifference to ideologically-slanted socialization, and ultimately to their political inaction. Such inaction, as I shall argue, was indispensable to the collapse of the state socialist system in that it enabled intellectual oppositional forces to take over during the late 1980s without fear of the workers' mass support for the regime.

## RECRUITMENT

Far from passive observers of their parents' working lives in the factory complexes, the adolescents of Csepel were affected throughout their upbringing by their parents' changing status on the shop floors, the socio-economic conditions of the firm, and its continuously expanding and contracting production cycles. As indicated in preceding chapters, the factory's boom-and-bust cycles stood in dialectical relation to workers' lives outside the factory, and to those of their families. While the factory provided employment and wages, it also positioned the workers paradoxically, for security of employment was connected, rather contradictorily, to the insecurities of shrinking pay cheques and lay-offs (Héthy and Makó 1989; Sziráczi 1988). Thus even those who did not work in the factory – the

elderly, spouses and children – were linked to it, albeit indirectly. At home, they heard about what was going on there, were included in the latest gossip and gained insight into the workings of the factory through the local newspaper.

I recorded the following narrative during a family meal to which I was invited by Géza, a young vocational school student:

*Géza:* Hey, Mum, this is supposed to be meat soup.

*Mum:* Oh, I couldn't get any meat in the shop today.

*Dad:* [Authoritatively looking at his son.] Yeah.

*Géza:* [To father] What about the butcher's next to the factory? I know they have meat most of the time.

*Mum:* [To father, somewhat scornfully] Couldn't you have picked up a pound of beef or even some sausage, dear?

*Dad:* I was too late. Look, you know I had to work overtime this afternoon. We have that large order to fulfil by the thirtieth so everyone must chip in.

*Géza:* Yeah, I know what's the thunder ('thunder' *dörgés*, slang for situation) there. My friend told me about that big rush. Both of his parents are doing overtime in, I think, the metal-roller shop.

*Dad:* [To the son] That's it, son. That's the 'thunder'. I'll probably do it again tomorrow and the day after.

*Mum:* [Calmly] So, I guess we will have more time *and* more money at the beginning of next month when the work-tempo slows down.

*Dad:* Probably.

*Géza:* So how many days is that until we get sausage again?

As suggested by this characteristic exchange of the 1980s, even the most seemingly innocent family conversations easily turned into a discussion of factory-related work, providing working-class youth with a mental template that reinforced their identity and an indirect relationship to their parents' world.<sup>2</sup>

The homogeneity of the patterns of daily life at home replicated the monotony of factory work. When parents got up as early as 4.30 or 5 o'clock in the morning, both adults and children were bound to suffer. Even if the mother (*anyu*) went to work later or stayed at home, she had to prepare the breakfast or lunch which children (*srácok*) consumed at home or took to school. As one vocational student observed, 'I have the same lunch-box as my daddy.' Afterwards, the family did not meet again until evening, when they ate dinner together. After supper, usually the main meal of the day, family members spent their leisure time together, depending on whether they had a second work-shifts, clubs or other after-work activities. Reading, playing, watching television, helping children with school-work were done after supper, but most commonly the 'Hungarian national pastime', watching television, brought them all together at the end of the day. As children grew up, however, the importance of communal 'TV watching' (*tévézés*) declined, at which point other factors began to leave a deep impression on adolescents' minds.

As we have seen in Chapter 3, after the establishment of the Manfred Weiss Works, the most clearly delineated relationship between the children of workers and the factory was accomplished through labour recruitment, a tradition in which fathers brought their sons into the factory. It was not unusual to find three or four generations of Csepel workers from one family even during the early 1990s. For them this was a matter of great pride. One young machinist claimed: 'My father worked here and now I work here; and, if the Americans don't drop the A-bomb on us, my son will work here too. That's the right way for us workers.' I often heard pride like this associated with blue-collar family traditions. To illustrate the importance of family heritage, I utilize life-stories that contribute to an understanding of the class values and gendered patterns of social reproduction. These stories are also windows onto youth consciousness and reveal how, through their identity with their parents' jobs and beliefs, they reconstruct their sense of themselves as workers and individuals in the community.

One such life-history concerns Tomi (nickname for Tamás). Tomi's father, originally a technician, was now a foreman in the Machine-Tool Factory (the SZG); his mother worked as a shop assistant at the local butcher's, a job she had held for almost 15 years. Tomi's only sibling was his younger sister, an eighth-grader he called 'Little Pissy' (*kis pisis*) – a reference to her young and somewhat volatile age – who was training to become a sewing machine operator. Despite this Tomi insisted: 'My sister still doesn't know what she wants in life', in a way that evoked the gender-based hierarchy of the family. Tomi adored his father and sought his advice almost exclusively, believing his mother to be a 'shop slave because she only made about two-thirds of what his father makes'. In this working-class family, 'making it' referred not only to wages but to the idea of having a 'real job'.

Tomi was planning to move out of the parental home after completing national service as he had a serious relationship with a girl and expected he would marry her, although in the end he did not. 'She was too independent, wanting to see other boys too. Also my father didn't really like her because she was in high school [and] ready to go to university.' As a result of paternal disapproval then their relationship ended, and Tomi decided to stay at home.

Living at home had obvious advantages for a young man just finishing his army service: he gave his entire pay cheque, a little over 5,000 *forints* per month, to his mother, but knew that she was putting some away in a savings deposit for him. Anything he wanted, Tomi knew, he could have; he only had to ask his *father*. As he asserted, his father made the final decisions about important matters, such as purchasing expensive household items, gifts and summer holidays.

What was interesting in Tomi's successful family situation – a story that resembled thousands of others during the 1950s period of Stakhanovite boom-production as described in Chapter 4 – was the way in which virility and work intertwined to form a complex son/father bonding. Although the men left together in the morning for work, they returned home separately



because of Tomi's involvement with various KISZ activities, or his preference to 'hang out with friends'. As described above, the harmonization of work-time and gender role had its effect in Tomi's family too: mother and daughter left together, to go to work and school respectively. Tomi made an effort to return home for supper: 'It's important to me', he said. 'My father likes it too. We sit round the table and discuss what happened during the day. Then we fight over what to watch on the TV.' On other occasions, Tomi and his father did odd jobs round the house or went fishing in the Small Duna at the weekends, weather permitting. Tomi's sister was never included; they did not socialize together, a fact he explained by observing: 'She talks to my Mum. They can get along real well.' The importance of the father, both as a source of symbolic energy and as a role model, was in Tomi's case a vital factor in turning him into a 'model worker'.

None the less, from other life-stories I recorded, it became clear that not all children were satisfied with what the factories had to offer. In some cases, the rupture between the parents' work and that of the younger generations was inevitable. Some confessed to being 'fed up with the factory' (*tele van a hócipőm* [literally, 'my snow-shoes are full'] – a popular saying) precisely because of their early involvement with their parents' work. The pressures exerted on young people to improve their status by moving out of heavy industry had been increasing with technological reorganization in the mid-1980s and early 1990s. It will be suggested that such pressures were linked to peer-group influence and the changing values of youthful workers.

One of the first experiences connecting children to the factory was, according to most workers, the 'assigned company vacation' (*beutaló*). Run by the trade union, this allowed selected groups of workers and their families to spend a week or two at Lake Balaton. While such collective vacations fostered a sense of community, as well as enabling their children to enjoy the world of adults, they nevertheless constituted a basis for discrimination, favouritism and elitism. One sheet-metal worker complained: 'Those favoured by trade union and party officials receive these highly coveted "award-vacations". The rest of us can go and visit grandparents.' Such complaints were common and, among young families, competition for such holidays was acute.

The second important institution was the 'children's day' (*gyermeknap*). Similar to the carnival atmosphere of the May Day (*majális*) of pre- and post-socialist days, this tradition offered a unique opportunity for parents to bring their children to the factory. Games, shows, work demonstrations, trips through the factory and quasi-military exercises were part of this festive occasion. When I inquired about the army trucks and parachutes on show at the request of factory management I was told: 'Well, children like that sort of thing.' For the children, though, the most exciting event was undoubtedly a tour of the factory and a visit to the shop floors. Fathers were encouraged by the foremen to demonstrate the workings of 'their' machines, and 'their' working styles', as if the use of the possessive represented the reality of their

ownership relationship to the machines they operated. Statements such as 'This is my machine', or 'This is the machine your dad works with' suggest that workers felt a close relationship to the machinery they used. (This sense of personal pride, however, was not apparent during working hours, when workers were otherwise engaged and preoccupied. Similarly, as an office administrator told me that white-collar workers' jobs were not very interesting, 'there was nothing to show the children in the offices'.) To hold the children's attention, food, sweets and drinks were served on the factory premises. When the festive 'celebration of work' (in the words of an organizer) was over, the children were given small gifts and sweets paid for by the union out of its Welfare and Cultural Fund (*Jóléti és kulturális alap*).

Many young workers I interviewed remembered these annual factory rituals fondly. A 19-year-old commented:

Yes, I can clearly recall the *gyermeknap*. I used to come, first with my father, and then with my mum. Somehow, when you are really young, the first couple of these things really get to you. I mean you look at the big air-hammer or the iron-smelting furnace, and you are totally blown away by them. They are noisy, sparkling behemoths. Then, when you get older, you say to yourself 'Wow, it must be awfully hot here.' And you start to wonder whether you really want this job or not.

While this occasion was meant to lure children into the factories, in reality by the mid-1980s only a very small percentage of youth ended up working there. It appears that recruitment of young workers, especially for the more arduous jobs, had become an extremely heated and controversial issue in the mid- to late 1980s. To overcome the shrinking number of young volunteers, special recruiting teams were set up in the Personnel and Education Department of the factory (*Személyzeti és Tanulmányi Osztály*). The teams, generally comprising two or three full-time specialists, were responsible for its advertising campaigns, visits to local and other district schools, and counselling sessions for students as well as their parents about the hiring firms and the availability of jobs. They provided brochures and gave application forms to students, teachers and parents, explaining the advantages of vocational training over a liberal arts education. A recruiting officer said:

The emphasis is not on whether vocational training is better or not. What we are trying to do is to convince young people that if they get a vocational education, then, by the time they are 18 years old, they have a *real* profession; they can work, earn money, and become wage earners sooner in their life in the labour force. We also tell them that, once they are part of this firm, there are plenty of opportunities to get high school diplomas or even university degrees.

Some of these advantages were, indeed, tempting. Young workers openly voiced satisfaction with the special hostels provided for vocational school students free of charge. But others expressed their feelings about those in the hostels in a rather negative way; to them, the students who lived there were 'country bumpkins'. In a sense, then, dormitories did little to ease the

integration of rural youth in the early years of their studies: needless to say, students were eager to find their own housing as soon as possible. Most important, however, were the scholarships students could 'earn' according to their grades and progress in technical education. This was perhaps one of the most effective means of helping youngsters select vocational training at the Csepel Works' own vocational training institute.

#### THE BAJÁKI VOCATIONAL SCHOOL

Most students who came to the Csepel factories had been recruited from Csepel and from Csepel Island; the nearby districts of Kőbánya, Soroksár and Pesterzsébet also contributed their share. They were then sent directly to the István Bajáki Vocational Training School, an institution reorganized in 1975 to cater to the specific needs of the factories. As indicated in Chapter 4, following the 1949 Law on vocational training, after the compulsory eight-year elementary education, young people had to choose between vocational training or a liberal arts education (Kozma 1985). This system was like those in the other Soviet bloc countries (Kurulin 1986; Ratner 1980) but parallels can be found with Western European educational systems (Reed-Danahay 1996: 157–73).<sup>3</sup> Based on demographic cycles and labour force requirements, a centrally planned quota-based system identified the number of students needed for each trade for every year. These decisions were not made public, so young people did not know what to expect but had to accept the schools and jobs that were 'openly' waiting for them. The differences between youthful aspirations and the state's needs were vast, creating enormous difficulties in individual identities and family lives (Kürti 2000b). In particular, the Budapest Educational and Vocational Counselling Office, together with the factories that controlled skills and jobs, planned in advance the number of workers needed (Kozma 1985: 200–4). In other words, Hungarian vocational training was set up to fulfil such requirements. After 1956, and dating from the establishment of state socialism, two major forms of vocational training were put in effect. A three-year technical-vocational training school (*szakmunkásképző*) focused heavily on specific trades. While this institute boasted a larger number of students, its prestige was not as high as that of its rival, the *szakközépiskola*, a four-year mix of vocational training and secondary high school, providing both a vocational training diploma and a high school diploma. In 1989, there were nearly 500,000 students enrolled in secondary education, of whom 201,702 were in vocational training and 160,000 in *szakközépiskola*, with the remainder in liberal arts high schools (KSH1990: 67–9). In Budapest alone, 38,706 students were enrolled in three-year vocational schools (KSH 1990: 128).<sup>4</sup>

In Csepel, the Bajáki Vocational School provided both types of schooling, although the level of training and the curricula differed. The 1969 Educational Law of VI had removed responsibility for vocational education

from the workplace and placed it in the hands of the state schools. This step, however radical it may have seemed at the time, dealt a serious blow to on-site training and disregarded the immediate in favour of the long-term needs of workplaces. The new law describing the goals of vocational training schools in a socialist state can be paraphrased as follows: to develop skills and knowledge for a concrete productive task; to socialize youth into a particular worker's life-style and workplace commonality; and to offer the general foundations of culture and education (Ferge 1976: 11). The Bajáki Vocational School – a name taken from a communist martyr – the only such school in the district, was established to fulfil the needs of the Csepel Works and the other industrial firms in the area. The school was directly associated with the Csepel Works until the 1969 Educational Act, although it was to the credit of the factory that the two institutions formed a closely interrelated system thereafter, in which the factory's Personnel Department specified how many trained students for particular jobs it needed, and provided financial support to the school in return. Furthermore, the factories furnished special training shops (*üzemi tanulmányi műhely*) which were not available at the school. However, as one instructor lamented, most students finishing at the Bajáki did not stay on at the Csepel Works or, for that matter, in the city of Csepel. Of the 1,200 students graduating in 1986, only about 30 per cent found their first jobs at Csepel firms. Subsequently, they moved on to better and higher-paying jobs, most likely in the service industries, high-tech electronics or private businesses. As it turned out, these students were on the right track for after 1990 jobs in heavy industry were decimated.

Many vocational students I interviewed in 1986 and 1988 expressed a yearning to become car mechanics, electricians or television repairmen, skills that would allow them to open private shops while continuing to work in the factory.<sup>5</sup> There was, none the less, a large disparity between their aspirations and their real material situation, and many of their dreams – as one suspects is the case with most youthful dreams – are unlikely to be fulfilled. The rationale for not selecting a popular job was based on two important considerations: first, the rate of applications for these was six or even seven times higher than for the less desirable categories. Consequently, screening and admission criteria were far more stringent, requiring considerably higher than average grades. Equally important was competition among private businesses for customers. One young man expressed this cogently during our interview by remarking: 'There are only so many families and TV sets in Csepel. Why do we need so many TV repairmen here?' However, it was clear that with more lay-offs in the late 1980s, young workers were desperately seeking opportunities outside heavy industry.

The structure of the Bajáki, its institutional hierarchy and subject areas, was similar to those of other vocational institutions in Hungary (Ferge 1976; Kozma 1984). The entire student body was taught by a faculty of 200, who were divided into 'teachers' (*tanár*) – those who teach academic high school subjects – and 'instructors' (*oktató*) – those responsible for technical-

vocational training. The latter spent most of their time at one of the factory's work-study shops, thereby contributing to an already atomized training system. Because students in three-year vocational training spent one whole week (approximately 35 hours) each month at the factory's work-study shop, they were closer to the 'instructors' than to the 'teachers'. By contrast the four-year school students spent only one day (seven hours) a week at the work-study shop, the rest being spent with 'teachers'. Consequently, the technical training of the former was much greater, while the general high school education of the latter was equivalent to that of a liberal high school diploma. Although I saw no open hostility between the two groups, I was struck by the degree to which they were separated from each other. Clearly, the two schools and what they stood for worked in favour of maintaining a divided blue-collar workforce. The number of days spent in the shops profoundly influenced blue-collar youth who learned the life-styles of older workers and were under the sway of their ideas and aspirations. This experience, combined with that of their parents' world, was decisive in the formation of a blue-collar sense of identity, and knowledge of factory skills was transmitted steadily during these early years.

The division of the student body into these two educational schools, then, did not work to the advantage of the students but served to promote and maintain educational inequalities. For only those who had finished the four-year *szakközépiskola* had the opportunity to go on to university and get an engineering degree. Vocational training students tended to do so, if at all, much later through the system of adult education and correspondence courses provided by the factory and the higher educational institutes. The rate of success of such educational mobility was predictably low. The few workers who did succeed believed that they had truly 'earned' their diplomas, as opposed to 'privileged kids' who had been, in their eyes, 'given their diplomas'.

In the following pages I describe what I observed on the vocational training shop floor in order to convey an idea of what the students' experiences were like at that time. When I witnessed the technical training of these 14–15-year-old students, I could not help remarking that their conditions were very like those of workers in the main shops. I rarely saw them fooling about, smiling or enjoying themselves at the machines – something that was discouraged by the foremen – and soon realized that they were attempting to act like 'little workers', behaving and talking like adults. Their locker-room, painted a bland greyish hue, resembled that of the blue-collar workers. The barrenness and dirt there were like those of any other locker-room in the factory, and the pin-ups decorating the chests, tool-boxes and lathes were identical. These student-workers (*ipari tanuló*) ate the same food in the workers' cafeteria and wore identical blue overalls. They also chain-smoked, not the proletarian brands of 'Symphonia' or 'Sophiane' which the older workers smoked, but the more expensive, western brands, an indulgence that forced many of them to spend all their precious pocket-money on cigarettes. Young blue-collar workers also learned early on how

to talk like workers, but with youthful slang added in and muttered with typical adolescent shyness. They also liked to prove their maturity and masculinity by drinking with older workers, who invited them for a beer at the Aquarium Bistro after the shift.

The general consensus was that these young people were anxious to leave school and begin their 'real life' as full-fledged workers. Joking and teasing were none the less daily occurrences in almost every department. On the shop floor the teasing, joking banter between workers was non-stop, but surprisingly, was less common among young vocational students. However, it was constant between older and younger workers. Joking on the shop floor was good-natured but at times cruel: tools disappeared; tool-boxes were welded to metal benches; lunches were deliberately contaminated; and overalls would lose a sleeve or a leg. Another aspect of this factory 'hazing' relationship had to do with industrial folklore and rumour, concerning for instance a worker falling into an iron furnace, a leg severed by a tram or an arm torn off at the drill-bench. According to older workers, this 'teasing-joking relationship served to educate youth to become *real* workers' (*hagy tanulják meg mi az igazi munká*). In this way they learned not only how to do 'real' work, but the rules for respecting and, more specifically, keeping a proper distance from older workers.

The life of a vocational student was neither easy nor carefree. Technical training began at 7 o'clock in the morning, requiring him or her to rise as early as 6 o'clock. Or, in the case of students commuting from nearby settlements, even earlier. Most, however, gathered before that time for a *cigi* (cigarette), a chat and a joke. A 30-minute orientation started as instructors described the day's tasks and schedules. This was followed by a rather monotonous work procedure during which they had to complete a certain tool or manual work routine. At 9 o'clock, a 20-minute breakfast break of milk, cocoa, buttered roll and cold meats was allowed. Some young men used this for a smoke.

At 11 o'clock, the instructor ordered the class to run a few laps round the building. Unlike the Japanese system in which gymnastics take place during working hours, this routine, the chief instructor claimed with authority, 'helps the kids to get rid of some of their surplus youthful energy'. Interestingly, older men also said that young workers had 'surplus' energy that needed to be harnessed and redirected. At 12 o'clock, the young workers went to the company dining hall (*ebédlő*), where they had a chance to meet older workers. It is worth mentioning that company meals have a notoriously bad reputation in Hungary: the idea that a colleague must work on company food (*üzemi kaja*, meals usually consisting of a soup and a meat course) was equally appalling to my youthful informants, and the factory kitchen (*üzemikonyha*) was a constant source of ridicule. It was also true that workers in Csepel had to pay a small sum towards the cost of the meal, while the company picked up the lion's share. Most white-collar workers ate better either by paying more, buying in the cafeteria or bringing a packed lunch.

Having experienced several different factory kitchens, I can say that the Csepel meals were generally well above the quality of others, but the young people felt that the company was cheating them by buying low quality food. Despite the fact that lunch was scheduled at different times for different shops, it was impossible for workers to avoid contact with each other. Eating together was important for making new friendships, reinforcing those with vocational school graduates and meeting the girls who worked in the offices. As one young driller coyly remarked: 'You have to check out the office chicks.' Some students also took the opportunity to eat with their parents who also worked at the factory.

As a rule, both young and old finished their meals in the same hurried manner. While all agreed that '20 minutes are not enough for anything except an ulcer', most finished their two-course meal in 10–15 minutes. I witnessed this hurried manner of eating in working homes too where children were egged on to finish first: those who did were called 'angels'. After lunch, workers returned to their workplace. Since the dining hall was located away from the school-shop, the students had to walk through several shop floors, during which time they met older workers and acquainted themselves with the rest of the factory. After 12.40, work resumed. Communication between students and instructors was minimal, yet pleasant and respectful, a situation quite different from the interaction between students at school.

The few women instructors were held in the highest regard by the vocational students. Having women as instructors was a new development in an educational system known for the 'feminization of schooling' (Ferge 1976: 40). A final-year student told me:

Unlike the female instructors, the male instructors are cold and distant. Marcsi Néni [Aunt Mary], for example, allows us to smoke, doesn't yell us and lets us do some *dumálás* [chit-chat]. She also cares more about us when we get sick, if we need something or if we make a mistake in the drilling and lathe-operation. I mean she *really* cares.<sup>6</sup>

This is a rather stereotypical, almost motherly way to describe a female instructor. However, their rare presence in the vocational schools gave the female teachers special status. The male instructors, however, were not thought of as father figures. As the students explained, the sole reason for this was that the students saw them as wielding power and representing the school controlling hierarchy.

The students worked until 2 o'clock, when finishing off and cleaning took place. As a rule, work-students were rarely unoccupied, even for a moment. As one instructor emphasized: 'Kids should never be without work, even if it's non-productive like sweeping. They have to get used to the idea of taking orders and doing things.' They were also forbidden to 'wander about the factory'. As a former worker-turned-politician said:

The very idea that the foreman would give me permission to wander about the factory without a definite reason and without supervision is ridiculous. Perhaps I could lie and say that I had something to do in one of the offices? But there is a foreman in every section, and each would stop me and ask what I was up to. (Haraszti 1978: 148)

Such control on the shop floor persisted to the very end of the day, when students were given grades by the instructor and told how well they had performed. Their day ended at 2.30 when they returned to the locker-room to change their clothes.

The same daily routine took place in the factory's other vocational shops, the only difference being during the final year, when students spent a full eight hours in the factory every other week. By then they had been fully incorporated into the work process and a blue-collar life-style. Thus, not only was the 'moral education' of youth completed (Durkheim 1973), but new sets of personal connections had been forged. Relationships between young and older workers acquired a more serious tone as they took up collective responsibilities for tasks. On receipt of their vocational diplomas, the young workers were already familiar with the factory system, the work routine, their older fellow workers, time constraints and the hierarchy of power relations.

## PATRONAGE

In order to facilitate the transition from student to full-fledged skilled worker, the companies at the Csepel Works established a system of patronage (*patronálási rendszer*), a relationship between an older, skilled worker and one or perhaps several vocational students. The skilled worker became a 'patron' of the student, helping his or her progress in learning tasks, handling tools, operating machinery and giving advice as needed. To enhance the system of patronage, the firm offered financial incentives to workers 'who agreed to take on one or two students'. Depending on the difficulties and demands of the job, workers could earn up to 1,000 *forints* (or a quarter of their monthly salary) in patronage benefits. When I discussed this incentive in the late 1990s with some friends, it elicited laughter. Some felt that this was really a means to control the workers. Others felt that it was nothing more than small change for the older worker. A few workers I interviewed were critical, believing that the money ought to have been given not to the older worker but straight to the student. A machinist argued:

We have to learn the job anyway sooner or later. If we got that amount, then we would work more and harder, spend more time learning our jobs, because we would feel that our company really wants us here and is willing to pay for us to get on. Our salary is so small that we deserve monetary incentives for coming here and working for the minimum wage.

Nevertheless, most workers agreed that the patronage system was necessary to smooth the transition from apprenticeship to productive skilled worker status. This educational process clearly was meant to help young



people identify with the shop floor in specific and the factory in general. Paying older workers to be patrons enabled the company to secure a stable, reliable workforce. It also established a solid generational transition, by which older, more experienced workers helped the younger generation achieve the required standard of skill and work ethic. In short, it was a specific form of pedagogical on-site or situated learning – something found in other societies as well (Singleton 1999). Without doubt, lifetime friendships between the generations could be cemented through this system. In certain respects, the system of the 1980s resembled the former *inas-segéd-mester* relationship that obtained in Csepel before 1945. A fundamental difference remained, however, in that this system was a new institution implemented from above by the state and the Communist Party, encouraging management to maintain a steady core labour force by offering cash incentives to the older workers. While in the pre-war system patronage was a part of everyday shop floor politics enabling the exploitation of youth, under communism the patronage system emphasized humanizing labour and easing the generational transmission of knowledge.<sup>7</sup> I need to stress, however, that the learning motivation notwithstanding, some young workers did express their dissatisfaction with the constant surveillance and control aspect of the patronage system. And at the request of the young worker, especially if the relationship between the partners became strained, patrons could be changed or, alternatively, the patronage dissolved.

Students who were recruited from the Bajáki Vocational School faced no further major transitions after completion of their vocational education. After graduating in June, they continued to work with older workers from the day their contract was signed. Most, however, preferred to wait until September to start, in order to 'take a month off during the summer for the last big vacation before becoming a real worker'. In September, young people who had transferred from other schools or factories underwent an orientation on their first day, during which time they met their immediate superiors and, most importantly, the shop floor manager (*művezető*). At that time, they received work assignments, were assigned a locker and tools, and filled out employee records and wage forms. Although they were encouraged to read it, most did not bother to peruse the hundreds of pages of the Collective Agreement. This was an indication that workers trusted the union to take care of all their problems and uphold the rights guaranteed them by the factory. New recruits were also given a general accident prevention lecture, followed by a brief medical check-up. A trade union representative or the respective shop steward explained the rules and regulations concerning union membership. During the first day, neither the HSWP nor the KISZ was discussed. A few days later, however, once the workers had started their jobs, such discussion did take place. No other welcoming ceremony was associated with the first day on the job.

## WHITE-COLLAR RECRUITMENT

As we have seen, blue-collar youth underwent a structured entrance into the labour force. The recruitment of young engineers and secretarial staff was quite different. Most white-collar workers came to Csepel in answer to job advertisements and a special 'job list' (*pályázati felhívás*). A high-level young accountant, Ica (a nickname for Ilona, Helen) proudly recounted her story and the respect she commanded from her female subordinates. She had not, however, come to the Non-Ferrous Metal Work (FM) by chance. An abbreviated narrative of her life-history reveals the importance of the family networks and class-based values that constructed her social persona in the firm.

Ica, in her mid- to late thirties and a single mother of a ten-year-old boy and a six-year-old girl, had been working at the FM for more than ten years as an accountant when she became head of the accounting department, a move that had both positive and negative consequences. The most devastating of the latter had occurred three years earlier when she divorced her husband, an engineer also at the FM, and moved back into her parents' home. Now the five of them lived in a two-bedroom apartment, her father close to retirement (after 40 years at the same firm) and her mother still working as an administrator. Their joint family resources were substantial for she received an alimony settlement as well as the house she and her husband had bought. Now she contributed half of her salary into what she called 'a common piggy-bank'. Since all three adults were working, the family had been able to buy a car. 'It's not a car, it's only a Trabant', she joked in reference to the small car made in the former East Germany. This car elicited laughter ten years later during a follow-up interview with the same family. As it was in the mid-1980s, however, this popular brand was a necessity not only for them but for many tens of thousands of Hungarian families. They used it to go to the family's 'hobby-garden' at the weekends, another valued property in Csepel which had already been signed over for the son for when he married. A plan was under way to exchange the car for a newer Volkswagen, which not unexpectedly would be a prestigious status symbol in the eyes of their neighbours.

More than these material things, however, Ica was extremely proud of her father who held the honorary titles of 'Outstanding Worker' and 'Old-guard Worker', awards given to outstanding workers as described in the previous chapter. She remarked:

My father is a hard worker. In fact, all of us are. My father deserves those special awards because he has been working for the Csepel Works for more than 30 years. I think he is unique. He also believes that women can handle family affairs much better than men. Me and my mum sit down on pay-days and figure out the family's budget for the whole month. My father really doesn't care about these things. For him the important things are to have his stomach filled, watch soccer at the weekend, have

plenty of cigarettes at home and enough petrol in the Trabant. He doesn't work with the children that much either. That's my responsibility. Anyway, I can do a much better job of raising my children than he could.

Like many women of her generation, Ica accepted the triple burdens of work, childcare and a second-economy job. Being hired at the FM after both parents had worked there was a simple affair, requiring merely an application to be filled out at home. But she did not see a future for her children in Csepel. She believed that her family values would provide them with a good start and 'there will be opportunities for education and professional advancement for my children'. She wanted, though, to give them a better start in life than she herself had received:

My education was not great. I started at the *gimnázium* and then because of my low grades I had to switch to the *szakközépiskola*. Then I worked on the shop-floor as a tool-and-die maker. That didn't last long. I then switched to administration. Later, when on maternity leave, I was able to enter evening school, receiving a certificate in accounting. Just when my job situation took a better turn, my relationship with my husband deteriorated and I divorced him. So my life had a terrible start, but professionally I made the best choice when I came to the FM.

Undoubtedly, however, as suggested by her pride in a little interview her father gave to the local newspaper *Cogwheel* (which made her a talking point for days on end) her story provides an opportunity to conceptualize the professional progression within families and the importance of family networks in reproducing class values.

Unlike Ica, the highest-level white-collar workers were recruited via yet another channel. Directors of production units and the Department of Personnel and Education decided on the number of engineers needed in a given year, and then wrote to the universities and colleges advertising the vacancies. Engineering students (by all counts the most respected young workers in the company hierarchy) were encouraged to sign 'study-scholarship contracts' (*társadalmi-tanulmányi ösztöndíj szerződés*), which bound them to work for the company for the duration of the scholarship (Kozma 1985).

In their mid-twenties, graduates from the handful of Hungarian universities and technical colleges were offered a wide array of choices. Many of the young engineers I interviewed admitted having taken this opportunity to sign a contract with the factory. A few, however, confessed their preference for a free choice in selecting a job after graduating. 'I'm not going to work in a dirty or messy place', one engineer asserted when I asked why he had chosen the Non-Ferrous Metal Works. Another stated, 'I wanted to see first who my colleagues would be. I just can't stand to work with old blokes [*hapsik*, slang for men].' Like it or not, young engineers at the Csepel firms had to spend their first year as 'apprentice engineers' when they were rotated among departments and divisions, in order, according to a management official, 'to better facilitate their incorporation into the

workings of the firm and help them to get to know people'. Not all, however, went through this rather uncomfortable year. Those with sought-after specialities or who were well connected were assigned a permanent job after only a few weeks' rotation, creating a gulf between them and their less fortunate colleagues. After their first year, engineers were required to produce a diploma piece, a contribution to the production process or a new invention. Most had no difficulty doing this.

Salaries reflected the hierarchical division, for young engineers made a little over 6,000 *forints* in 1986, which could be added to considerably by participation in the various annual work and innovation competitions. By 1988 some engineers were earning several times that amount. Nearly every firm boasted of having a few 'whiz-kids' (*nagymenők* or *fejek*) who submitted inventions, participated in outside projects and travelled to the West for conferences and technical training. These engineers were considerably better off than their fellow workers, owning a car, a house and taking foreign holidays in the West. While these few fortunate workers earned twice the average starting salary, they numbered less than 5 per cent of the total white-collar workforce. One such person admitted that his father was an engineer responsible for the implementation of the numeric control (NC) technology at the Machine-Tool Factory, a position that placed him in the highest echelon of the white-collar company hierarchy. Ten years later, the same engineer's basic salary was ten times higher, an increase facilitated not only by his skilled work but by the inflation that plagued Hungary in the mid-1990s.

Recruitment of secretarial and administrative workers was even more highly differentiated. Most arrived through yet another channel: personal connections and family networks. Young women were trained in less than a week and then 'quickly become part of the office machinery', a typist remarked. Those I spoke to at Csepel firms claimed that they had come to the factories because family members already worked there. I soon discerned a pattern in Csepel of white-collar couples working at the same firm, the husband as a skilled worker and the wife as an office worker. White-collar male and blue-collar female couples were almost non-existent, indicating a sharp demarcation along class and occupation lines. This pattern was influenced, I concluded, by the position of youth in production.

## THE WORKPLACE HIERARCHY

All state socialist enterprises in Hungary, just as in the former Soviet bloc countries in general, were organized hierarchically, with educated and politically selected individuals occupying the upper echelons (Kornai 1985: 107). Education and extra skills are guaranteed tickets to higher-paying jobs in non-socialist or collectivist firms and enterprises (Müller 1991: 115). However, women and young people under the age of 30 were almost always

excluded from positions of power and prestige. Not surprisingly, leadership positions are almost always kept for those with a special class or family connections. In Csepel, as in Hungary in general, higher positions went to those 'assigned' or 'nominated' and not 'elected', positions cleared by the management and the Communist Party (Bakos 1975: 19). Although the original Leninist policy of selection named only three basic criteria (skill, leadership quality and political belief), with the reorganization of the Hungarian economy throughout the 1980s, skills replaced political criteria as the main factor. As management clearly stated: 'Young people do not possess enough intellectual skills and leadership qualities to qualify for management positions.'

At the Csepel state enterprises I studied, the most important institutional block preventing promotion to higher positions was the rigid separation between blue- and white-collar workers resulting from class, educational or regional background. The official distinction had been based on the Marxian dichotomy between 'productive' and 'unproductive' (also referred to as '*regie*'), or 'manual-physical' and 'intellectual-mental' workers. For most workers these terms translated into the duality of 'us' and 'them', or, as the workers themselves say, 'us *melósok* [workers] and them-up-there'. This attitude reflected the distinction made between working in the 'shops' and in the 'offices'.

Although this distinction was easily elicited when one talked to workers (Haraszi 1978: 71–3), the situation itself was, not surprisingly, considerably more complex (Ladó and Tóth 1988). As noted previously, the implementation of the 'four corners' (known also as the 'firm's quadrangle') of the firm's decision-making structure was to serve as a buffer between the various contending factions. This meant that representatives from management, the trade union, the Communist Party and the KISZ were present whenever decisions were made. Although the Hungarian industrial sociologists Héthy and Makó argued that, in terms of the enterprise quadrangle, they 'do not find it justifiable to treat the KISZ organizations separately from the party organizations' (1989: 22), my experiences at the Csepel firms indicated that the practice of the 'four corners' did make a slight difference, especially in so far as young workers' rights and interests were concerned.<sup>8</sup>

While most workers recognized a sharp duality between 'us' and 'them' – many slang terms were used for both categories – several groups belonged to neither, forming instead a third numerous and diverse category, or constantly oscillating between the two groups. Blue-collar workers who had obtained special diplomas but who still worked in the shops rather than in the offices, made up the majority of this third group. Controllers (those responsible for setting tasks and orders) and the technical inspectors (*meósok*), both of whom worked in the shops, were also considered by workers to be 'not real workers', yet they did not belong to the category of office administrators. Carpenters, electricians, painters, security guards, drivers, cleaning, maintenance and machinists responsible for safety and the

up-keep of machinery (known as *tmk*) also belonged to this ambiguous third category. Vocational students and recently hired young employees were also somewhat marginal in the shops and offices and thus in the firm's hierarchy as well. Both daily and weekly commuters formed a special category that cemented ties among those travelling from the same regions; as was the case with those who were housed at the workers' hostel of the Csepel Works.<sup>9</sup>

While these occupational and regional categories contributed to the variegated make-up of the factory's workforce, the lack of antagonism between these different occupations can be attributed to the fact that skilled workers themselves may, at one time or another, shift in and out of these positions. The case of a young NC operator is instructive. He had obtained several certificates while in vocational school and during his apprentice year, and held not only the prestigious NC diploma, but also welding, electrician and safety and standard inspection certificates, all of which he utilized as needed. His case, while not yet widely practised, clearly pointed to a lucrative path for trained young skilled workers to follow.

As is evident from this illustration, the 'us' were not a homogeneous or unified category. Within the blue-collar labour force there was a noticeable hierarchy. Workers admitted that they recognized hierarchical groupings within the blue-collar labour force: at the bottom were the few unskilled and temporary hired hands (many of whom were women and Gypsies). Next came vocational students, both young men and women, perhaps one of the most vulnerable groups. They were followed by semi-skilled workers, those in maintenance, crane-operators (90 per cent of whom were women) and janitors. In this way the hierarchical ladder continued upward: at the bottom of the skilled labour force were the older master-workers who, because of their accumulated years, had a decisive voice in important shop floor matters. Next were workers with special education and diplomas. At the same level there were cultural, political and social functionaries; finally, the last cluster was composed of foremen and shop floor bosses.

Membership of any one of these smaller clusters depended largely on one's education and skills as well as on personal connections and networks. Most young people I saw in the prestigious VGMK (subcontracting work unit) teams managed to become members because of skills that were badly needed by their production unit, and only later because of informal connections. However, both older and younger workers stated that it would be difficult to work together without interests and ideas in common, a shop floor-level value system that seemed to be the strongest undercurrent in most small team work such as the VGMK and the socialist brigades. Workers admitted openly that they had little patience with or tolerance for those they disliked or found incompatible. Two stories, one concerning a female crane-operator judged to be 'whoring around' (*sokat kurválkodott munkaidő alatt*, i.e. not working on the job) and the other that of a foreman considered an 'arse-licker' (*seggnyaló*), were related to me to affirm the pervasive attitude characterizing workers' power within their work teams. These groupings,

organized around each production stage, selected members from the pool of potential vocational students who conformed to the unwritten rules and standards of the team. A young miller recounted one such story:

I had the longest hair in the milling-shop for a long time. Almost everybody joked (*cikizett*) about it. So I decided to transfer myself into the NC-shop. However, there were only older guys working there. So I invited myself back to the milling-shop. After all, what are friends for if not to work together with?

Like anywhere else in industrial shop floor culture, mobility within the firm's hierarchy was restricted by rules and regulations that engendered exclusion (Adams 1984; Burawoy 1985; Clawson 1980; Grootings 1986; Müller 1991; White 1987; Willis 1981). Adding to this exclusionist selection, managers themselves made certain that some of their 'close pals' were given favoured positions. It is evident that, since the mid-1980s, opportunities for both horizontal and vertical mobility, and for reorganization within the firm, had been limited especially for the younger age group. To illustrate, I describe below the power structure and workings of the Machine-Tool Factory and the ways in which young workers experienced differentiation and marginalization within the firm.

#### THE MACHINE-TOOL FACTORY

The firm, known as *Szerszámgépgyár* (hereafter called by the Hungarian abbreviation, SZG), had been a typical machine-tool factory in Hungary, a socialist firm with the characteristic successes and failures of Hungary's machine industry (Koknya 1982). Its labour force, following the external economic cycles throughout the turbulent decades described earlier, fluctuated accordingly. In the mid-1980s, it stood at 1,400, a figure achieved through the restructuring of the internal labour market since the early 1980s. The SZG did not have a monopoly on machine-tools in Hungary, for there were two other major firms producing similar machine-tools. Competition between the SZG and the SZIM (Machine-Tool Works), the largest machine-tool firm in Hungary, also located in Budapest, for COMECON markets until 1991 and western markets was quite keen for almost 30 years. This became especially noticeable after the 1982 reforms when the Csepel Trust, under the state directives of decentralization and liberalization, was divided into individual firms.

Following this wave of reforms, the SZG was given considerable leeway to establish market relations on its own. Together with the general crisis of price regulation and labour market segmentation, this action was crucial in forcing the SZG management to improve its competitive position. As described in the previous chapter, in order to do so, several strategies were employed, the most important of which were the upgrading of outdated machinery; the formation of a new, skilled blue-collar and technologically

superior white-collar workforce; and the restructuring of resources and funds now totally at the disposal of the firm (Csepel 1986 10: 1–2).

These steps were followed by others based on the 1984 Council of Ministries policy, espousing workers' participation in the management of the firm (Csepel *Művek SZG* 1985: 7). This entailed the creation of a new legalized form of managing body, *vállalati tanács* (company council, or VT); releasing or re-educating unskilled and semi-skilled labourers hoarded by the firm; and implementing the new form of VGMK, the subcontracting work-units. These changes had important implications for the future of the SZG and its labour force even though the hierarchical nature of the firm did not change substantially. Nevertheless both white- and blue-collar workers agreed that the newly implemented VT was a more democratic institution. True to its radical historical tradition, the SZG was among the first in Csepel to institute this system when the VT was introduced in 1984. The VT was comprised of 30 people, of whom 15 were elected through secret balloting by the selectmen of each division; ten appointed delegates from divisions, such as personnel or legal consultant; and, finally, four members who were appointed by the VT president himself (Csepel *Művek SZG* 1985: 10). Depending on the number of workers, each department elected its respective selectmen. Members of the VT were elected for a total of five years; in cases of mismanagement and/or wrong-doing, the electorate had the right to recall VT members, of which one-third consisted of skilled workers, the rest recruited from the white-collar labour force (Csepel *Művek SZG* 1985: 7). However, despite the HSWP Central Committee's decrees espousing increased participation of young people in the management, important trade union and youth activists participated only in VT sessions as observers without voting power.

While the VT did not have ownership rights in the firm, it did act as its legal representative, and had all decision-making power. Redistribution of funds, salary increases, production quotas, marketing relations and other important questions were decided by its president. The VT, however, retained the right to veto any decisions the president made if it deemed them to be unfit or unrealistic. Through its twice yearly meetings the VT exerted pressure on the president as well as the production directors. With this new, seemingly more balanced and democratic system in effect, the SZG was pursuing its aims by encouraging its total labour force to higher levels of performance; and giving it a concerned voice in decision-making and a sense of belonging to the firm by partaking in its overall workings. In retrospect, it seems that the formation of the VT was necessary to counter the falling rate of production, the result of the world industrial crisis under way since the late 1970s.

But despite its purported aim (of broad-based democratic decision-making) the VT soon became a bureaucratized and exclusivist organ paralleling other leading bodies in the firms. At first, the VT was headed by the president, who, for the first time in the history of Hungarian industry, was not appointed by the Ministry but hired by the firm from a competitive pool of qualified



applicants. In this way the power of the Ministry and the HSWP shrank and became the target of sharp criticism. As one HSWP secretary wryly remarked:

Now that we have the VT and Mr. President, everyone thinks that they can sleep because world peace has been achieved. On the contrary, we are feeling the squeeze of the capitalist world market more and more. The only way to counter those powerful economic forces is by putting politically correct and class-conscious individuals in leading positions.

Little did he know then that, in less than two years, he would no longer be in office and that his party would be ousted from the factory premises. What is clear, however, is the fact that the HSWP was losing control of the factory. The VT president now had all the rights of the former director, and, in a sense, was in competition with the firm's executive director and the political leaders. An added responsibility was that he had to report not only to the respective ministry, but to the VT and the executive director as well.

Below the president, the upper echelon consisted of the directors (*igazgató*) responsible for the production units and the 'non-productive' departments. At the SZG, four directors (economic, marketing, production, technical) were appointed, overseeing a total of 30 departments. But in certain cases, such as the director of production, one person could fill more than one position, in his case executive director. All the directors were middle-aged men and had a university or college diploma. A few of the older directors had earned their diploma through evening or correspondence courses (*esti-levelező tagozat*). The HSWP tried to maintain its control by arguing that an added requirement was political education, a filtering system that had been losing its importance since the mid-1980s. Political education was achieved through *beiskolázás*, a system of Marxist-Leninist education at either the Marxist-Leninist University or at the Institute for Party Education which, in addition to political education, offered university diplomas to their graduates. The way in which this worked with regard to young cadres will be described in Chapter 6.

Each of the four directors responsible for their respective departments (*osztály*) was served by an appointed department head (*osztályvezető*), some of whom were younger people and women, but generally younger individuals were more numerous as assistants to department heads, a middle-management level once removed from the real power-holding position. After the reorganizations of the mid-1980s, several new, younger directors were promoted to these positions and were respected and liked by their subordinates. The department head, generally known simply as the boss (*főnök*), had real power with an authority immediately recognizable in his presence not only in the offices, but also, as I noticed, in the shops as well. While in theory the closest person to him – without exception male – was the assistant director, in reality access to any director was made through his personal secretary. (This became obvious to me when, after a week of unsuccessful attempts to obtain company statistics from one director, I received

the papers in five minutes from the director's personal office assistant.) To maintain stability and control, contact between director and department heads was constant, primarily through weekly meetings during which plans were made concerning the organization of tasks and production, special assignments and responsibilities. The difference between the 'non-productive' department and the actual production unit (*üzem* or *gyárrészleg*) was in the mechanism of bureaucratization: the latter was headed by a foreman (*üzemvezető*) who had technical education. These shops were classified according to the main profile of the factory such as NC shop, Drilling and Milling, and Turning-Mechanic Shops, each employing as few as a dozen workers, as was the case with the NC division, or as many as 150, as in the case of the drilling and milling shop.

To complicate the workplace hierarchy further, shops (like the offices) were organized with a similar top-down pyramid, in accordance with the general organizational principles outlined for Hungarian industry as a whole (Tari 1988: 120–33). Nowhere did these principles regulate the exclusion of youth and women from the higher managerial positions; yet lower-level shop floor positions systematically favoured middle-aged males. Shop directors (*üzemvezető*) were former skilled workers and/or technicians selected by higher management based on their skill and time spent in the shops. Tasks assigned to certain divisions were supervised by a trusted 'group leader' (*csoportvezető*). These groups were further divided into brigades, or socialist brigades, each with an elected leader, someone widely respected and highly regarded as a 'model worker' by his or her peers. At this level there were several energetic young workers who were described to me as 'excellent cadre material'.

While, during the 1980s, these workers could move easily in and out of certain production units and even shops within their qualifications, there were, nevertheless, a few shortcuts to progress through the firm's hierarchy. During my interviews in the SZG, I identified several of these younger 'cadres' as potential candidates for promotion. Without exception, they were high school-educated skilled workers with above-average first-hand knowledge of various tasks. During my stay in Csepel, I regularly interviewed these candidates and their supervisors and followed their progress closely, and left with the realization that the most important criteria were not only their skills and aptitude, but also their contacts with the foremen (*összeköttetése van* – 'with connections' as the saying went) and on the amount of *time* they had spent in the shops.

When asked about how they felt about waiting for promotion, the most obvious way young workers came to terms with this was by rationalizing the use of time: in their words, 'You have to wait your turn' (*ki kell várni amíg eljön az ember ideje*). Yet their patience was often severely put to the test. Traditionally, blue-collar young men had to finish military service, marry and 'settle down'. Young workers who impatiently complained about how long it took to get promotion – such as from skilled worker to group leader or shop

leader – were constantly reminded by older workers, ‘Look, you have to do your work first, you will have to put something down on the table for people to know who you really are, only then will people trust you and like you.’ Clearly, statements like this constituted ideological walls in the eyes of youth. An often recited line from Hungary’s respected underground rock band the URH (Ultra Radical Wave), ‘Why, why, why do we always have to stand in line?’ aptly summarizes this generation’s dissatisfaction.

Overall, at the SZG, young workers in the shops advanced through the hierarchy in a slow, zig-zag-like, horizontal mobility. By the time they reached their late twenties or early thirties, most young Csepel workers were in a higher position and earned more money than their parents had at the same age; and by the time they had achieved those positions, most had better technical knowledge and skills than their parents. However, even a KISZ survey, conducted in the early 1980s, recognized and acknowledged the economic disadvantages of being young: ‘Young people reach the level of the average salary of skilled workers when they are over 30 years of age. [and graduates of universities] reach the level of skilled workers’ salary only when they are 37 years old’ (Tóth 1985: 12).

Aware of this rigidity, many young workers became indifferent and decided either to direct their energies elsewhere or lost enthusiasm for their work, despite the work competition programmes. As Héthy and Makó observed:

In one of our engineering factories in the countryside, 30 to 35-year-old workers, still in full possession of their physical and mental abilities, ‘practically stopped working’ when they reached the maximum of their personal wages rates. (1989: 39)

Similarly, in the Csepel SZG, this was followed by conflict not only between young people and their older cohorts, but also between target plans and actual output. To counter this, leadership and management were forced to come up with new incentives to fulfil centrally established target plans and reduce conflict among workers. Subsequently, the implementation of the official and regulated second economy in 1982 was put into effect not only to reach target plans but to balance these inequities.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, by incorporating young women into the second economy, the state planners felt assured that the original promise of women’s emancipation – an aspect of state socialism that never came about according to the plans – would be encouraged at the shop floor level. In a few months, of the 1,400 workers at the SZG, more than 500 were included in 42 independent legally incorporated-into VGMKs. The VGMK provided a laboratory to study the extent of young workers’ power on the shop floor and to acknowledge the intricate informal networks enabling workers to form alliances at grass-roots level.

VGMK referred to a ‘company’s economic work-community’, *vállalati gazdasági munkaközösség*. During the 1980s, there were three forms of VGMKs at the SZG: auxiliary (*kisegítő*), service (*szolgáltató*) and productive (*produktív*). In the first case the work units functioned according to the immediate ad hoc

needs of the various departments of the firm, at times being asked to clean up, help with packaging or, as I experienced during my stay in Csepel, make flags and uniforms for the May Day demonstration. In the second case the roles of servicing VGMMs were integrated into the target plans; as were those of the third type, in which units engaged in activities directly related to the main production profile of the firm and set out in the 'rules and work unit agreement'. The maximum number of workers in each VGMM was 30, half of whom were elected members, the rest appointed by the counsellor. Management and leading members of the social organizations, however, were excluded from the VGMMs. Each VGMM was led by an elected counsellor but since the VGMM required the authorization of the firm, it was also important that this person be acceptable to the firm's management. Members were allowed to work a maximum of 90 hours a month. Since salary from the second economy was substantial – I saw pay cheques as high as 9,000 *forints* for a service VGMM counsellor or equal to a regular monthly wage – workers were eager to participate. However, since work was limited and the number of VGMMs was set by the VT and the executive director, eligibility for membership had become a subjective choice more than a prerogative.

Clearly, admittance to VGMMs depended on education and skills as well as on personal connections and networks. Most young people in the prestigious VGMM teams had been accepted because they had skills that were badly needed by their unit, and only later because of informal connections. However, both older and younger workers stated that it would be difficult to work together without common interests, a view that seemed to be the strongest undercurrent in other small groups as well, including the socialist brigades. Each production team, organized around each production step, selected members from the available pool of potential vocational students who conformed to the unwritten rules and standards of the group. Thus, while selection did favour those connected to personal and informal networks, regular hierarchical inequalities were not reproduced by the VGMM – the only 'privileged' position was that of counsellor – and many young people had a chance to increase their earning potential.<sup>11</sup> Only after the 1988 cutbacks in the number of VGMM units did young workers feel the side-effects of favouritism as they were increasingly excluded from participation in the official second-economic production (Andorka 1990: 29). This was the period when several researchers noticed workers lacking power on the shop floor. However, while some felt that participation in the second economy provided them with 'considerable countervailing power' (Burawoy and Lukács 1986: 733) and that workers' presence in such work teams may have allowed them to 'reform the socialist enterprise' (Stark 1989: 163), others reacted negatively to factionalization of the workforce, which resulted in a society of 'competing bands' (Sampson 1987: 135).<sup>12</sup>

As can be seen from the workings of the company's hierarchy and the second economy production, opposing tendencies were apparent. On the one hand, workers faced a traditional hierarchy ladder but on the other, they

could participate more fully in production. As a sheet-metal roller stated: 'It was a vicious circle; we did not have real power but by working more it seemed that the factory relied on us more. And, what's important, we *did* make more money.' Rigid though it may have been, the hierarchical structure was neither dictatorial nor wholly under the control of the party and management as it had been during the Stalinist period. Based on the communist principle of workplace democracy, workers had their say through six different democratic forums: workers' meetings (*munkaértekezlet*), brigade meetings (*brigádértekezlet*), the brigade leaders' council (*brigádvezetők tanácskozása*), the youth parliament (*ifjúsági parlament*), trade union stewards' meetings (*bizalmi testület*) and the trade union council (*szakszervezeti bizottság*).

While this list may sound confusing – and to many young workers in Csepel it certainly was – the single most popular forum for those under the age of 30 was the youth parliament, put into effect in accordance with the National Youth Laws of 1971. This plan stated that each firm's Department of Education and Personnel was responsible for monitoring the process of recruitment, the educational needs of working youth, the system of patronage and the political and technical development of youth, ensuring that young workers developed strong ties and remained loyal to the company. Regardless of the stated goals, the youth parliaments were established to control young people's economic performance:

Respecting the harmony of rights and duties [youth parliaments] also play a major role when questions which are not particularly linked to youth policy are debated. They are mobilizing young people for the realization of plan tasks mainly by analysing the implementation of the plans of national economy (on the enterprise and institution level) and by outlining the economic tasks of the forthcoming period. (Tóth 1985: 25)

As set out by the Youth Constitution of 1971, every other year, the firm held a youth parliament in which problems and issues specific to the young cohort were to be addressed. However democratic these youth parliaments were intended to be, they nevertheless reproduced another age-related division of workers. As a result, young workers were not satisfied with the way youth parliaments functioned, sensing that more could and should be done to take their needs seriously. Some argued (perhaps correctly) that two years was too long for such a forum to really work, while others wanted something more specific than 'general youth laws', laws that would address such issues as pay rises, housing, better company meal plans, and the like. In the words of an SZG worker, local issues and specific problems required immediate solutions: 'Youth parliaments do need to look at the local problems of youth and their needs as they emerge out of their specific regional, age, and gender concerns.'

To conclude this chapter, we can say that the whole process of socialization and official reproduction of the workforce was fraught with problems and contradictions. Unlike the interwar period, when the category of youth

was more or less an economic one, the socialist category was strictly political. By creating an official youth policy, the Hungarian regime classified all those between the age of 14 and 30 into a homogeneous political group (*Ifjúsági Szemle* 1985: 3). In retrospect, it is obvious that, aside from the political spheres, another, equally important contradiction must be added: that between what state socialism promised and what it delivered. The Youth Constitution of 1971 had clearly stated this tautological utopian promise it could never deliver, which heightened the discriminatory practices carried out at the expense of young workers:

The introductory provisions of the Bill [i.e. the Youth Constitution] as already indicated by the General Preamble state that youth is part of society. Consequently our society has eliminated all distinctions which were disadvantageous for youth and has assured for young people all the rights shared by adult citizens. (State Committee of Youth 1981: 18–19)

These contradictions were obvious for from their early adolescence, children experienced the impact of their parents' jobs and the cyclical nature of production in the factories. Inculcated with initial class values and ideas from an early age, once they entered vocational school, they were thrust into a new and confusing world. Through the various institutions of patronage, socialist brigades, the VGМК and youth parliaments, the young were taken into various work teams and separated from the rest of the labour force. Despite the purported aim and original well-intentioned goals, this factionalism created contradictions for young and old alike.

As we have seen, youth parliaments, together with the other institutions, did not improve the status or the progress of young people in the firm's hierarchy. The Hungarian industrial sociologist Csaba Makó (1988) argued that, in general, the workforce could be divided into a centre and a periphery. The centre was composed of those workers who were essential to the production process, while the periphery encompassed those who were marginal and had no decisive voice in important matters. If we apply Makó's model to the situation of working youth at the Csepel firms, it is clear that in general they were relegated to the periphery, a conflict between goals and actual realities. Rather than resolving and coping with the realities of the situation, young people faced a variety of choices to counter this rigid hierarchical structure. One avenue for advancement was special education and cadre selection. While many young workers did take advantage of this, disparities persisted between white- and blue-collar youth, one of the most important of which concerns time constraints.

In short, they were forced to choose whether to work more to earn more money or to spend their nights and weekends studying. This was burdensome for time is a very precious commodity for young people who felt keenly that 'their time is always limited'. The many institutions invented throughout the 1970s and 1980s proved to be little more than bureaucratic stumbling-blocks which, rather than helping youth to integrate fully into

productive work and society, contributed to the distinctions between them, a fact that ultimately led to their political apathy and inaction. As we shall see in the next chapter, most – like their counterparts in the Soviet Union or China (Zuzanek 1980; Hooper 1985) – preferred to engage in recreational activities rather than spending extra time in the factory. However, one unintended result of all these reorganizations needs to be highlighted: namely, that with the VT, VGMK and the youth parliaments, the Communist Party elites slowly yielded control over the labour process. Rudolf Tókéş argues convincingly that from the late 1970s on new ‘formal and informal bargaining and interest-adjudication environments between the people and the regime’ (1996: 12) opened up. The workers now had a choice: they could leave the Communist Party and its youth section, and no longer take it seriously. As Tókéş aptly observes: ‘the hidden agenda was political power. The real stakes were the recovery of personal, local, regional, and quasi-corporatist autonomy, the restoration of civil society, and the emancipation of Hungary from foreign rule’ (Tókéş 1996: 12).

In what follows, I shall discuss the nature of political socialization so crucial to politically determined production and reproduction processes under state socialism. I shall suggest further that the Communist Youth League constituted yet another contradiction, as demonstrated by many scholars, and highlight the importance of informal or non-corporate networks in the socialization of youth in opposition to the regime’s stated aims and policies.

## 6 THE COMMUNIST YOUTH LEAGUE: IDEOLOGY, CULTURE AND ALIENATION

The honourable goal of members of the youth organization is to earn the privilege of joining the vanguard of the Hungarian working class through its organization, the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party.

(From the Code of the Hungarian Communist Youth Organization)

In Chapter 5, I described the functioning of a state enterprise and the ways in which young workers were socialized into the labour force. Such an enterprise, however, did not exist in a vacuum but engaged in direct, if at times muted, contact with the state that supported it. In this chapter I propose that young workers maintained a continuous relationship with the state as its ideological subjects by means of a number of avenues that supported such social relations. We must consequently consider the ways in which formal institutions, apart from those that were strictly economic, were established to serve both the party and the state. In other words, we must reconsider the ways in which the political, economic and cultural spheres are connected, as proposed by a number of anthropologists (Donham 1990; Godelier 1986; Roseberry 1989; Wolf 1982). In particular, I hope what will become clear in reading these chapters is the way in which the various regimes took the original formulation of Aristotle literally. For the communist regimes, like their pre-war antecedents, humans are political animals *par excellence*. However, it is not only within the limits of the city, as Aristotle envisaged, but the whole polity, the state, that must be the organizational force to create that political animal. Just how communists ordered the state and, in turn, socialized citizens through the various controlling channels of the Communist Party and its youthful *alter ego* needs to be addressed in detail.

Ideological justifications for the foundations of the utopian Marxist-Leninist states were, and continues to be, the ur-texts of Marx, Engels and Lenin. In the *German Ideology* Marx and Engels discussed the function of the state with regard to its ideology and legitimacy. Representing the interests of the ruling classes, the state in their view controls material and intellectual production and the reproduction of those institutions needed for its existence and legitimation. For its ideological functioning, the state ensures its hegemony by devising, provisioning and monitoring formal and informal



institutions. Legal, educational, political, law enforcement and religious organizations are but a few examples of these formal institutions; in Chapters 4 and 5, we considered instances of their workings as they relate to Csepel's history and the ways in which young workers were integrated within and subsequently entrapped by them. On the contrary, state socialist countries were conceived to differ from capitalist states by virtue of their efforts to plan the ways in which citizens become 'conscious agents' of their position and hence willingly serve the state. This social engineering is inimical to all states attempting to gain and preserve legitimacy (Habermas 1994: 83). In the state socialist planned societies, in other words, the Hegelian distinction between a 'civil society' and a 'political state' was to be successfully united within socialism (Kolakowski 1978: 125–7).

In order to ensure representation of the working classes, social ownership of the means of production and equitable redistribution (Wilczynski 1982: 2–3), socialist states invested in formal institutions with the aim of achieving these goals, among the most important of which was the Communist Party and its Youth League, the KISZ (Luza 1970; Riordan 1989; Schiffer and Soltész 1986). How this trajectory took place – its structure and functioning, which led to its eventual decline – will be discussed in the following pages.

In the previous chapter we saw how the KISZ established its monopoly over Hungarian youth following the failed revolution of 1956 by amalgamating all previously established youth organizations into a single Marxist-Leninist body. By the early 1980s, it had become clear to the leadership that, despite its purported aims, the communist youth organization was failing to maintain the interest of Hungary's three million citizens under 30 years of age. In-depth studies on the KISZ's leadership problems were undertaken by the Youth Study Group of the Social Science Research Institute (Gazsó, 1987) and the Youth Research Group of the KISZ Central Committee (Schiffer and Soltész, 1986). Most important among their findings were (1) the conflicting interests of members and leadership on the one hand, and KISZ and the management on the other; (2) loss of interest in the KISZ movement among its members; (3) lack of representation of young people's welfare; and (4) unsuccessful political socialization and lack of sufficient camaraderie among Hungarian youth. Such findings signalled difficulties, notably declining membership and disinterest on the part of members, all factors noted in the entire Soviet bloc (Riordan 1989: 33–6). In 1986, 913,000 people between the ages of 14 and 30 were claimed by the leadership as members of a youth organization, representing slightly more than 38 per cent of the eligible age group – of which 48.1 per cent were women and nearly 10 per cent were also members of the HSWP – a significant decrease over the past two decades (Gyimesi 1982; Gazsó 1987). The purported role of the KISZ, similar to that of its Soviet counterpart, the Komsomol, as the vanguard of youth, together with its constitutional mandate to complete the political, ideological, cultural and emotional

education of youth were, it would appear, compromised and even undermined by its failure to represent a majority of Hungarian youth.<sup>1</sup>

What did the KISZ represent to a young person in his or her twenties during the late 1980s? This question was raised during numerous meetings. At a company KISZ meeting I attended, for example, a middle-level functionary lamented members' declining interest in purchasing theatre tickets. The ensuing discussion alerted me to the fact that members had difficulty verbalizing the organization's ideology and aims. Participants referred to behaviour during, and participation in, KISZ activities rather than providing a clear-cut definition of its purpose. It was often repeated that Hungarian working youth exhibited little class-consciousness during the 1980s, an impression confirmed by views articulated by blue-collar youth in surveys on the subject of political participation and official ideology. KISZ leaders and functionaries were more likely than the general membership to have formed an opinion about its function and goals. They were also, as I later realized, more consistently favourable to KISZ, though only moderately so. This may, however, have occurred because of laws and regulations of the KISZ implemented at the Eleventh Congress in 1986, according to which:

The KISZ is a voluntary mass organization of Hungarian youth, under the MSZMP. Its function is to teach the spirit of Marxism and Leninism and the politics of the Party to its members. It should take its due share in building and working for the goals set by the Party and in recruiting and educating the future members of the Party. The KISZ should mobilize the whole of Hungarian youth to build and defend a developed socialist society, and make them aware of their responsibilities as patriots and internationalists. Furthermore, it should represent and defend the interests of all youth.

When I asked leaders about the meaning and purpose of the organization, one responded by reading those very words verbatim. Another opened a book of speeches by Károly Némethy, a former Prime Minister and Politburo member, calling my attention to the following passage:

It is important to note that when our Party called into existence the KISZ, in 1957, its aim was to create a unified youth organization in order to fulfil one task, perhaps with different means where applicable, to represent the ideology of the Party and to enlist the masses of youth to our cause. The way we formulated it at that time was that only politically committed and conscious young people should be admitted into the KISZ. This axiom holds true as well today. (Némethy 1985: 23)

These words and concepts may well be familiar to anyone growing up under a state socialist educational system, for since the late 1950s, there had been little change in the wording and meaning of these official texts. Though the 'creation of socialist men and women' was less visible in official publications, one could still hear phrases (as late as 1987–88) such as 'socialist morale and consciousness', 'patriotism and internationalism' or 'youth for the future' legitimizing the existence of the youth organization of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party. All these expressions were part of the ideological legitimating linguistic discourse familiar to Soviet bloc societies

following the establishment of communist rule (Fisher 1959; Lukács 1985–86; Riordan 1989; Szelényi 1998; Vitányi 1983; Zrinszky 1981).<sup>2</sup>

With this in mind, I was most interested in the specific workings of the communist youth organization in the Csepel firms I investigated. I began by asking questions regarding its organization, functions and power in the company's hierarchy, as well as the nature and degree of young people's involvement with the political organization that purported to represent their interests. In order to take up these questions, I shall describe the organization, its structure and membership, subsequently turning my focus to its role and activities.



6 Meeting of the local Communist Party and Youth League activists, mid-1980s. The sign reads: 'The Communist Party can build on the dynamism, eagerness and determined activities of youth' (author's photograph).

#### THE KISZ AT THE CSEPEL WORKS

As I described in Chapters 4 and 5, certain characteristics of the Csepel communist youth movement lent it a special flavour and set it somewhat apart from most of its Soviet and national counterparts. Bureaucracy does exist at all levels within the factory gates but political bureaucracy is a unique creation that needs to be described in detail. In another context, Italo Pardo makes an apt remark when discussing the domains of bureaucracy in Naples, arguing that it tends to become more 'personalised' (1996: 134), as opposed to more impersonal, 'western' type of European bureaucracies (cf. Herzfeld 1992). What I found in Csepel in this regard was similar to Pardo's experience. In contrast to the highly impersonal and rigid bureaucratic structures present in the management and the Communist Party, the KISZ

office culture was almost friendly, cordial and down to earth. Even in the late 1980s, there were signs that the legacy of the Csepel working-class movement and the 30-year-long KISZ history was still alive. In the offices of the KISZ and HSWP, slogans on the walls reminded visitors of the continuing presence of official ideology. These included: 'Continue on the Leninist Road' (*Tovább a lenini úton*), 'With work towards peace and the politics of our party' (*Munkával előre a békéért és pártunk politikájáért*), 'With work and studying towards socialism' (*Munkával, tanulással a szocializmusért*), and 'Work, live and study the socialist way' (*Szocialista módon dolgozni, élni, tanulni*). These almost ritualistic incantations, many of which had been on the walls for decades, were 'mere decorations' in the view of some members and, in particular, perhaps non-members. By 1990, all signs disappeared from the factory premises as the new laws went into effect declaring the presence of political parties illegal in the workplaces.

Before I was even allowed to interview informants at the factories with regard to the organization, I had already been presented with a rather dismal picture by several researchers who saw no point in investigating an 'organization that was in shambles, outdated and without membership support'. Such expressions of disinterest and even disapproval proved in fact to be the swan-song of the youth organization.

My first meeting with the KISZ took place at the Non-Ferrous Metal Works, in early February. During the short walk from the office building to the KISZ headquarters, my guide and I were concerned primarily with the cold; I had no idea what awaited me. The KISZ building looked nothing like what I had imagined an official political structure to be. Instead, I entered a greyish, brick building, with two offices and a small conference room. This stood in marked contrast to the HSWP headquarters, with its dozens of offices and small meeting rooms, and its large conference hall.

The KISZ office was pleasantly warm, filled with smoke and the fragrance of freshly brewed coffee, quite unlike what I had encountered in other offices. The administrator welcomed me and informed the KISZ Committee secretary, whose room was adjacent to hers, of my arrival. No sooner had she done so than I was sitting in his room, in a large, comfortable armchair, sipping coffee and talking to a genial man of 30. He was cordial and obliging, like so many others during our long hours of interviews. The secretary's manner was open, with a subtle pedagogical slant. 'This is our territory', he said. 'This is our office, workplace and hide-out. It's not too bad, but if you take into account that we built all this by ourselves, I think it's excellent. Please, feel at home here, now this is your place too.' Having heard such unpleasant stories about the KISZ, this welcoming gesture put me at ease, my sense of comfort facilitated by familiar symbols such as the portraits of an austere-looking Marx and a rather smirking Lenin on the wall flanking a red silk flag, symbols so coveted by western tourists in 1990–91 on the streets of Budapest. At that time, however, I knew I had arrived.

## THE OFFICE AND THE CLUB

The office of the secretary was small, containing only the necessary furnishings: a large desk, a chair, a small coffee table with several chairs, and, along the walls, bookshelves stacked with political literature. Several trophies and medals were displayed on one shelf, some boasting of athletic achievements by the members of the organization, others of the outstanding political activities that had earned the KISZ 'Red Banner' and the 'Outstanding KISZ Organization' awards given each year by the Central Committee to KISZ groups. On the desk was a telephone that rang frequently. Piles of papers called attention to the fact that the secretary was working on a report, or *jelentés*, that each KISZ group was expected to submit to the Central Committee once a year. Beyond the desk was a huge window, the only one in the room, affording views to the side-road and the rear entrances of shops. The curtain, badly in need of a wash, helped little to enhance the view, nor did the incessant smoking, having no doubt contributed to its dubious hue. A large ashtray on the desk and several smaller ones scattered throughout the room were emptied periodically, either by the secretary himself or by his assistant, who appeared to come and go as she pleased. Whether out of habit or anxiety, for men and women alike, smoking represented an almost obsessive preoccupation, as if they wanted, albeit symbolically, to express their identification with the smoke-filled shop floors. Constant exchange of cigarettes was an open symbolic act of camaraderie among KISZ functionaries and office workers.

Some books on the shelves were political, others literary or scientific, still others popular travelogues. Those I saw most often were the constitutions, the KISZ documents and congress proceedings, the works of Marx and Lenin. One had a distinct sense, looking at the dust they had collected, that they had not been taken off the shelves for years. Some, however, appeared to have been well-thumbed, including publications of local history associations, factory journals and the local weekly newspaper, *Csepel*. Magazines were scattered on the shelves, most of which were issues of popular youth magazines such as *World Youth (Világ Ifjúság)*, *Hungarian Youth (Magyar Ifjúság)*, and the *Youth Magazine (Ifjúsági Magazin)*.<sup>3</sup> As I was to discover, these papers were signs of political commitment and group identity experienced on the part of the leadership to an age-group as well as to the KISZ. Both the printing and the subscription costs of these journals were met by the Communist Party and the KISZ. These funds were given to official youth programmes in general. On the coffee table were stacks of other journals, more pertinent to the office profile of the KISZ, one of which expressed commitment to the party and the state. They included the *Social Science Journal (Társadalomtudományi Közlemények)*, a critical and analytic social science journal published by the Social Science Institute of the HSWP; *Young Communist (Ifjú Kommunista)* and *Youth Review (Ifjúsági Szemle)*, publications of the Central Committee of the KISZ; and the *Hungarian Gazette*

(*Magyar Közlöny*), published by the Council of Ministry. These three, however, remained in the hands of the leadership and rarely reached blue-collar youth, who showed little interest in them and no sense of urgency to read or comprehend what they symbolized. Unimportant though they may have been, these distinctions reflected not only different tastes, but gaps in educational and value orientations between white- and blue-collar youth.

The office was connected to the reception office by a small door, behind which the full-time administrator sat behind a large desk. A married woman, a mother of two, in her early thirties, she worked in close contact with 'her boss'. Their relationship was based on more than ten years of partnership, on a shared organizational affiliation and residency in the city of Csepel. In many ways, she was his equal, or at least felt herself to be so. She answered the phone confidently and put calls through to the secretary's office as needed, answering important questions in his absence, and taking responsibility for running the whole headquarters. While she performed his general typing and office tasks, she was also responsible for making coffee, serving drinks, running errands and overall office management.

The administrator was aware of what was important and what was not and, especially, who should be allowed to see the Committee secretary. Those members who sought only casual conversations were discouraged. She either courteously asked them to leave or offered coffee, depending on the circumstances. Like so many in the communist bureaucracy, she had the power to help or hinder those who came in contact with her. This power, although not always apparent, was none the less significant: at times, she permitted me access to individuals that was denied to others. Obtaining files and statistics, at times a nearly impossible task for me, posed no difficulty to her. 'Just ask me', she said, 'I know where things are.' From her I learned an important axiom: to gain access to the director, one must get past his assistant. As I soon found out, this important informal system of connections placed at times a nearly impassable wall between the secretary and the members; some blue-collar workers also resented such a 'privileged' existence, feeling a sense of inferiority by comparison. As one KISZ member stated: 'Having a private office, a clerk, and at times a car at your disposal puts an end to the equal distribution of resources.'

While it was true that she worked hard, the administrative assistant received many benefits in return. Proximity to the top functionary in the company KISZ meant that she was also close to those in the company hierarchy. Although her salary was much less than his, about 4,500 *forints* compared to his 7,000, it was none the less somewhat higher than that of her colleagues in payroll and administration. In addition, bonuses, vacations and study-leaves came with her job, but more important still, this position required further higher, as well as political, education, although evening school and the KISZ political high school were no doubt burdens for her. At examination time, however, she was entitled to paid study-leaves, as she explained:

I don't mind studying, I know I will benefit from it in the long run. It's true that I can't spend as much time at home; my husband told me the other night well, did you marry the KISZ or me? But he calmed down a bit when I reminded him about his VGMK work and outings with his buddies, and, especially, about his weekend soccer games. So you see, it all works out: he goes to watch soccer and I stay home and study the political economy of capitalism. They both have to do with money. Isn't it true?

True or not, time spent studying did not redress the gender imbalances for young women at the factory and within the youth organization. I never saw a male clerk at Csepel, whereas women, even graduates from political schools, rarely advanced beyond the middle level in the organization's hierarchy.

The KISZ headquarters extended into a basement, called the 'KISZ Club', where members met and socialized. I was informed that members used to go to the HSWP building for meetings and other gatherings, which for many was a sore point; their remedy was to build their own club house by renovating an old bomb-shelter under the KISZ office, in work-bees at the weekends and after hours. The former bomb-shelter in no way resembled its original purpose after renovations. Only the sturdy, air-tight metal doors revealed its earlier history as the new club-house was refurbished, repainted and remodelled according to the needs of the organization. Several rooms were available; a large room set up for dancing, with a stereo system with large amplifiers; a meeting room in which a bar-like structure was skilfully concealed to circumvent the firm's alcohol ban; and a games room, with a ping-pong table, card table and table-soccer ('*asztalifoci*' or '*csocsó*' as it was referred to by some of the members).

The general meeting room, the largest of them all, was lined with small tables, where most meetings took place; screening rented films on recently acquired equipment was a late addition to the communal club activities, while others were of recreational nature, including quiz games and competitions. All these activities were funded in part by the KISZ, a budget for which a substantial portion was contributed by the firm and the HSWP. Such amenities could not, however, have been achieved without willing sacrifice on the part of the membership. As the secretary told me:

This was a major achievement for us. It's not on the same scale as the major and now historical work of building the 'Hanság Waterways Channel System' in 1958 through nation-wide voluntary work by KISZ members. We only had to build our clubhouse on our own and, I think, the membership did an outstanding job. I can say with certainty that a bomb shelter has never looked so good.

This testifies to the centrality of such communal activities in forming a loose and selective generational alliance within the factory's organized youth. Most members felt a sense of pride when such a plan was realized even though minor disagreements with the factory management surfaced concerning the reassignment of work-schedules for KISZ members volunteering for such jobs. These were, however, not the main problems associated

with the organization; its contradictions were exacerbated by its inherent structure, leadership function and activities.

## STRUCTURE AND LEADERSHIP

Naturally, socialist political culture and bureaucracy were not native inventions: the organization's bureaucratic structure was modelled on that of the Soviet Communist Party and its Hungarian counterpart, the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party, the HSWP. Several 'basic organizations' (*alapszervezet*), headed by a basic organization committee and a 'secretary' (*titkár*), united 20–30 people in a small grass-roots organization, working in the same office or workshop. Each such basic organization held a separate meeting – a full-scale, bi-monthly mobilization encouraging its members to appear at the *gyűlés* (gathering) for the whole membership. A dozen or so basic organizations formed the single KISZ group at the firm, which enjoyed independence from the twenty-first district KISZ Executive Committee and the party committee of the HSWP. In this sense, the Csepel Works' youth groups were different from other organizations, for their privileges extended directly from the national headquarters and not from the district, although relationships between the district KISZ Executive Committee and that of the factories' own KISZ Executive Committee were cordial and respectful.

The connection between the executive committee members of the KISZ and the Party Committee members and the HSWP Secretary was close, often intertwined with political, economic or cultural activities affecting the whole firm. Most secretaries and executive committee members were drawn into the party where their assigned 'vocation' or 'special task' was their 'unrelenting devotion to their KISZ work'. Such promotion was seen by members as a step towards career advancement and clearly demarcated an elite guard who were seen as trustworthy 'cadres' (*káderek*).

The KISZ secretary of the executive committee (or in his or her absence, a trustee of the committee) was always present at party, trade union and company management meetings. These were the most available channels through which young workers voiced their opinions at higher levels. At times, however, members complained that, by the time a request reached the VT meeting or the Party Executive Committee, it was 'not the original version' or may have been 'ignored'. I witnessed this during the spring of 1986 when the KISZ organization held its general election meeting at the Non-Ferrous Metal Works. There, a young worker raised objections to the superficial treatment of recently hired KISZ members by the local organizational secretary. A month later, when the district held another meeting, the same complaint wasn't mentioned. Whether it was simply dismissed as unimportant or dropped from the agenda was not revealed, but the frustration of the rank-and-file concerning the abandonment of their own issues by the leadership remained a sore point.



The fact that the organization was fashioned after the Soviet Komsomol reveals how bureaucratic and cumbersome its structure had grown. Each basic organization was run by a 'leadership council' (*vezetőség*) composed of the secretary and several 'resort secretaries' (*rezort titkárok*). These secretaries, such as the 'organization secretary', the 'agit-prop secretary' and the 'financial secretary', were directly responsible to their secretary. Thus, the principal secretary and his or her subordinates composed the council that led a basic organization. The three or four 'resort secretaries' could deputize for the KISZ principal secretary when he/she was on leave or busy. Just as the 'resort secretaries' were elected by the members, several key functionaries from their ranks were also nominated and elected to be responsible for monitoring and organizing tasks: the 'sports counsellor', for example, set up athletic and recreational competitions (*sportfelelős*); the 'cultural counsellor' (*kultúrfelelős*) organized get-togethers, dinner-dances, discos and other leisure activities; the 'youth-worker counsellor' (*ifjúmunkásfelelős*), made certain that in each shop the welfare of members was safeguarded; and the 'social work counsellor' (*társadalmi-munka felelős*) was responsible for recruiting volunteers. Through vehicles such as the bulletin board and outside connections with other groups, assignments or elections by the members were made. Thus, it is clear that counsellors and secretaries composed the middle-level leadership, roughly one-third of the total membership, who directly participated in the total workings of the youth organization at the basic organization level.

To further complicate the picture of the organizational bureaucracy, the factory KISZ organization, uniting 130 to 160 people, consisted of the top leadership of secretaries of the basic organizations and the Executive Committee, which was chaired by the Executive Committee Secretary. Members of the Executive Committee were elected by the membership at the factory, underscoring a conscious selection to avoid duplication between secretaries and Executive Committee members. The two leading bodies, the secretariat (all KISZ secretaries of the basic cells or groups at the firm) and the Executive Committee, did not exist as independent units. Each basic organization made its decision every other month during the general meeting and, if there was disagreement on key issues, the final decision rested with the general membership vote. However, in extreme cases, the Executive Committee was obliged to make a decision. Once a month, a secretarial meeting and an Executive Committee meeting were held to discuss plans and membership problems and options for decisions, both of which were supervised by the Executive Secretary.

In retrospect, it seems that this top-down system, which broadened the basis of participation by involving more people on the lower echelons, assured more democracy by sheer dint of numbers. While this was clearly the case at the two factories, the FM and SZG, in practice such power-sharing meant little more than long, tiring debates and meetings; moreover, Executive Committee members were always more powerful than local

organization secretaries if only because of their closeness to the high-level functionaries in the party, trade union and management. The Executive Committee was an extremely tightly woven network of friends who formed a clique of their own. This form of favouritism, needless to say, was rejected by the members – especially blue-collar workers – who hated the nepotistic exclusivity of secretaries who became butts of their jokes. Respect for them continued to erode throughout the 1980s.

## THE SECRETARY

Political bureaucracy, just like workplace bureaucracy in general, could not work without committed functionaries and a selection procedure and political education of potential leaders. The identities of political elites, the roles they played and the power they held must be analysed in greater detail, for two to three generations of Hungarian youth were organized, monitored and educated under their watchful eyes or, more precisely, under the eyes of 'Big Brother', the HSWP. For high-level KISZ functionaries were not simply elected by the members, but 'appointed', 'nominated' or even 'selected' by the leadership of the existing social and political organizations, namely the trade union, management and especially, the party.<sup>4</sup> The several basic organizations formed the KISZ organization at each firm, with a separate Executive Committee and an 'an independent full-time KISZ executive secretary' (*függetlenített KISZ bizottság titkár*). Here the word 'independent' is important since his or her original occupation was abandoned for the duration of the political function; thus, the position was considered a full-time occupation with a monthly salary. The secretary of the Executive Committee of the FM earned 7,000 *forints* a month in 1986, the same as a skilled worker before income from 'second economy' work was taken into consideration.

The title *KISZ titkár* had a powerful ring to it, even though most members agreed that the position's prestige and power were no longer what they had once been. Election to the post of secretary of a group of 20–30 people required strength of character, a persuasive manner, devotion to group affairs and sacrifice of time. To become Executive Committee Secretary at the head of the whole organization at the firm required far more: driving ambition. Most of the young people in leadership positions whom I interviewed, however, stated that they did not wish to be in the position of the Committee secretary. Their arguments were of a piece, such as that of a 29-year-old 'agit-propagandist', responsible for information dissemination at the SZG:

I've been doing serious KISZ work for more than five years now. I became an 'agit-prop' secretary two years ago and, already at that time, my MSZMP secretary told me smilingly that I am an excellent candidate for the KISZ Committee secretary at the next election. I didn't tell him that it's not my dream, and that I don't even want to

hear about such a promotion when I see what our Committee secretary does: he doesn't have any free time. He is constantly on the run. Going to various meetings – KISZ, the union, management, district KISZ, and what not. You see, I just couldn't give up my free time. I am married, I want to have a family, I want to progress in my job. That kind of serious politics is not for me. You need special people there. People who like politics, people who aren't afraid and feel the call of this vocation.

Who were these 'special people' in the mid- to late 1980s when the youth organization was just a few years away from its exit from history? To discover their profiles, I shall draw on the life histories of two KISZ Committee secretaries from each of the factories I investigated. In order to facilitate a more complete understanding, the following list highlights important aspects of their life histories.

	<b>SZG Secretary</b>	<b>FM Secretary</b>
Place of birth	Bátaszék	Püspökladány
Date of birth	1958	1956
Father's occupation	mechanic	craftsman
Mother's occupation	nurse	domestic
Education	<i>gimnazium</i>	<i>gimnazium</i>
Army service	yes	yes
Membership in KISZ	since 1977	since 1973
Membership in MSZMP	since 1983	since 1977
Political education	KISZ school	same
Political education	KISZ school	same
	MLEE	same
KISZ Secretary	since 1985	since 1983
Average monthly salary	6,500 ft	7,500 ft
Marital status	married, 1981	in 1983
Wife's occupation	technician	data programmer
Children	son	son
Foreign language	none	none
Housing	company	same
Car	none	Trabant
Quote	'To be useful in production.'	'I guess I'm not average.'

What is striking about these two life histories is the similarity: rural background, the parents' lower-working-class background, vocational education and the high-school diploma earned in their later years. Even their marital status and the first-born child, in both instances a son, as well as housing conditions reflect the similar socio-economic position of the two former KISZ leaders. As was the case for most high-level political positions, a Marxist-Leninist education and the completion of the KISZ's political school were required. In order to advance in the KISZ, as in the HSWP, the MLEE (Marxist-Leninist Evening School) was essential to assure eventual

'promotion' and 'recommendation', even for high-level management. While the MLEE was required for both professional and HSWP advancement, the KISZ political school was necessary only for young people who were planning to take on important political functions (Szelényi 1998: 127). This was a fundamental step in 'cadre education' (*káderképzés*) as one Committee secretary remarked:

The political orientation is an important step. We have to be educated in Marxism-Leninism since we are not born with it and since the regular school-system provides little of that. You have to study what's happening in the world today in order to make sense of it and, moreover, to know how to interpret it for yourself and for the membership.

Interestingly, both secretaries came from rural and low-class backgrounds and neither was a university graduate. Does this reflect a pattern that university-educated, urban and middle-class youth did not, as a rule, play an active role in the leadership? The two cases from the Csepel factories suggest that this was not an isolated case.<sup>5</sup> It is true that during the 1980s one found university-educated, white-collar young people only among the middle-level functionaries. One told his story as follows:

I spent five years at the Miskolc University to get a diploma in industrial electronic engineering. When I came to the Non-Ferrous Metal Works, I was already 26 years old. In less than a year, I was approached by my KISZ secretary and the MSZMP secretary. They told me that I am an ideal person, because of my diploma and KISZ functionary position at the University, to become a '*káder*' and to enroll in the MLEE. I told them that I just finished five years at the University and was happy to get out of school and now you want to put me back into another school for three years? So I declined that possibility, but I agreed to enroll in a shorter evening political-school and become a KISZ functionary.

As this makes clear, sacrificing time for the KISZ was at the heart of work in the committee, and secretaries were typically behind schedule because of management meetings, trade union and HSWP functions, and the district KISZ work. Since no high-level leaders were allowed to participate in the VGMKs (a law promulgated by the state), their 'second shift' consisted of these political activities which took up their time after regular work-hours and often at weekends as well. Thus, their financial status lagged behind that of regular participants in VGMKs – a bone of contention and hence the constant battle on their part to eliminate the gap by arguing that it contradicted a 'socialist work ethic'. Nevertheless, secretaries did receive monetary 'awards' and other benefits that were unavailable to regular members, which in turn were taken with a pinch of salt by members. In this way, incongruities between politics and work were exacerbated by the KISZ, thereby contributing to the alienation of members from the organization, its leaders and its values.

Interpretation of the word work, as related to politics and physical activity, remained at the heart of this conflict. Why these young men

became political functionaries can be gleaned from their concept of 'work'. They argued that they were ideally suited to a leading position because of their love of work inculcated by their parents. 'My parents were hard-working people and they raised me to be one too', argued one secretary. 'I can't sit still, I have to do something even when I'm on vacation', said another. When I queried them about the exact definition of 'work', inferring a distinction between 'physical' and 'mental' work, the distinction did not trouble them. The SZG secretary said:

When I was working at home, or later in the shops, I did all the work I was supposed to and much more. When I finished I asked for more or I just simply helped my colleagues. Nobody had to tell me what to do. I didn't know the words of '*lófrálni*', '*lébecolni*', or '*amerikázni*' [all refer to 'loafing']. When I became the secretary I did the same. KISZ work is not a five-days-a-week and eight-hours-a-day work. When you have to go to meetings, when you have to prepare a speech or report, when you have to go to company-council or district functions, or the time has come for a KISZ continuing political education school, you cannot say 'I'm, sorry I don't have time.' You have to do it. Work is work and when you are a KISZ leader there's no difference between political work and drilling. You have to be there and you have to know both.

The FM Committee secretary presented his background as follows:

When I was a kid I already loved to '*bütykölni*', 'to do things'. I got my vocational diploma as a machinist but this wasn't enough for me. I knew that you can only make it in life if you are flexible and versatile. So I studied more and got my diploma in car mechanics and welding. I even went as far as to get my certificate as trolley and crane operator. This kind of love-for-work, then, carries into the KISZ work too. I would say that, as a KISZ leader, one has to be a '*mindenes*' [a jack of all trades].

But he argued that a person in such an important political role must also be assertive, candid and stalwart in his values and beliefs. In his own words: 'They noticed that I had opinions about things. You have to be opinionated, but that doesn't mean you don't have to listen to others' opinions. You must be sensitive to your members' needs.' His point of departure was that only through political education could one learn such sensitivity. Whether his personal belief or not, this view was easily discernible in all political propaganda about the functionaries' need to listen to the membership, and firmly entrenched in official Marxist-Leninist pedagogy.

What did members think of their secretaries? As I tried to discover the answer from the members at large, it became obvious that what young people really wanted from their leaders was not so far from what the leaders themselves described. Most agreed that a good KISZ secretary or Committee secretary must be active, available to members, flexible, assertive, original, strong in his or her opinion, and knowledgeable about the company and its members. In the same vein, young people despised greed, selfishness, timidity and laziness. As one 20-year-old administrator argued: 'women make better KISZ leaders because they have more patience for the members' problems, because they are more sensitive to individual problems'. Thus sensitivity

notwithstanding, the gender imbalances were easily observable by pointing to the all-male Executive Committee.

Since members did vote against candidates they did not like, it was highly unlikely that such individuals would be elected to key positions. The profiles of the two KISZ Committee secretaries introduced above show that only those who had spent considerable time at the firm had a chance of being elected. 'We don't like newcomers', confessed a machinist, himself a middle-level functionary. It did happen, though. At the SZG a few years before my arrival, a candidate selected by the local HSWP committee was nominated and elected for a two-year term. But in the face of covert hostility from some middle-level functionaries and realizing the dangers of decreasing membership, the secretary resigned at the end of his term.

It is evident from the foregoing that becoming a KISZ secretary, or later a KISZ Committee secretary, was an important step. From such a position a young person in his or her early thirties would probably not return to the shops to continue, say, as a driller. It was more likely that he/she would become a middle-level functionary either in the Communist Party or in the local trade union. If the person already had an engineering degree, or managed to get one while serving as an independent secretary, becoming part of the management seemed inevitable. Both possibilities were used at the factories to illustrate the trajectories of former high-level KISZ leaders. Most middle-level functionaries eventually were recruited into the party and consequently received middle-level assignments. Both the secretaries introduced earlier were able to create their own positions after the KISZ folded in 1990. Neither returned to his original profession but both were co-opted by the management to take up middle-level management jobs: in one case, that of payroll department head; in the other, manager of job recruitment. The formal and informal networks they were able to develop during their tenure as KISZ functionaries had helped them to establish credentials for a smooth transition after the political change, a situation quite unlike that of many of the tens of thousands of members who bore the burden of lay-offs, demotions and unemployment in the early 1990s.

## THE MEMBERS

In light of the post-socialist changes, the breakdown of the hegemony of the HSWP and the KISZ, and ultimately the disbanding of both organizations, it is instructive to determine exactly who the members of the communist youth organization were. When conducting fieldwork in Csepel, I was interested to learn about the characters and identities of average KISZ members. My interest was prompted not only by the strong leftist working-class tradition in Csepel, but, more significantly, by the contradiction between the officially claimed 900,000 members and the studies projecting a more 'reasonable'

figure of around 100,000 committed members (Gazsó 1987; Schiffer and Soltész 1986).

When one KISZ secretary commented that 'The KISZ has seen much better days in Csepel', he meant that participation of young people in the organization was not what it ought to be. When we compare the percentage of organized youth at the Csepel factories to the national figure, the difference is apparent. In 1986, the KISZ Central Committee reported a national membership of 900,000 out of a little more than two million people, about 43 per cent of those under the age of 30. At the Csepel firms, this figure was higher (see Tables 6.1 and 6.2). At the SZG, out of 294 people, 168 or 63 per cent of the under-30 group belonged to the KISZ (see Table 6.1).

Table 6.1 KISZ Membership at the Machine-Tool Factory

	1984	%	1985	%
Workers under 30	346	100	294	100
KISZ Members	242	70	186	65.3
Blue-Collar Workers	197	55	177	60
Blue-Collar KISZ Workers	138	70	101	57.1
KISZ Members over 30	28	11.5	15	8.0
Women KISZ Members	n.d.	n.d.	82	44
Women on Maternity Leave	24	n.d.	7	8.5

Table 6.2 KISZ Membership at the Non-Ferrous Metal Works

	1984	1985
Number of KISZ Organizations	8	8
Active KISZ Members	156	151
Number of Women	71	63
Number of Men	85	88
Blue-Collar Workers	89	92
White-Collar Workers	67	59
Women on Maternity Leave	14	14
Total Number of KISZ Members	170	165
KISZ Members Under the Age of 30	142	123
Total Number of Young People Under the Age of 30	184	272
Percentage of KISZ Youth Under 30	77.1%	45.4%
Number of KISZ Members in the HSWP	62	62
KISZ Women in the HSWP	15	23
KISZ Members in the 'Workers' Guard'	8	8
KISZ Members in the 'Youth Guard'	4	8

Tables 6.1 and 6.2 reveal that the higher percentage of organized youth at the Csepel Works is understandable given Csepel's long working-class history. The small number of KISZ youth in the HSWP, the Workers' Guard and the Youth Guard – the latter two being the paramilitary elite force – show that those in their early twenties were still marginalized from the centres of political power. The roughly 1,000 KISZ members at the Csepel Works, however, do not compare to the much-vaunted 'strong and committed 4,000 KISZ members' in the late 1960s when the workforce reached an all-time high of almost 40,000 workers (see Table 6.3). Numbers notwithstanding, the percentage of organized youth at Csepel was around 60 per cent, a figure that appeared to have remained static since 1978 (Gyimesi 1982). There were differences, however, depending on the industry in which young people were dominant, an example of which is the percentage of organized youth at the Non-Ferrous Metal Works. This was well below the percentage at the Machine-Tool Factory (see Tables 6.1 and 6.2).

Table 6.3 KISZ Membership at the Csepel Works, 1959–78

Year	Number of Youth	Number of Members	% of KISZ Youth
1959	8,990	2,867	31.8
1960	9,000	4,000	44.4
1962	9,134	4,860	53.2
1963	9,200	5,100	55.4
1971	8,500	4,600	54.1
1978	6,583	4,000	60.7

Source: Figures calculated from Gyimesi (1982).

When discussing the low percentage of organized youth with members, and especially the declining white-collar membership, several important issues emerged. Most obvious was the small number of working youth in traditional industries such as metallurgy. Low wages and the low esteem in which these occupations were held have been identified as the primary reason why young people preferred employment in the service and private sectors. Second, lack of interest in and time for organized life and activities were expressed. Third, it was pointed out that a number of young people, the majority commuting workers, were not members of the company KISZ group because they were already members at their place of residence. Whether or not this was true, since KISZ functionaries lacked the power to verify the claims of those who claimed 'residency KISZ member status', this category allowed those who were indifferent to the organization to remain on the outside unnoticed. Fourth, members were adamant that a large percentage 'does not mean much if it's not active participation'.<sup>6</sup>



As Table 6.2 reveals, only about one-third of the total could be referred to as 'active members'. Most of those I interviewed agreed that this core group could be mobilized at any given time, for it consisted of 50 committed and active members, many of whom were functionaries. Finally, some leaders voiced concern 'that membership and active participation sometimes exist only on paper and in reports'. This meant that a well-written, periodically submitted report to the KISZ Central Committee was capable of earning prestigious prizes and bonuses for the organization, whereas real participation in organized life was very different. While this was true of some of the KISZ groups I investigated, I did not witness falsification of KISZ records while I was in Csepel.

Looking at the composition of the membership (Tables 6.1 and 6.2), we see that 60 per cent, or roughly two-thirds, of KISZ members were recruited from the blue-collar workers. While white-collar youth admitted their disinterest in the KISZ, their low level of participation was ingeniously rationalized by the leadership. Both leaders and workers argued that their non-membership was the result of them 'having extremely important tasks in production, which easily granted them non-political status'. In the two firms investigated, young women comprised 30–40 per cent of the membership. Especially interesting is the fact that most young women in the non-manual white-collar professions belonged to the KISZ, while their male white-collar counterparts did not. Looking at the blue-collar composition, the figures are also instructive: since the early 1980s reorganization of the internal labour force, few blue-collar women remained in the shops – amounting to only 10–15 per cent of the skilled workforce – yet almost all belonged to the KISZ. There were more unskilled and semi-skilled women, roughly 50 per cent of this group, but they were older and did not take part in political organizations.

Heterogeneous though it may have been, and more important than blue- and white-collar participation, were there signs that clearly distinguished KISZ members from non-KISZ youth? Did personal or group characteristics distinguish members from non-members? My experience in talking with young people indifferent to the organization was that the gap between them and KISZ members was minimal. They felt neither superiority nor shame because of their non-member status at the firm, and friendship between member and non-member youth was common, especially among those working in the same shop or department. Non-members occasionally criticized the KISZ for its overt political activities, for taking up too much of young people's free time and for serving as a 'springboard' for career advancement. At the same time, KISZ leaders argued that young people outside the organization were 'loners', even 'asocial types', who 'don't have anything to offer' and 'don't like to work harder'. One KISZ secretary argued: 'Why should we have more members? Why should we work for more people when they are lazy, don't like to work and are indifferent to what's going on

in our organization?' This, however, was an isolated instance. Most KISZ leaders agreed that the KISZ was an organization whose purpose was to safeguard the welfare and interests of youth whether or not they were members. This was reaffirmed when I talked to former KISZ leaders after the abolition of their organization in 1991, when they lamented the fact that no new youth organization had taken up the task, not even, despite its name, the political party, the Federation of Young Democrats (FIDESZ).

#### THE IDEAL KISZ MEMBER

While examining the reasons why workers joined the KISZ in the first place, I encountered a concept referred to as the 'ideal member' paradox. In discussions with young people, members and non-members alike, it was frequently suggested that those with certain characteristics should not be members and, in contrast, those with other attributes would make ideal members. Laziness, asocial behaviour, indifference, jealousy, greed and egocentricity were repeatedly mentioned on the negative side. The ideal or positive side included, not surprisingly, the opposite characteristics; I was repeatedly presented with an imaginary person, an 'ideal' or 'really good' member. At that point, my task was to discover the identity of the ideal KISZ member.

Non-KISZ youth expressed a nearly universal reaction: that the leaders, the secretaries, were the most ideal *because* they possessed the requisite characteristics. 'Look at KJ, he is an ideal man. If he wasn't ideal he wouldn't be the KISZ secretary', said a young toolmaker. Such tautological reasoning was typical. Interestingly, those in the higher echelons, such as managers, union and party functionaries, responded in almost identical fashion; they, too, considered the KISZ leaders to be ideal because of the positions they had achieved. What was striking was the automatic assumption that because of their achieved (or assigned) positions, these people must possess more knowledge, leadership qualities and even charisma. Thus, in the eyes of the members, the positions served to legitimize those who held them.

Members and functionaries, however, had more specific definitions concerning the ideal KISZ member, no doubt as a result of political socialization patterns. However, an intriguing feature of the 'ideal member paradox' emerged: the more highly positioned workers were in the KISZ hierarchy, the more vehemently they denied that they represented the ideal type. Perhaps it was modesty that prevented their self-identification as the ideal; in any case, an interesting duality emerged when specifics were listed for the ideal and non-ideal types:

#### **Ideal type**

hard worker and active  
flexible, group-centred  
intelligent and educated

#### **Non-ideal type**

lazy, not ambitious  
rigid, egocentric  
unintelligent, uneducated

unselfish and sociable	selfish and asocial
helpful and likeable	careless
political	apolitical
reasonable	unreasonable
always have good ideas	no ideas
ordered family life	disruptive family life
impressive, skilful speaker	inarticulate
cultured leisure activities	alcohol, gambling, etc.
smart appearance	careless, dirty

As one middle-level KISZ functionary pointed out to me, nobody possesses all these characteristics, and when I asked for an example of an ideal KISZ member, her answer was 'Well, we don't have anybody exactly like that.' At times, certain individuals were named as exhibiting a few of these positive attributes; in a few instances, others were identified as having non-ideal characters. When I commented that the characteristics of the ideal type may have been remnants of the KISZ and its youthful *alter ego*, the Pioneer movement and, more specifically, the 'socialist person' of the Stalinist 1950s when such an entity was an active goal, some nodded in agreement. After a long conversation, the KISZ Committee secretary at the Non-Ferrous Metal Works noted:

Sometimes people are real hard workers in our group; they like their peers and they form a well-working team together. What do I care if they have problems in their family and private lives? As long as it doesn't affect the KISZ and their activities in it I'll say it's their own problem. Still, for us, they are valuable the way they are.

Another leader argued in a similar vein, but added:

Look, I cannot give you a one-line definition of who's a socialist youth or an ideal KISZ member. What I know is this: when I need some people to do some voluntary work on Saturday and I ask so and so, I know that they will come in and work, I know I can rely on them. For me they are ideal members of our organization. Or when people pay their membership dues, and come to the meetings and organized activities, I know that they are members in good standing. In a word: they are ideal for the KISZ. And, that to us means that they are socialist.

It had become obvious that the basic organizations themselves defined who was ideal by adhering to the general outlines of the basic organizational rules and regulations of the KISZ, appended and constituted by the Eleventh Congress of the communist Youth League in 1986.<sup>7</sup> However, differences in their interpretation and application, as we have seen, were vast, as an engineer, himself a KISZ leader, summed up succinctly: 'To the question who is the ideal KISZ member I can answer this: *Homo sapiens* is the ideal KISZ member. The thinking and active human being.' Members of the Executive Council present seemed satisfied that we were able to get round this rather awkward subject and produce a sound, working definition of the ideal KISZ

member. The notion of ideal leadership obviously plagued the organization as it did the HSWP. Nevertheless, when political functionaries were appointed there was an underlying fear of 'a dictatorial personality cult' (not surprising after what Stalinism had promulgated, resulting in a chaotic society under a non-charismatic leadership). So it seemed that the 'ideal member' and 'ideal leader' paradox provided the leadership with a control mechanism for the selection and recruitment of future members.

## GOALS AND IDEOLOGY

One may well wonder whether Hungarian youth in general, and Csepel youth in particular, abandoned the KISZ to pursue their own self-interest, or whether this shift represented a deeper change in political attitude. Did the difference between membership and 'active membership' reveal that the members had grown indifferent to the official ideology of the youth organization in the mid-1980s? The answer to these questions is both yes and no. There was indeed a wide gap between activists and higher-level leadership – those with political education and diplomas and those without diplomas or political education. First of all, to tens of thousands of Hungarians the organizations' goals were both outmoded and formulated in a trite format, making it difficult to locate blue-collar youth with vocational-school diplomas who could verbalize the organization's ideology and functions as articulated in the organization's founding documents. Informants responded to this question in widely differing fashion, ranging from passages quoted by a university-educated youth leader from official regulations, to a blunt comment from a tool- and die-maker with a vocational diploma to the effect that 'the leaders know what to do and how to go about it'.

Familiarity with and ability to elaborate on the stated role of the KISZ by members was hardly new to the leadership and the Central Committee. Two areas were stressed to enhance the willingness of youth to participate in the organized political party: first, extensive and continuous political education of the membership, and second, activities that bound young people to each other and to the KISZ.

For the KISZ, political education did not necessarily mean mass education. An important distinction prevailed between the ways in which selected members of the KISZ elite were educated through local and national channels, and the ways in which the KISZ attempted 'to captivate the masses of youth' (in the words of the former Prime Minister, Károly Németh). While formal political education was available to only a fraction of KISZ-age youth, informal education and consciousness raising of the membership at large was achieved through KISZ events that drew young people into the organization.<sup>8</sup> However, the stress on participation and the fashioning of a KISZ consciousness created a reverse effect: it helped to atomize youth by

alienating them from the organization and from those who were not included in that organizational, collective existence.

In order to understand the range of these cultural-political activities, I compiled the following chronological list of major, regularly scheduled KISZ events at the Non-Ferrous Metal Works in 1986:

1. Name Day or Christening Day (January and February)
2. International Women's Day (March)
3. Revolutionary Youth Days (March –4 April)
4. Communist Voluntary Work-Saturday (Spring)
5. Children's Day (April)
6. May Day
7. Mother's Day (May)
8. Company KISZ Leaders' Educational Camp at the Company Resort at Revfulop, Lake Balaton (May)
9. KISZ Vacation Package tour to Yugoslavia or Romania (July or August)
10. The 21st District KISZ Leaders' Educational Camp at Somlyó Island (September)
11. Communist Voluntary Work-Saturday (Fall)
12. Work Competition and Prizes for 'Creative Youth' Movement (September–November)
13. Csepel Youth Days (October)
14. Santa Claus Dinner-Dance Fest (December)

In addition, the initiation of new members and the departure of former members (*kibúcsúzás*), weddings and funerals, and celebration of the regular holidays were causes for ritualized gatherings. To analyse these events, and to enable the reader to comprehend their organization more effectively, I have grouped these activities into three categories: economic and voluntary work, political and ideological activities, and cultural, recreational and sport events. These three were closely interrelated and, in the minds of the leadership, even inseparable. Many recreational and sport activities coalesced under the umbrella of 'Revolutionary Youth Days' (*Forradalmi Ifjúsági Napok*, or FIN), constituting a unified, politically and ideologically charged sequence of events. Similarly, communist 'work-Saturdays' were instigated by the KISZ Central Committee and the local party leadership. Name-day celebrations, funerals and weddings were considered 'atheistic celebrations' in accordance with the political principles of the KISZ.<sup>9</sup>

Interpreting the complex and multi-layered activities of the KISZ in Hungary presents a special challenge to the anthropologist attempting to analyse their development, function and meaning. The challenge lies in trying to understand and correlate differences in the actors' perception of them, with the overt ideological aims of the organization, especially between those who were seemingly committed to the system and those who were indifferent. Contrary to popular perception of the leadership, the three major

areas of activities were sharply separated in members' minds and require, I believe, comprehensive treatment. Let us consider each in turn.

#### WORK AND MONEY

Before taking up the specifics of work activities, I shall discuss the financial status of the youth organization, the two being fundamentally interconnected. In fiscal terms, the KISZ at the Csepel factories was not a well-funded organization; its sources were the company's separate but meagre 'youth fund', organized events and voluntary contracted work. In order to understand the financial workings of the KISZ, I have provided a simple table of the Machine-Tool Factory KISZ, indicating major income and expenses for 1985 (\$1 = roughly 70 *forints* then):

	<b>Income</b>	<b>Expense</b>	
Membership dues	9,000	Individual Gifts	98,900
Voluntary work	66,000	Social events	144,600
Communist Saturdays	185,000	Honorarium	133,000
Social events	19,940	Equipment	43,000
Home-loan interest	65,619	Other	142,700
Other	7,815		
Rollover from previous year	234,000		
<b>Total</b>	<b>587,374 Fts</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>562,500 Fts</b>

As this demonstrates, membership dues contributed less than 2 per cent of the KISZ's total income; the majority derived from the firm, both in the form of contracted work and a lump sum allocated from the youth fund. Contracted work may have involved jobs and weekend tasks performed by the KISZ group for the company, such as cleaning, reconstruction and building, or may have covered regular shifts for which the company deposited money in the organization's bank account.

The youth fund was an annual sum set aside from the company's yearly social fund, provided for activities and events monitored by the KISZ. Averaging between 100,000 and 130,000 *forints*, this amount was requested by the KISZ for organized activities, group travel and honoraria and bonuses. Depending on the number and nature of the events organized each year, the KISZ group used 50 per cent of its fund for organizing social events and distributed bonuses and honoraria to young people, members and non-members alike. The funds always seemed sufficient and, in this sense, the group was never 'in the red', a fact that placed Csepel KISZ – once again – ahead of its counterparts elsewhere.

More than 40 per cent of the KISZ annual budget was spent on individual gifts for expectant mothers and name days, for young men drafted into the army, for women on women's day and special gifts for KISZ members who left the organization. A substantial percentage represented honoraria, among which were the annual 'Creative Youth Movement' (*Alkotó Ifjúság Pályázat*) and the 'Young Masters of Professions' (*Szakma Ifjú Mestere*) competitions. In addition, small awards were made by the appropriate KISZ organization to those submitting outstanding proposals for inventions or those who passed professional qualifying exams. What was the significance of these bonuses in binding members to the organization? It would, I think, be simplistic to conclude that financial gain was the only reason for which youth participated in KISZ activities, and more accurate to emphasize the fact that rewards reinforced ties between members and the youth organization. 'I don't care about money', one NCN mechanic said when I asked him. 'Money means nothing if you have to work with people you don't like.' Other members felt that distribution of the funds was not wholly democratic nor without favouritism. A case in point is the fact that both the prestigious prizes mentioned above were awarded to skilled workers, technicians and engineers, whereas few blue-collar youth received a tidy sum for their work or inventions. Those who did were happy with their lot and did not see the contradictions within the system.

Three types of economic activities engaged the KISZ at the Csepel firms: the communist Saturday (*kommunista szombat*) or communist shift (*kommunista műszak*), contracted work (*szereződéses munkavállalás*) and work performed within the subcontracting work units, known as the KISZ VGMK. Communist Saturday had a long tradition in Csepel. And voluntary work performed on weekends or holidays to assist in reaching a targeted plan by which workers offered their earnings from a full day's work was a fairly regular event in the 1950s. Several factories and shops at the Csepel Works, such as the Converter Factory, for example, were established in part because of the voluntary work performed by the KISZ organizations.

Each year, two communist Saturdays were organized. In 1986 a third 'communist shift', the 'Offering for the XIth KISZ Congress' involving all KISZ organizations nation-wide, was organized with the proceeds being sent to the central fund of the national organization. Most workers, including some critically minded KISZ leaders, resented this extra Saturday's work. Some argued: 'We already have enough difficulty making sure that the regularly scheduled two communist Saturdays will be successful and everyone will show up.' Others felt that 'You just can't squeeze more out of young people.' In spite of this, the KISZ Congress Communist Saturday was a successful event, with almost 96 per cent of the KISZ membership participating. Contracted work was less onerous and initiated most often by the members themselves. It involved only a few hours, almost always after the regular daily shift, and was performed only by volunteers. The work was diverse and less arduous than regular shifts – helping a local school or kindergarten erect

a fence, or planting district parks with flowers and laying a new side-walk for example, tasks that did not conflict with regular work and political activities.<sup>10</sup> The last type of activity, initiated at the end of 1986 and fully implemented in 1987, was regular VGMK work performed by the youth organization, its only differences from the regular VGMK being in the limited amount that was earned.

However, these extra voluntary economic activities were sources of conflict between members and the leadership. Since the introduction of a five-day work week in 1975, Saturdays and Sundays had been considered precious time for youth struggling to make extra money, working on their garden plot or housing project, and spending time with family and friends. But the KISZ, party and union leaders argued that 'doing two or maximum three communist shifts a year was not that much'. An older union secretary stated:

Young people sometimes spend their weekends with idle things, such as drinking and carousing. When I was young I worked 60 to 70 hours per week. Now that they only have to work 40 hours they should not get too comfortable and spoiled. They can surely offer a day or two for the common good.

Talk of 10–14-hour work days in the past was not unusual at meetings and political rallies. But in the mid-1980s, young people thought differently. 'Sure, time is money', voiced a tool-mechanic, 'I don't want to spend my time on things that don't help me.' During a small 'rap-session' in the copper-smelting shop, young people nodded in agreement. Still more revealing was the attitude of a young smelter, 'I've just bought a "hobby-garden" (*hobbykert*, vegetable allotment). I spend every minute there because that's how I can put some fresh vegetables on our table.' Others felt that the KISZ and the company were worth the extra work. One youth commented:

You have to ask yourself where the money goes. The money we make during the communist Saturdays goes into the company's social fund. That fund serves everybody: the young, the old, the children, the mothers, and the sick. I believe that we'll need that money where it is. An extra day or two won't kill us.

While nearly all initiatives were met with hesitation by the membership, over time members grew accustomed to them and, subsequently, lent their willing support. Although non-members were less inclined than KISZ leadership as a whole to support or agree with the purpose of such work activities, most of the committed rank-and-file seemed highly supportive. As the following statement reveals, even some outside members agreed that the organization did well by organizing a large group of people to work together to earn money:

You can't buy money in the store. Money doesn't grow on trees. You have to make money. The KISZ guys here are pretty successful in that. Sometimes even I work with them. After all, they are my friends and, once the work is done, we can have a drink together.



## POLITICAL EDUCATION AND SOCIALIZATION

As discussed above, since 1957, the KISZ had been the only political Hungarian youth organization, its main goal being the political socialization of young people. In fact, its main role was the instruction in the politics of the HSWP and Marxism-Leninism. Like the Soviet Komsomol, it aimed to develop a 'sense of responsibility and obligation for socialism' (Gorbachev 1987: 114–16; Lukács 1985: 149). Indeed, this was the process of creating the nationalized version of the Soviet-type of '*Homo politicus*' by repoliticizing age-relations. Both the leadership and the elites believed that generations are political creations. Throughout the 1980s, KISZ leaders argued that most Hungarian youth belonged to the post-war generation that either compromised with the Kádár government or did not. Those in the latter category were often referred to as the 'beat' or 'crisis' generation (Fritz 1990: 8–17), a generation as produced by the socialist government. Those who belonged to the former category were the politically enlightened and trusted youth assisting in the building of a better (socialist) society. Since most youth were not members of the official youth movement, and a large percentage of the membership were not active, leaders had no choice but to wage a constant battle against non-members and recruit new members. How realistic were these goals at the Csepel firms? Here I cite a KISZ secretary at the SZG:

It is very difficult to talk about so-called 'high politics' here. There are many difficulties in teaching Marx and Lenin. First of all, this is a factory and not a political school. Secondly, the members have different educational levels making it is an extremely demanding job to lecture them about something they cannot comprehend. Then there is the question of time. When to teach? Everybody is involved with over-time work and VGMK or, if not, they want to get out of the work-place as soon as they quit their shifts. So when can we teach the younger members?

The KISZ leadership perceived dangers inherent in the apolitical attitudes of the members. One KISZ leader argued: 'Kids coming to the factory after their vocational training know almost zero about Marxism-Leninism. They are totally indifferent to it because they don't know anything about it.' Was this really the case? I asked a teacher at the Bajáki Vocational School. 'Yes,' he answered immediately, adding, 'we are not set up for that. We are happy if we can teach them the basics about their profession. Even for that we don't have enough time.'

Nevertheless, learning Marxism and Leninism was not a high priority for the rank-and-file membership, something largely attributable to the lack of politicization within the working-class family setting in general (Török 1986: 26). Furthermore, the almost obsessive over-politicization of work and leisure turned blue-collar youth away from the organization. When asked about learning and adhering to these beliefs most KISZ leaders felt rather uneasy, not because they could not answer but because they considered it

too commonplace to warrant discussion. One of the Executive secretaries formulated his opinion as follows:

Of course you have to be committed to the Marxist-Leninist doctrines. You can't be a church-going and politically insensitive guy. The reason why we are educated at the KISZ school and MLEE is to know what our system is all about, where it came from, where it stands, how we can make it better and where it will lead us.

During one of the seminars organized by the FM for functionaries, the political orientation of the leadership was discussed. There was general agreement that current politics differed from those either at the beginning of the KISZ movement or in the hey-day of the communist movement in Csepel in the 1920s and 1930s. One leader commented:

Communism to young people in the second half of the 1980s means something different when their head is full of the second economy, Gorbachev's *glasnost*, and texts of the latest Hobo Blues Band's LP, and, most of all, how to get enough to build a family home.

A clever secretary in her late twenties commented:

We don't have to organize and participate in strikes like our parents did when the Csepel Works was still Weiss Manfred Works. Our task today is to convince young people, both within and outside of the movement, that we are working for the same thing: to build a better society for ourselves and our descendants. This is how we interpret Marxism-Leninism and how we try to explain it to the members.

Another functionary, a 30-year-old engineer and KISZ secretary at the sheet-metal shop, commented:

I don't know about this brouhaha about Marxism and Leninism and communism. People who just criticize us and see a contradiction in our organizations' names – the Communist Youth League and the party is named Socialist Worker's Party – don't understand that regardless of the names we are working to build socialism here and now. Whatever problems we have today that's what we have to fight for; that's what Marx did in his time. But we cannot do that alone. We need our members' commitments and their good will. But the only way we can rely on them is if they can rely on us.

Thus, while such statements were informative about the leaders' position vis-à-vis the rank-and-file, members' attitudes were a wholly different matter, for blue-collar youth's acquaintance with international or daily politics was a remote concern in conversations focused far more pointedly on soccer, earning extra money, family troubles, leisure activities and other everyday topics. At times, though, the balance would shift. Mikhail Gorbachev's visit to the Csepel factories on 9 June 1986 – like an earlier visit by Leonid Brezhnev – was seen as an important step in Hungarian-Soviet relations, and sustained a high level of excitement among Csepelers for days. Some made sarcastic comments about the Chernobyl disaster and temporary inconveniences caused by security precautions. Yet not everyone was so

offhand: others felt the weight of the event to the extent that, at the KISZ meeting preceding Gorbachev's visit, an extra 'communist work-shift' was proposed in his honour. This idea was rejected by the membership in view of the three voluntary communist-Saturdays already completed in 1986.

Young workers believed that everyday problems such as absenteeism, alcoholism, vacation schedules, pay rises and promotion were not political issues. Such matters were generally settled outside the KISZ sphere. Members did not consider addressing the KISZ secretary about problems of that nature. A few agreed with this 20-year-old accountant: 'The reason why we have functionaries and KISZ leaders is to let them talk and worry about politics.' Even members who were not pleased with the prospect of extra KISZ work put up with the socio-economic and political system with indifference.<sup>11</sup>

The leadership wished to view the apolitical attitudes of KISZ youth as temporary:

The way I think about our youth is this: when times are difficult they will become overtly political instantly. When they feel the pressures and the squeeze they will open their mouths. Right now, in relative peace and prosperity – compared to some other neighbouring nations – their way to politics is through work. Indeed, doing the best they can in production is the best way for them to be political.

Though this nicely summarized the views of the intellectual stratum of the leadership – and proved to be correct during 1989–90 when Csepelers took to the streets – most KISZ and HSWP leaders expressed concern that the political education of young blue-collar workers was inadequate. Thus, constant pressure was exerted from higher echelons to promote political socialization and engage more young workers in the political activities of the communist youth organization.

#### THE POLITICS OF LEADERSHIP

The selection of future leaders and cadres was a highly contentious area, eliciting accusations of bias from non-KISZ workers. However, the number of individuals who attended political schools was surprisingly high, for of the 50 youth leaders at the two factories of the Csepel Works, 33 had political diplomas in 1986. Of these, 18 had received diplomas at the Marxist-Leninist Evening University, the MLEE. Those who participated in the Marxist-Leninist High-School, the MLK, and the KISZ schools had been fewer; only one was sent to the HSWP Political College, the form of political education guaranteeing a high-level position in the company's hierarchy. Clearly, for the leaders political higher education was fundamentally separate from higher education *per se*. The KISZ Secretary School was a highly elitist institution restricted to KISZ Committee secretaries whose entrance to these schools was achieved through selection and appointment by the HSWP, trade union and management. Since many of the exams and courses were passed through evening classes, correspondence courses or summer

seminars these diplomas were not held in high regard by those who had university degrees. A subjective selection process and the small number of young women sent to such schools had been a matter of dispute by critically minded members and non-members alike.

Looking back over the past 30 years of KISZ socialization, it is obvious that some of the middle and high-level managers at the firm reaped the benefits of the process of 'cadre selection and cadre education', referred to in Hungarian political discourse as *káderkiválasztás és káderképzés* (Zrinszky 1981). For the most part, high-level KISZ leaders and functionaries enjoyed the benefits of these avenues of advancement, knowing well that such diplomas would enhance their future careers. It was they who, on leaving the youth group, became functionaries in the HSWP, the trade union, company management and, after 1989, the technical intelligentsia in general.

Apart from the nationally organized political schools, there were two major locally organized activities for leaders and functionaries: the first involved only two dozen gathered at the company's resort for a weekend educational camp. The other, organized and sponsored by the district, had involved several hundred. This week-long seminar was held for high-level secretaries representing their firm, school or collective. There, the programme was set by the district's leadership, and included lectures, open sessions, invited guest speakers and discussions centring on themes such as international conflict, national and the COMECON economy, problems of youth employment, KISZ regulations, local level KISZ functions and organizational difficulties. Other topics could be suggested by the participants. Schedules, however, were often entrenched firmly in the organizational mentality of the leadership.

While the atmosphere was cordial and friendly, with most evenings spent in leisurely fashion, this KISZ school was quite different from the first. Most participants agreed that it was always the participants themselves who accounted for the difference. The locally organized political retreat involved only those who came from the same organization. Formally organized events were few and far between, with subjects ranging from informal presentations, discussions of problems relating more directly to each functionary's responsibilities, to the goals and aims of KISZ programmes. One reason for the popularity of this company's KISZ event was its restrictive composition. As members expressed it: 'It's more informal when we are alone than when a big-shot comes from Budapest.' This statement entailed an unprecedented degree of anti-functionary feelings as well as a sense of anti-elitist feelings on the part of Csepel youth. While Gorbachev's visit was seen as a 'once-in-a-lifetime occasion', the arrival of central functionaries was common at the Csepel factories.

#### THE EDUCATIONAL CAMP

I have described, albeit briefly, some of the formal channels of political socialization. I shall now turn to a discussion of the camp organized by the local

KISZ group in order to examine the inside workings of a more informal institution. Interestingly, political education was almost a private affair for the KISZ and the party. Most non-members did not have any knowledge about the actual events taking place at political seminars, retreats and weekend schools. This made them highly suspect in the eyes of youth who were not involved with these political bodies. Political camps were special events with a carefully selected number of participants, instructors and topics discussed. The event I visited was extremely important for two reasons. First, it revealed how this formal gathering engendered elements of non-corporate and non-ritualistic leisure activities in order to maintain the cohesion and attention of the members. And, second, it suggested the disparity between purported goals and a lack of resulting coherence and camaraderie. This dialectics, strange though it may seem, appeared to be present in most KISZ activities, causing confusion if not disinterest among the members.

The camp began on Thursday afternoon, immediately after work, with a group of 25 taking a bus ride to Lake Balaton. The company's summer resort was not yet open for the tourist season, enabling the group to take charge of it temporarily. Its modest three-storey building, only a short walk from the lake, with a capacity of 50 people, provided a vacation retreat for workers and their families. It resembled other recently constructed company resorts mushrooming around the shores of Lake Balaton, in stark contrast to the private villas and isolated weekend homes of the wealthy.

After supper, the KISZ Committee secretary held the first orientation session to explain the purpose and tasks of the camp, and to distribute printed programmes. The first day concluded with informal introductions of the participating members and plenty of loud disco music and hard liquor until 11 o'clock, when the participants were asked to disperse, to the evident dismay of some younger members. While lights were 'officially switched off', bleary eyes and dazed expressions the following morning were convincing proof that the curfew had not been taken seriously.

Each day a member was appointed to the role of 'official on duty' (*ügyeletes*) in charge for the duration and hence responsible for the running of the programmes. Work-days were structured similarly: breakfast at 8 o'clock, discussion sessions until 1 o'clock, lunch-break until 2 o'clock, continuing sessions until 4 o'clock and conclusion of the day's programme with supper at 6 o'clock. Each evening ended with a party or some form of recreation. Working sessions ranged from general topics, such as KISZ duty, to specific tasks, such as the responsibilities of secretaries and counsellors. Another small group discussion, led by the committee agit-prop secretary, included all the secretaries from the basic organizations, focusing for instance on responsibilities of the agit-prop secretaries. During an afternoon session, small groups of four or five discussed specific problems, proposing a solution to the group as a whole. These problems were presented on xeroxed sheets, each representing a 'problem case-study', a conflict between a company

manager and a youth leader over extra work or overtime, or a functionary asked to resign for reasons of personality.

Larger group discussions were important in clarifying the KISZ's role in the company hierarchy and the tasks of functionaries. Older members were assigned to take an adversarial position to challenge younger or recently appointed members. Young people were encouraged to talk and take sides; they were asked their opinions and, in turn, criticized and shown how to make more democratic or objective decisions. In this sense, most participants felt that the educational camp was extremely helpful, for it enabled younger functionaries to learn the skills necessary to a successful KISZ functionary or leader. 'I was scared stiff at the first session, but by the end of the camp I realized that I was among friends who were there to help me', said a 22-year-old, recently appointed KISZ leader, a comment congruent with his elevated position.

However, while members' satisfaction ranged from 'having a really good time' to 'I like the cold and clean water of Lake Balaton', to 'I liked having Friday off from work', it was nevertheless clear that success was contingent on learning to handle small, local-level problems facing leaders at the company and the recreational portion of the gathering. A 30-year-old KISZ leader in her final year in office summed up the camp's goal succinctly: 'Lasting social bonds and friendships can be made, but pre-existing personal differences can also be deepened.' My impression was that those who benefited most were recent members, lacking experience in KISZ affairs within the company. In that sense they were socialized into the organization which, in the end, differed substantially from political high school. There were no songs, uniforms and marches, nor was there truly engaging discussion on topics concerning political affairs outside the organization, or, for that matter, on national issues such as the emerging oppositional youth movements, liberation from Soviet rule, and the presence of Soviet troops in Hungary, all of which were hotly debated topics at the time. In this sense, the KISZ not only discouraged individual initiatives, but was on the whole undermined by its own myopia.

## ORGANIZING ACTIVITIES

From the foregoing discussion it becomes clear that leisure activities had the limited, if contradictory, effect of maintaining young people's interest in the organization. The KISZ at the Csepel Works took this fact seriously, for cultural activities (in Hungarian known as cultural work, *kultúr munka*), entertainment (*szórakozás*) and get-togethers (*összejövetel*), and not political rallies, were the events favoured and attended by rank-and-file members. The importance of these events was attested to by the designation of a separate functionary position, the 'cultural counsellor' (*kultúrfelelős*) who, together with those holding similar positions in the basic organizations, was

responsible for organizing, monitoring and publicizing cultural activities. Once a month, the cultural counsellor of the firm's youth committee met with the district cultural counsellor in order to coordinate plans among the various groups, obtain adequate financial help and report on activities at each firm.

Those activities involving elaborate plans and large participation, such as group travel to the countryside or abroad, national holidays and district Revolutionary Youth Days, were organized at cultural centres throughout the city. Most, however, were held at the KISZ's own club, thereby contributing to the sense of isolation and exclusivity. It is fair to conclude, none the less, that this club was used at least once a week, sometimes even two or three times. Most events sponsored by the KISZ were announced regularly at meetings or on the KISZ bulletin-board (*faliújság*) and, more effectively, by word of mouth. As a cultural counsellor lamented, 'it is a never-ending battle to remind people about the next event'. The bulletin-board, however, did not appear to be a sufficient avenue for dissemination of news, for a cultural counsellor told me the following story:

In our basic organization we have a separate post for the bulletin-board. This bulletin-board is placed in the company *étkeзде* (cafeteria) because everybody goes there. But we noticed that most of the time people don't even bother to read what's on the bulletin-board. No matter what we put on there people just passed by, maybe with a passing glance, but they never really bothered to stop and read it. So we decided the following: we printed up a half-page text of our next club meeting. In the middle of the text we put in a sentence that said 'If you get to this point and read this one sentence please come to the office and pick up a cash award.' This text was on our bulletin-board for one week. Do you know how many people came? One. Out of 160 people we had to pay only one person, for he was the only one who read the memo.

The job of the cultural counsellor was a demanding one, involving frequent communication with those in the basic organizations and middle-level functionaries who were in touch with those in the shops and offices. In addition, the cultural counsellor was responsible for reminding KISZ members of events at factory premises. However, the failure of communication and the trivial nature of the bulletin-board revealed not only the leadership's inability to change and create new means of dissemination but, more importantly, the alienation of masses of youth from painted slogans, posters and other paraphernalia long believed to be propaganda tools in the hands of party activists. In fact, many of the symbols of Hungary's communist past – together with the medals, uniforms and tools left behind by the Russian army – were sold by street vendors to tourists in 1989 and 1990.

## FORMAL RITUALS

No formal organization or corporate network can or could exist without some form of open celebrations and formalized ritual activities, as Durkheim

remarked earlier: 'There can be no society which does not feel the need of upholding and reaffirming at regular intervals the collective sentiments and the collective ideas which make its unity and personality' (1915: 427). Both capitalist regimes and state socialist governments have prided themselves in allowing citizens to participate in state events and ritual celebrations of official holidays. At the same time, they closely scrutinize those celebrations deemed non-official or undesirable. In retrospect, the ritualistic celebrations of the former Soviet bloc, and the way they changed after 1990, provide fascinating anthropological perspectives to view the actual workings of states, regimes and nations (Kligman 1988; Kubik 1994; Lane 1981; Watson 1994). In fact, whole histories of nation-states and political regimes may be, and have been, written from the point of view of political celebrations, mass rallies and manipulated symbols (Boissevain 1992; Edles 1998; Kürti 1990b; Wanner 1998). Viewing the KISZ in retrospect it is easy to argue that, above all else, formal political rituals of the party and its youth organization attempted to provide the framework for creating potent and overt symbols for expressing unity under the communist banner. As with any other political symbols, they were meant to be a locus for members to learn and reinforce collective ideological sentiments.

In addition, such affirmations connected – in a legitimate public fashion – the local organization with the district and hence to the Budapest hierarchy including the most powerful body, the Central Committee of the HSWP. This, as I learned early on in Csepel, was a necessity for youth leaders bent on situating working-class kids on the ideological spectrum. In this way, each such gathering consolidated ties to the national organization and to its expected ideological disposition. Interestingly and not unexpectedly, these events also linked the group to its own local traditions and heritage as well as to international socialist organizations. Heritage and working-class tradition (*hagyomány* or *munkáshagyomány*) in this sense had always been important for Csepelers and especially local elites. But as we saw in Chapters 2–4, heritage was not based on collective memory rekindling the distant past alone, as in preceding nationalist movements. More specifically, it rested on invented communist tradition and a constructed mythology of leftist working-class radicalism since the interwar period. The ways in which this dynamic manifested itself and fostered an ossified structure unable to cope with the demands of changing times will be discussed next.

The ideological charge of KISZ rituals was always immediately obvious, if only because these activities were part of overtly propagandistic organizational affairs boosted with extreme, at times with wholly antithetical, ideological content. Whatever the nature of the occasion, participating members were always asked to dress formally: the men clean-shaven, dressed in suits and ties; the women in skirts and blouses. There were no formal dress codes as such, but these traditionally gendered practices were nevertheless observed particularly because on such occasions local HSWP, union and KISZ leadership, newspaper reporters and invited foreign guests were likely to be



present. The importance of formal gatherings could also be immediately sensed by the elaborate decorations and the arrangement of props and flowers. Ritualized division of space and time was a hallmark of these occasions, in which tables, chairs and flowers were arranged and participants seated accordingly. Without exception, tables were covered with red cloths, while red flags and the Hungarian tricolour were mounted in the background, framed by posters and familiar emblems of the communist past. Not missing from the walls were black-and-white photographs of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Kádár. Refreshments were put out on the tables, which prompted a member to warn me: 'You can tell the importance of the gathering by looking at what and how many kinds of refreshments will be served.'

Formal greetings and speeches, heavily laden with quotes and symbolic terms of Marxist-Leninist language, were essential. During International Women's Day, for example, the secretary's opening speech was fashioned according to a pre-set formula. Opening and closing remarks, commentaries and guest speeches were never omitted from official meetings and KISZ Committee elections. Among guest speakers, familiar faces were always included: the representative of the company's management, trade union leaders, district KISZ and HSWP representatives. Seating arrangements reflected the separation of leaders from members, imparting a sense not of a communal gathering but rather a court hearing. Major meetings such as elections and annual report seminars followed these patterns. The meaning and symbolism of such rituals were even more complex and significant than has been previously indicated, for they served as a reminder of their identity and the sacrosanct nature of the party which seemed to know all and to be fully prepared to account for all.

Each such occasion was carefully choreographed and prepared in advance by the organizing and agit-prop secretaries in which local Young Pioneers also participated: songs and poems contributed to a heightened sense of formality and lent a ritualistic charge to the events. As expressed by the Pioneers' vow: 'Pioneers help wherever and whenever possible' (*az úttörő ahol tud segít*).<sup>12</sup> Medals, honoraria, and plaques were also awarded at such ceremonies. The 'Award of Outstanding KISZ Member' and the 'KISZ Red Flag Award' were most common. Formal KISZ meetings were always concluded with singing the 'Marching Song of the Democratic World Federation of Youth' or the International.<sup>13</sup> Another song, 'We Follow the Way of the Party' (*A párttal a néppel egy az utunk*), was also sung for decades.

While many of these symbolic elements could be found at non-KISZ company events, three important rituals were overtly politicized; termed 'atheist' they included the annual Name Day, at which babies were christened; the weddings of KISZ members; and funeral ceremonies. Strictly, KISZ funerals were not unheard of but, as a rule, such occasions were organized by the trade union. Company and union officials were responsible for funerals, and the youth organization helped defray expenses and offered wreaths. These three 'atheist rituals' were KISZ-monitored in order to

preserve these rites of passage without church involvement. Although some church officials claimed that there was growing interest in the activities of the four churches in Csepel (Roman Catholic, Reformed, Evangelical and Baptist), the atheist name days and weddings seemed to be standard practice among young members of both the KISZ and the HSWP. Nevertheless, these took a radical turn after 1990 when the KISZ was disbanded and greater numbers of individuals decided in favour of returning to church weddings, funerals and baptisms, a topic discussed in detail in Chapter 8.

#### DEMONSTRATIONS, ANNIVERSARIES AND RALLIES

The events described were for the most part largely hidden from the public eye. In the following I consider formal KISZ rituals that took place in public, referred to as demonstrations, anniversaries and rallies (*felvonulás, évforduló, tömeggyűlés*). From its inception, the party and its youth guard had always held a large number of organized mass rallies, no doubt to demonstrate their strength in numbers (Kürti 1990b; Lane 1981). What is important in these events is what Robert Rotenberg observes for social time in the urban Viennese context. For Rotenberg, 'administrative decisions create, maintain, and reproduce the higher-order dimensions of social time: timing and tempo' (1992: 190). The KISZ was ingenious in doing just that: ensuring that members are fully conscious that their lives are intertwined with the social time of the higher order, the KISZ's own calendar. Moreover, as such, organized youth participating in formal KISZ events are re-connected to the working-class heritage and the communist state.

The 'Revolutionary Youth Days' (FIN) held in March and April, were organized to commemorate three major events in Hungarian history: the revolution and war of independence of 1848–49, the council of the Soviet Republic in 1919, and the liberation of Hungary by the Red Army. Consolidation and sequencing of three days of celebrations reflected a growing sense on the part of the leadership that youth must be brought back to socialist values by highlighting their 'revolutionary', 'progressive' and 'socialist' elements. In the words of a member of the Central Committee:

The Revolutionary Youth Days form a true nation-wide political action which – and I am sure history will prove this – form the consciousness of the whole generation. It would serve no purpose to deny that up to now there have been those who believed that March 15 was the nation's, March 21 the communists' and April 4 the country's holidays ... But today's generations know that these historical events are inseparably connected, and without one, the others will make no sense ... More and more people consider them to belong to a socialist nation, to which we all now belong. (quoted in Birta and Erdős 1982: 79–80)

During these 'FIN Days', intensive activities took place, all under central directives: meetings with writers and poets, lectures by historians, laying wreaths at statues, tours to historic sites and museums, and demonstrations.

Since these activities followed a tight schedule, care was taken not to overburden some while leaving out others. While some events of greater importance were reserved for the leadership (the wreath-laying ceremony at the Csepel Petőfi statue, for instance) and the middle functionaries (lectures and open forums), others, such as marches, cultural activities and sports events, mobilized the whole KISZ organization.<sup>14</sup> A small, select group was always present on these occasions to ensure visibility and the vitality of the KISZ group in the eyes of the political and company leadership. This practice of separation maintained an exclusivist stance on the part of the leadership while, at the same time, mass rallies were considered by many of the low-level members as 'bother' (*nyűglődés*).

Until 1989, the 15 March rally at the National Historical Museum – commemorating the 1848 uprising against Habsburg rule – was a voluntary but highly organized event whose function and meaning acquired portentous proportions. Leaders usually agreed upon a time and place, proceeding in a group of four or five to the state ritual and celebration. This official celebration was organized by the Budapest Central KISZ Committee, and most youth in the organization felt obliged to participate. In this jubilant event many professional actors, musicians, dancers and statesmen were invited to perform. Most were singled out during 1990–91 when a communist witch-hunt overtook the nation and they were publicly ostracized for their willingness to serve the ruling regime. In addition, from the early 1980s, an unofficial counter-demonstration took place at the Petőfi statue in Budapest, an event that received international attention because of police involvement and harassment of participants. While this unofficial demonstration had become a symbolic expression of dissatisfaction with the government on the part of the democratic intellectual opposition, Csepel KISZ youth, fearing reprisals, rarely attended. Non-members, however, enjoyed opposition events, as can be seen from a technician's comment: 'To me, March 15th represents one thing only – the fight against tyranny and foreign domination.' To many, this statement summed up their antagonistic feelings towards the Soviet bloc and the Red Army which had been stationed in Hungary since the end of the war.

Another major demonstration attended by the whole KISZ as well as non-KISZ youth was the annual May Day, the *sine qua non* for the legitimization of the HSWP. Great effort and expense was contributed to the organization of this demonstration as the KISZ, together with the HSWP and the union, took all responsibility to ensure enough funding for costumes, flags and floats, the pride of each firm. Special items and uniforms were created: scarves, caps, flags and floats' decorations were manufactured by KISZ group VGMKs. This meant overtime for members, but with considerable earning potential. At the same time, it accounted for missed target dates and redirected production efforts. On the whole, however, it also ensured a systematic controlling mechanism on the part of the leadership. Many who worked overtime expressed their willingness to do so. 'The money comes in

handy,' one worker said, 'but we also know how to have fun there. After work we'll go for a drink.'

Not only time, place, too, is of primary value for expressing political solidarity and symbolic power. In this all the communist states were inventive (Kubik 1994). Committed elites not only invented new streets, memorial parks and public spaces for themselves but eagerly occupied former sites of remembrances and charged them with Marxist-Leninist vitality. For almost 40 years this largest state demonstration took place in Budapest's largest park, next to Heroes Square (*Hősök Tere*). This square is the largest public nationalist plaza in Hungary to survive the name-changes resulting from the post-1989 reorganization. However, the podium was located not in front of the heroes' statues – the mythical Hungarian princes and tribal leaders of the 896 Conquest period – but next to the Lenin statue, which was finally removed in 1990.

Since its inception, 1 May had elements of both political propaganda and a carnival atmosphere (see, Harvey 2001: 94–5). Following party directives, members gathered in a side street adjacent to the main square where the demonstration took place. Most were dressed casually, yet still in official uniforms and company insignias. While older workers and union stewards wore their respective trade union uniforms, KISZ members wore specially made caps; balloons, flags, signs and pictures of Lenin, Marx, Engels and various government figures were carried by participants. Many workers celebrated this event as a family affair, forming pre-arranged rows following the float and proceeding in front of the stand. In the first row were the leaders of the company and the social organizations; in the second row, those carrying flags (the Red Flag, the Hungarian flag, and the blue flag representing peace) and placards ('We are working to fulfil the next five-year-plan'). The rest of the marchers followed. After the march, participants dispersed in the nearby park to socialize.<sup>15</sup> It was like the 'May Day' (*majális*) before the war, with the exception that concerts, beer and food stands, and entertainments reflected a well-thought-out effort on the part of city leaders to keep the people content with their lot; happy and entertained – a socialist bread and circuses. But unlike the pre-war May Day which appealed to the raising of working-class consciousness and, at the same time, demanded basic rights, if not the dismantling of the capitalist state, through the 'free May Days' of established socialism the HSWP achieved a single aim: the peaceful alliance of the masses with the state, and the redirection of popular energy and discontent (if only momentarily) into non-threatening public channels.

## SPORTING EVENTS

As both leaders and members agreed, sporting events were the paramount recreational activity in the life of KISZ organizations in maintaining the



7 Paramilitary sports event organized by the Communist Youth League, mid-1980s (author's photograph).

interest of the membership at large. The leadership prescribed athletic programmes to all organizations to maintain the 'health and fitness of youth'. Young people enjoyed taking part in sports whether within the political group or outside. However, as national surveys of the early 1980s indicate, the physical fitness of Hungarian youth was well below desired levels (Tahin 1986). For this reason, major changes were introduced in the mid-1980s. One of the most important was the abolition of the National Youth Council (AIB), an official organization that had failed to oversee 'all problems of youth' in Hungary, and its replacement by the National Youth and Sport Office (AISH). This reorganization survived only for three years, and proved unable to alter the situation substantially.

Organized sport has had a long tradition in Csepel; its Sports Club boasts many national and international champions, and several national and European records (Vedres and Zsolt 1962). Such competitive sports, however, had only occupied one aspect of sports life in Csepel. Under the new incentives of the AISH, the KISZ began to favour 'mass sports' in which all able-bodied members could participate. These included tennis, soccer, hand-ball, ping-pong, hiking and chess. In each KISZ group a 'sport counsellor' (*sportfelelős*) was responsible for organizing and arranging sporting events, working together with the 'tour organizer', 'sports series referee' and the 'Military Sport contact person' to plan the sports activities for the entire year. These positions and jobs were clearly defined in the company KISZ regulations:

The responsibility of the sport counsellor is to organize and direct activities that aim at physical fitness of youth. Most important is to utilize the potential of mass sports in

order to spend free time usefully. He/she should organize many vacations, combined with hiking, and urge young people to visit the swimming pools and boat basins. Furthermore, the sport counsellor should organize local champion-games, involve our youth with ongoing sports events in our district, and mobilize young people to participate in the 'Youth for Physical Fitness Movement'.

During the Revolutionary Youth Days of 1986, perhaps the last of such a string of events in the 30-year history of the KISZ, I observed many athletic events that were competitive, while others, involving almost everyone, were not. Sport demarcated youth along class and occupational lines. Some clearly favoured by white-collar members, such as tennis and computer games, were recent additions to the sporting events. Soccer was perhaps the only game that seemed to unite white- and blue-collar males but only for the duration of the game, after which friends and colleagues of the same occupations tended to go off with one another. Unlike soccer and tennis, target shooting was the only event having any overt military connotation. But according to one sport counsellor: 'We do it because it is easy to organize. We borrow small rifles from the local MHSZ [Hungarian Military-Defence Sports League], and the members really enjoy it.' Women's soccer was also popular but few men attended, a fact that reinforced gender bias and overt patriarchal attitudes of men. Such occasions gave men the opportunity to indulge themselves in lewd comments with highly charged sexual overtones in a public arena where the judges and organizers were almost without exception male. This might well have been one reason why so few women from the



8 Female football championship, organized by the Communist Youth League. mid-1980s (author's collection).

administration were willing to participate, for most female soccer players came from the vocational student body, the shops and, to a lesser degree, from the administrative staff. University-educated women were hesitant about engaging in women's soccer and felt that 'it was too masculine a sport for them'. It was clear, however, that they enjoyed playing soccer and felt that, aside from feeling foolish (*jó hülyéskedés az egész*) it gave them a sense of equality and empowerment.

## CONCLUSIONS: POLITICIZED YOUTH IN RETROSPECT

In this chapter I have described the interconnectedness of political life with social relations and the way in which they were imbued with meaning and actions. In fact, the driving force in creating political subjects out of working youth was the official youth movement – at once the power and organizational superstructure. I have discussed the real workings, activities and aims of the Communist Youth League in the Csepel factories, a political life that had determined socialization of Hungarian youth for more than 30 years. As I have emphasized, many problems plagued the organization from its inception but especially after the late 1970s when baby-boomers matured and acute socio-economic problems forced the youth organization to revise its policies and regulations. This sense of urgency and need to establish hegemony over a large and diverse age-group backfired as the KISZ's goal to reach *all* youth and foment a separate species of KISZ youth was rapidly disintegrating. For despite strong pressure for the creation of a socialist '*Homo politicus*' it is clear that the rank-and-file learned their political sensitivity and consciousness not from the KISZ organization, but at home, from friends, and in elementary schools, a topic to be discussed in the following chapters. However, the most serious wound to the youth organization was self-inflicted by its self-preoccupation and political pressure to maintain a hegemonic status quo over its youth through participation in its activities. Both the timing and the nature of these activities were among the major causes contributing to the alienation of youth from the KISZ. What is interesting in this regard is the notion of 'agency in life course', a phrase that has been utilized recently by sociologists studying mechanisms in the transition to adulthood. This approach describes 'how people formulate and pursue their life goals, but also how people are constrained and enabled by socially structured opportunities and limitations' (Shanahan 2000: 675). What scholars have offered to this proposition by looking at European youth are various ethnographies placing youth at the intersections of state policies, economic activities and youth cultures (Kühnel and Matuschek 1995, Markowitz 2000, Smith 1998). In this chapter I have shown how Csepel youth have been placed at such intersections. The next chapter will reveal how they responded to constraints and limitation by formulating their own ideas and actions.

## 7 YOUTH AGAINST THE STATE: FRIENDS, PARTNERS AND FAMILY

So learn from this, all you men who have made women suffer through your blindness,  
and know that if you break a woman's heart, you will kill her love!

(Alexandra Kollontai, *A Great Love*, 1932)

As I have noted in the previous chapters, the overarching presence of the state was felt throughout the whole of society, in both the politico-economic and cultural spheres. Under existing state socialism, the connection between state and citizen was monitored to include all areas of control, existence and dominance. As anthropologists have shown, for decades, Marxist-Leninist regimes – their different attitudes to youth notwithstanding – were fairly homogeneous as well as ambivalent in their attitudes to socialization patterns, identity politics, youth and cultural policies and the way in which they exhibited, symbolized or muted power relations (Hann 1993; Kligman 1988, 1998, Lampland 1995; Nagengast 1991; Ruf 1998; Verdery 1991). With the previous chapters in mind, the question naturally arises: did the official youth culture create a mindless generation of youth with no cultural means of their own for potential political opposition? Or can we follow Ben Agger who, in his reinterpretation of the Frankfurt School's debate concerning the power of youth culture, argues that even though manifestations of youth culture may be part of commodified and co-opted corporate culture industry, 'yet they may also represent a real attempt to create a new order of political togetherness, the beginning of a new class consciousness, however inchoate and ephemeral' (1992: 234).

In this chapter I investigate precisely this problem by looking at Hungarian youth outside the official events of organized youth culture and ascertain the informal aspects of their class-consciousness and, more specifically, their role in the reproduction of working-class attitudes and values, examining relationships between young people, their families and other informal networks in order to explore further their significance for the reproduction of working-class culture. In other words, I analyse the processes of reproduction (socialization of the formal and informal spheres) and politics (ideology) in the context of historically-specific state political economic practices. Central to our inquiry are the following questions: What roles did these informal networks play in young Csepel workers' lives? What was the relative importance of family and non-kin relations to young men and women at the



end of the 1980s? Finally, how did working-class youth fit into the family structures in the district of Csepel known for so long as a stronghold of working-class radicalism? In taking up these questions, we are provided with a unique anthropological opportunity to understand how existing socialist societies really worked, and what the everyday dimensions and concerns at the local level were (Hann 1993: 8–9) in working-class families.

#### FRIENDS AND FRIENDSHIP

As we have seen, in Hungary, the KISZ, the trade union, youth parliaments, the four corners of the firm and the HSWP were the formal agents in the workplace representing and maintaining the ideological basis of the socialist state. According to János Kádár, in a speech to the HSWP XI Congress: ‘The party, society, school, work place, and family must work with youth continuously and systematically’ (1976: 236). Though we might well agree that these agencies served as the tools of the state to influence – and thus dominate and control – young workers’ consciousness, much remains to be said concerning the nature of working-class consciousness and its reproduction beyond the sphere of the state. In this chapter I describe three areas of primary influence: friends and friendship ties; love, sexuality and dating; and contemporary family patterns. This enables us to discern a consensus among young workers, especially vocational students, in their tendency to prefer friends and sexual partners to members of their family. This may not be exclusive to Hungarian youth culture, for studies point to a variety of resources at the disposal of youth (Phillips 1999; Skelton and Valentine 1998). However, how Hungarian youth relied on friends and utilized them may provide the key to understanding the generational aspect of social relations under existing state socialism.

Friends played a major role in everyday matters as well as during important special events; decisions concerning what to wear and what to do at the weekend, simple enough for many, for Csepel youth fell within the domain of friendship and often determined the decisions reached. Friends’ opinions also exerted considerable influence on the choice of dating partners, educational and job choices, and even provided support in family conflicts. Although *barát* is the most common noun for ‘friend’, my blue-collar informants preferred the current slang *haver* (pal), and occasionally even used the kinship term *testvér* (sibling). *Testvér* was reserved for special occasions and exceptional circumstances such as unusually close neighbourhood ties or a serious financial commitment. One of the earliest conflicts between young people and their parents has always been friendships and the choice and personality of friends. A carpenter commented: ‘Who your friends are really counts in the eyes of my parents. If you have the right ones my parents approve of them, and then I can do anything I want. I only have to say that I’m going with my friends.’

Despite obvious similarities in outlook and life-style, friends were not merely reflections of the self in the cultural tapestry of Csepel, for an essential feature of friendship was the maintenance and functioning of an informal, non-threatening, peer-pressure institution. Differences of opinion were well tolerated, and arguments or even heated debates characterized their encounters, and were resolved almost as soon as they were voiced. Really 'good pals' (*jó haverok*) were not allowed to remain angry for long, or hold a grudge. 'We talk each other out of trouble', was a common expression. Peer pressure has always been effective, and when an argument became serious, friends turned to others to help sort it out.

As Csepel young people often asserted, when money was scarce, they needed close friends to exchange or lend goods that were beyond their means, including things like expensive blue jeans, shirts, trousers and jackets. Motorbikes, sporting equipment, tape recorders, records and, more recently, videos also circulated among friends on the understanding that everyone had something to offer (*kölcsönösség*). The most important commodity of all was money, cash in particular, and thus money lending and borrowing became a way of life, perhaps a consequence of its availability to those engaged in second-economy production.

Since virtually all respondents claimed to have at least a few *haver*, I set about discovering the origins of these important informal ties and the ways in which they were recruited from the neighbourhood, school and the workplace, the closest ties being those that bridged all three. Blue-collar workers especially enjoyed such friendships largely thanks to the fact that they had grown up in the same block or neighbourhood, attended the same elementary and vocational schools, and worked in the same shop at the Csepel Works. For white-collar youth, the pattern was complicated by the fact that engineering schools are distributed throughout the country, which accounted for the break in school-school continuity once they went off to attend higher educational institutions.

The following excerpts from interviews with two young machinists illustrate the scope and depth of friendship and mutual obligation at issue here:

My mate Laci and me are inseparable. I grew up with him, and we've known each other since we were kids. They also lived also in Királyerdő [a residential area in the south-east corner of Csepel] just a street away from us. His father and my dad worked the same jobs at the Csepel Works and they were good friends, too. We went to the same local elementary school and even sat beside each other. After school we both went to the Bajaki to learn the same trade. I told Laci that if he went away and became a car mechanic or anything like that I would never speak to him again. The only time we were separated was when we were drafted into the Army. But we tried to keep in touch. We wrote to each other and arranged our leave so we could be home together. So this year Laci is getting married and his wife is a girl who is our next-door neighbour. Of course, I'm going to be his best man at his wedding. When I marry he'll

do the same for me. Now he is kind of tied down because of building his house, so we can't do all those things we used to do. On weekends I go and help out. This way we are still together and having fun too.

While this friendship is undergoing a transformation from bachelor friendship to married couple friendship, the next story illustrates the necessity of friendship:

Friendship to us means being together in good and in bad times. When I bought my motorbike, my friend Zozo also bought his. Now we can go on trips together. We go on fishing trips to the north and camping trips. Sometimes we take the 'girls' [*csajok*] too but not always. Men have to have fun by themselves. So we go out a lot to the 'Csili' [culture centre in the neighbouring district] to dance and meet people. When there is trouble [*gubanc*] or things are going pretty bad [*tré*], then we make plans together to solve them and help each other. By the middle of the month we are short of money [*lé*] so we try to help each other if possible. Then the other person has to settle up as soon as he gets paid. You don't have to ask for it. You know that you owe it and you have to pay it back. That's real friendship. You can't be selfish, unwilling and self-centred in a friendship.

As these narratives suggest, friendships between young people are indispensable and continue despite changes in personal circumstances. As indicated by the first interview, such shifts include the transition from bachelorhood to marriage, with the friendship largely unaffected, despite the limitations imposed by marriage. Such friendships are based on long-lasting commitments, at times inherited from their parents. Children of parents who had formed a friendship circle may themselves remain in close friendly contact. The second informant referred to 'family friendship' (*családi barátság*), an important class-based network system. He illustrated this further:

We named my friend Zozo because his father's nickname was Zozo too. Naturally, he became 'Little Zozo'. When his father died, we just called him Zozo. And, I am sure of this, when has a son he, too, will be called Zozo. whatever his real name might be.<sup>1</sup>

Such long-lasting friendship, however, did not, appearances to the contrary, necessarily take place within a fixed framework. Young people could move in and out of social circles referred to as 'ordinary friendship', while nicknames were renegotiated within such groups. An 18-year-old crane-operator, Ica (shortened from Ilona, Helen), told her story:

When we moved to Csepel and I started in the Bajaki Vocational School, the others called me Puffy (Pufi) because I was a bit chubby. I didn't like it and told them so, but they just wouldn't listen. As a result I couldn't get close to anyone at school. So I made friends with girls in our block. When I finished school and came to the Csepel Works, the older people asked me what they should call me and what my nickname was. I said that my real name is Ica. From then on, everyone called me by that name and sometimes jokingly referred to me as 'Crane Ica' because I operate the overhead crane. I don't mind that. So I do now have a few friends at the shop as well as at home.

## DATING, LOVE AND SEXUALITY

As these texts reveal, friendship is extremely important to young workers, and the use of a special nickname reflects the intimacy of individuals within a friendship circle. The distance imposed by national service jeopardized young men's friendships and many tried in vain to avoid the draft. Despite the two years in the army, however, strong relationships do survive, an aspect that speaks of the value young men place on close friendship. Gender relations are not well balanced. Male bonding between vocational students tends to be longer lasting than heterosexual friendship. For both sexes serious dating emerged as the most pervasive threat to friendship. Dating remained a substantially private affair; hence the factory did not, as a rule, concern itself with such matters. Rather, it assumed a neutral position on the issue, romance and marriage; only when problems arose, such as alcoholism, wife beating or absenteeism related to drunkenness and parties, or when these became public knowledge, did party officials, the KISZ and the union become involved.

Choosing a suitable boy- or girlfriend was similar but not identical to choosing a friend. While dates might live in the same three areas as friends (neighbourhood, school and workplace), young people were not limited to these areas alone. Travel and commuting to the capital were the most common sources of potential dates. For young men, army service was a determining factor (if not a source of bitterness), for being away from home, most likely in another part of the country, frequently offered the possibility for dates with women of their choice. What was important to youth, however, was the fine line separating friendship from dating. While dates might be referred to by the same words and concepts (*csaj*, *pasi* and *hapsi*), these terms were used in the possessive case, as in *csajom*, *pasim* and *hapsim* (my girl, my boy). Only when the decision had been made to marry, or a relationship had passed beyond the engagement phase, did they refer to each other as 'my man' (*emberem*) and 'the woman' (*az asszony*). Until then, a dozen slang terms were used to refer to dating partners. Friends distinguished each other from dates by introducing and talking about 'my girlfriend' (*barátnőm*), while young women said: 'This is the boy I'm dating right now' (*a fiú akivel most járok*).

Interestingly, both sexes avoided the use of the more traditional term 'suitor' (*udvarló*), on the grounds that that was 'mainly because of its old-fashioned connotations to formalized dating'. But parents and older neighbours often described their children's dates in that way. Generally, 'going out together' held youth responsible for a host of behavioural norms ranging from intimacy, expressions of affection and certain sexual behaviours. Most respondents agreed that dates were different from friends, based on such considerations as ethical and moral values:

Dates are also friends, good friends. But more than that, with dates you can do everything. Dates should be an open book to each other. They should know everything that the other person does. Dates you love both emotionally as well as physically.

In this way it became evident that – aside from physical sex – trust, faith and reliance on one another, in addition to emotional support, are the principal characteristics of a dating relationship. However, the most complex issues in a dating relationship were clearly those of love and sexuality – their meaning and dynamics. In an earlier paper, I analysed the nature of gender relations under Stalinism and state socialism by contending that, while under Stalinism the state encouraged the notion of ‘collective love’ for the community and the abandonment of ‘bourgeois’ family and individual love relations, by the 1980s, Hungarians had become ambivalent about state involvement in their private affairs (Kürti 1991a).<sup>2</sup> However, it was exceptionally difficult to elicit information from the youngest generation on these matters, for the young women were shy and embarrassed, believing it improper to discuss them openly. Young men, too, were reluctant to talk about what they did not fully understand and, hence, could not put into words.<sup>3</sup> State socialist education did not provide sufficient knowledge to acquire the verbal skills to discuss topics ranging from abortion, birth control, erotic behaviour and menstruation, subjects largely relegated to biology classes. As a consequence, both men and women had great difficulty expressing their feelings about these matters.<sup>4</sup> One of the main reasons for their reluctance, I believe, was the lack of more general contexts for talking about these topics, at school and at home. The answers to my queries were always the same: ‘No, we don’t talk about things like that in school, only in biology class as it relates to the animal kingdom. At home, the topic is not encouraged either.’ A young worker who had been seeing the same woman for almost two years responded in similar fashion:

I never ask my mother or my father about things that I do with my girlfriend. Mainly because such talk is not openly encouraged. I believe that you cannot really talk about birth control or even where to do *it* and how to do *it* over the dinner table. Once I tried to tell my mother about some of my feelings, but she didn’t really understand what I was talking about. What I know about these things I learned from the other guys, watching other people and seeing it in the movies.

Male vocational students used a standardized frame of reference when discussing love, trust, mutuality, emotional attachment, physical attraction and ‘being right for each other’. Only women and those with higher education were able to provide lengthy explanations for their concepts of love. They more fully expressed their innermost desires and their dissatisfaction with the lack of emotionality on the part of men. One young woman defined love as ‘a process of understanding each other’s responsibilities to each other’, a definition closely approximating that of a construction engineer in her mid-twenties: ‘love is a life-long emotional commitment to someone’. Another administrator phrased love as ‘an emotional attachment based on desires, feelings, and concern for the well-being of the family’, whereas an 18-year-old clerical worker, finishing vocational school and moving away from the state orphanage where she had grown up, expressed

a somewhat different view on love: 'love is a bunch of flowers'. This also meant, of course, that while women did receive flowers from colleagues and organizations, a bouquet of flowers had the symbolic connotation of closeness and partnership not associated with the collegial single carnation or rose. After work, and especially on Fridays and Saturdays, one could see young people shopping for bouquets all over the city, for by then flower stalls had become quite numerous.

Clearly, such diverse views on love are founded on social, psychological and philosophical concepts among which two were frequently mentioned, although at times latently. On the one hand was the ideal, socially accepted view of romantic love common to almost every young person when talking about love. Meeting the right person, infatuation with the opposite sex and the closeness of two hearts were repeated metaphors in these definitions. But these images were drawn from consumerist and popular culture mentalities, more specifically rock music, popular literature and everyday conversation. While white-collar men and women expressed disdain for such 'corny and syrupy' stereotypes, blue-collar men and women spent a considerable amount of time copying and learning the words of pop songs, which they felt 'to be close to their heart's rhythm'. In another context, I explore the nature of Hungarian rock culture where I suggest that: 'Although this overt romanticism is a recurring formula, even in the more rebellious and often scandalous heavy metal and folk genres, its resemblance to everyday life in Hungary is negligible' (1991b: 487). In any case, it is apparent that the romantic mood created by and in pop music furnishes these young people with a dominant image-complex with which they can verbalize their emotions, however brief and stereotypical they may be.<sup>5</sup>

On the other hand, derogatory characterizations of love relationships pervaded their slang; expressions such as 'I fell for this chick' (*beleestem a csajba*), 'I'm poking his/her head' (*szúrom a fejét*) or 'I'm pinching the guy' (*csípem a srácot*) – unromantic terms to describe relationships that were neither romantic nor affectionate. For male bias and patriarchal values have long obtained in Hungarian culture without regard to occupation and age, portraying men to be more rational, calm and objective. Women, on the contrary, are presented as irrational, 'hot-headed and subjective creatures'. These attitudes are undeniably rooted in the Hungarian male world-view (and no doubt will continue to be), as are the convictions that women ought to be skilled bread-winners, intelligent, sexually attractive and accomplished lovers – patriarchal notions that persist elsewhere in Europe (Cole 1991; Loizos and Papataxiarchis 1991; White 1994). After marriage, these stereotypes transfigure into an expectation that women should be maternal, home-loving, nurturing of children, and care for the house and kitchen. Young men often defined love relations in precisely these terms and, perhaps not surprisingly, young women, too, considered it their responsibility to look sexually attractive, be subservient to men and please their boyfriends. Only among university-educated women was I able to find expressed the desire

for equality, shared responsibilities and respect. These are but faint signs of feminist thinking which are encouraged neither by the state nor by men in general (Kürti 1989, 1991a, b).

The boundaries between friendship and dating are often flexible and easily transgressed, mainly through sexual encounters. Young people in Csepel, like their counterparts elsewhere in Eastern Europe, generally experience their first sexual encounter between the ages of 14 and 18. Opportunities for young Hungarians to acquaint themselves with sex and sexual practices have, however, expanded greatly since the mid-1980s following the more relaxed attitude on the part of the Kádár regime. Through films, television, newspapers, videos and even hard-core pornographic materials they could observe sexual acts – both simulated and real. Hungarian television permits full female (but not male) nudity, and magazines and literature also feature sexually explicit material, and since the post-1989 liberalization of the media, X-rated videos are in circulation, mostly from West Germany, and are in great demand. Sexually explicit shows, musicals and cabarets are also available especially in the larger cities. Limited finances, however, do prevent younger workers from attending regularly. Although strictly American-style stag parties did not exist, at parties (*hábé* or *buli*) such videos were often viewed and discussed by young bachelors. However, with the arrival of the new 'post-communist era' – initiated by the introduction of a free press law and the legitimization of private enterprises – Hungary opened its first legal brothels and sex shops. The result perhaps will be the further solidification of an even more male-biased world-view – the 'springtime of men' as a university-educated woman re-named the euphoric 'springtime of the people'.

Despite the availability of such material and the overt consumption of videos, nude posters and go-go girl-shows, an understanding of human sexuality and sexual behaviour on the part of young males leaves much to be desired. While young lovers stroll through the streets arm in arm, hugging and kissing openly, sexuality and issues of sexual conduct were and continue to be shunned and hidden from public view. Magazines such as *Hungarian Youth (Magyar Ifjúság)* and *Youth Magazine (Ifjúsági Magazin)* – for two decades the only two youth-oriented magazines with political, sexual and popular culture contents – carry advice pages (one called 'The Doctor Answers') dealing with mainstream family, love and sexual problems. Since most of the letters are written anonymously, it is uncertain how regularly these columns were read and how deeply were understood by young people. From my observations, while a fairly large percentage of women were regular readers, young men were rarely so and then only to ridicule the 'poor bastards who can't get it up'.<sup>6</sup>

Bachelors in Csepel have long been under the spell of such macho ideology and are adventurous, even aggressive, at parties, dances and on the streets. Many admitted to attempts, without warning or invitation, to take physical advantage of their dates at the first possible moment. Having sexual

intercourse with a girl on the first date was considered a victory to be bragged about for weeks. Since inviting girlfriends home was not usual (at least pending formal acceptance by the family), sexual intercourse was almost always attempted in the parks, dark alleys or secluded wooded areas along the river. Necking and petting were also common in cinemas. Men are considered by both sexes to be the active instigators of sex, while women are to be self-controlled and passive, despite the fact that men often complained about women 'who are stone-cold, acting like a dummy'. Without exception, males used a tactic which they called the 'touch-and-go' system, meaning they started by 'touching' or 'fondling' (*tapizni* or *lekezelni*) the breasts and genitals, and then, if their partners offered no objection or resistance, went further.

As young women complained, men did not usually ask their partners whether they wanted to engage in sex. A man articulated this common heterosexual philosophy: 'If she allows you to touch her under the skirt, then why bother asking her.' Furthermore, men never asked if the woman was using birth control. As far as they were concerned, condoms were 'troublesome' and 'took away the pleasure'; they expected women 'to take care of these things'. Only in longer and more serious relationships did men think about birth control methods and, even then, it was still primarily considered to be the woman's responsibility to obtain birth control pills.<sup>7</sup>

In heterosexual, everyday discourse men used the colloquial expression *dugni* (to fill) and *baszni* (to fuck), but never, in my interviews, did they use these terms to refer to sexual intercourse with their steady partners. Since they began using the words as soon as they left school, mainly under the influence of older men, they seemed to be commonplace to express the sexual act with someone they cared for. While a host of words with symbolic meanings were used by young men to express sexual acts, women used 'to make love' (*szeretkezni*) or more subtle terms roughly equivalent in English to 'doing it', 'wanting it' and 'finishing it'.<sup>8</sup> To describe orgasm in lovemaking, the concept *elmenni* (literally to 'go away') is common but the term *elélvez* (literally, 'to wither away' or even 'to pass away') is hardly if ever used. Sexual positions other than the missionary and oral sex were, admittedly, not commonly practised although they were known about and recalled generally in playful contexts. In lovemaking, men always expected to be satisfied, caring very little about the discomfort, pain or menstruation of their partners. A menstruating woman was frowned upon as an 'inconvenience', yet men continued to demand attention and satisfaction. This Hungarian version of machismo also involved stamina and staying power – central topics of male conversation. At the workplace, older workers teased bachelors for 'showing signs of sleepiness and [being] drained of energy'. A brigade leader in his late forties took a hard line on this matter when he recounted: 'My feeling is that youth have to come to work full of desire for work and energy. I keep telling them: if you were a *real* man last night in bed, you should be a real man at the machine.' While this more mature voice



reflected the beliefs of a few older men, there was nevertheless a marked generational gap based on sexual prowess, although young males interpreted this as a form of control by management over their bodies and their ability to work. Yet, it became clear that neither older nor younger workers were able to confront these issues with civility or objectivity. In Csepel, as elsewhere in Hungary, such overt sexist and anti-feminist behaviour was rarely discussed in public even when the subject was introduced at social gatherings, a problem acknowledged by educated white-collar workers.<sup>9</sup> Yet we cannot, I suspect, conclude that class necessarily lies at the root of the problem, for I heard plenty of complaints among white-collar workers as well; rather, a deeply embedded patriarchal mentality should be held to account for this value system, from which there appears to be no escape at present.

On a more positive note, many young people stated that serious dating and sexuality were learning opportunities and occasions for meeting potential future spouses. Parents rarely insisted on single dating or long commitments in 'going-out' relationships; yet as many admitted, parents frowned upon multiple dates. While young women were frequently criticized for being too choosy and 'whoring', men, on the contrary, were encouraged to play the field so 'they won't end up tied down to the wrong person for the rest of their life'. Obviously, sexual inequality and differences between young men and women were deeply embedded in the ways in which they viewed and expressed gender roles and sexual stratification in their society. Like Hungarian workers in general, Csepel workers have maintained a rigid and traditional sexual and social status for women. The culture of workers dictates that men must direct all activities, make all decisions, be powerful and mobile (not unlike their machines) and represent the interests of the family both at home and in public. Such values have not changed much since the 1970s and early 1980s (Kemény and Kozák 1971, Török 1986). There is little opposition to these asymmetrical roles even in marriage, an institution that heightened and reproduced these imbalances.

## MARRIAGE

Young men and women are equally keen to find a spouse, settle down and own a home. Today, arranged marriages are extremely rare, and young people continue to express their disapproval of that tradition as being 'peasant-like' and 'medieval'. Early marriage and unsuitable marriage partners are, however, discouraged by parents, kin and friends, who argue that: 'For men, the ideal age for marriage is after military service, once they feel able to offer a potential mate a steady job, bank savings or special education.' As a result, most blue-collar workers continue to marry in their early twenties, or during their military service. The majority of female blue-collar workers marry younger: 'women should marry before their early twenties, assuming that afterwards, nobody will want them', an

administrator urged. Within the sphere of university-educated technical intelligentsia, marriage was a different matter, although there, too, young men were encouraged to have a secure job before marriage, prompting many to marry in their late twenties. The dominant pattern, however, has been to marry while still at university or shortly thereafter.

Although most young people made their own choice of mate, friends and family members wield an informal influence on selection. A young tool- and die-maker recapitulated a story in which one of his friends decided to marry a girl whose mother was a Gypsy. After considerable debate, the idea of marriage was dropped on the grounds that the woman was not from Csepel, and more importantly, that she didn't have the right family background – *nem volt jó munkáscsaládból való* (she wasn't from a good working-class family).<sup>10</sup> It is important nevertheless to note that there have been rare cases of arranged marriages due primarily to unwanted pregnancies when two families attempt to settle the issue quickly by marrying off their 'irresponsible children'. Abortions may also be considered if early enough in the pregnancy for *kaparás* ('dilation and curettage'), a freely provided form of birth control under the state socialist system. Working-class families frowned on abortion but prefer it to shot-gun marriages. Interestingly, both the local political elites and the clergy helped young couples in deciding to start a family and have children. The birth of the first child often meant a complete change of gender identities for both young men and women. Most working-class women accepted the socialist state's maternal policies, relying on the three years of child support and various social and medical assistance (Haney 1999: 152). Young men boisterously celebrated fatherhood with a drinking spree at a local pub.

Despite all the socialist rhetoric to the contrary, marriage was, and still is, considered a 'traditional' event that must be preceded by an engagement party. The latter is a simple family affair which may also include close friends. It has been fashionable in Csepel to rent a section or room in a local restaurant for the occasion, an event that parallels the wedding in a less ostentatious manner. After the engagement, the young couple are treated almost like a married couple. It is noteworthy that the wedding day may be delayed until certain key elements are provided, such as a promotion, graduation, a housing assignment (including completion of the house and moving or relocation) or a vacation abroad. Young workers took marriage very seriously, making plans well in advance concerning decorations, number of guests, location and other special arrangements.

In the working-class district of Csepel, marriage ceremonies have long been either a simple family or a larger company affair. In the former case, the family decides on a church wedding as opposed to a civil ceremony. In Csepel, a total of 578 marriages took place in 1985 as opposed to 549 in 1988 (KSH 1987: 24; KSH 1989: 26). From the data I obtained from the four churches, it is evident that only 82 church weddings were conducted in 1988, or 14 per cent of the total, the remainder being civil (non-church)

weddings. Some religious leaders expressed dismay at such low figures, and argued that the number of church weddings was actually considerably higher because many young couples decided to marry outside the district. Further, church leaders claimed that abuse of the churches and ministers after the Stalinist era made young people 'afraid of being discovered by bosses and party people'. In discussions with the unmarried, I found them relatively indifferent, some even venturing the opinion 'that church weddings are too old-fashioned and all that hocus-pocus is just nonsense'. It was clear that socialist state education had had a more than superficial effect on the way in which young workers related to the Church. The ratio between church and civil ceremonies (required in Hungary since the end of the nineteenth century) has been undergoing fundamental changes since 1990 when the government began to promote religious education and church rituals, a marked change for Csepelers who had been subjected to official atheist programmes since the end of the Second World War.

Although extremely important in cementing kinship solidarity, family weddings are simple affairs compared to ostentatious village weddings with their colourful street processions, electrified gypsy bands and festivities lasting two or three days and involving more than 100 guests. As Csepelers like to think: 'Weddings are modern and not of the peasant type.' In their minds, two or, at most, three major steps are required for such 'modernity': a civil ceremony at the city hall; a formal portrait taken at the photographer's; and a dinner at a restaurant or cultural centre. Processions involve decorated cars, food and drink, dancing and carnivalesque revelry lasting well into the early hours.

#### THE KISZ OR COMPANY WEDDING

Marriages arranged by the company or the appropriate KISZ organization warrant attention because they illustrate a unique and fashionable socialist ritual that united hundreds of thousands of Hungarians for decades. Such weddings were preferred by both blue- and white-collar youth for the values mentioned above and for financial reasons since the KISZ contributed a considerable portion of the expenses, a sum administered at the KISZ's discretion from its socio-cultural fund. Unlike in agricultural communities, such rituals were organized according to the wishes of the young couple, with KISZ and trade union specialists consulting guidelines concerning the choreography of the events. The political undercurrents were obvious, for the nuptial arrangement at the city hall included special features such as a children's choir, songs by young Pioneers, poetry readings, speeches by KISZ, trade union and company officials, and appropriate music. Flowers and red drapery were abundant, and small gifts were presented to the young couple by the organizers. Invitations to friends, neighbours, colleagues and management and union officials were common at KISZ weddings. While the

evening dinner was not lavish, young people were careful to select the best available restaurant and took great pains to hire a popular local rock band, an addendum indispensable for such occasions.

The 1980s witnessed efforts on the part of parents and kin to ensure a good start in life for their children, as symbolized by gifts, money and durable goods as presents. Despite the claim for 'modernity' and 'anti-peasant-ness', one aspect of the conjugal rite, the 'bride-dance' (*menyasszonytánc*) still serves an archaic function: guests are encouraged to perform a few steps of a couples' dance (*csárdás*) with the bride, for which they offer money and gifts. The closer the relations to the young couple, the higher the price to be paid. Close relatives are expected to give expensive gifts such as a suite of furniture (*garnitúra*), washing machine or colour television. A savings book containing the equivalent of a year's salary, although uncommon, was not unknown, and blue-collar parents more often gave 40,000 or 50,000 *forints* to their children as a wedding gift. At white-collar weddings presents were more extravagant: quantities of gifts and goods of finer quality. By the mid-1990s, monetary gifts for the newlyweds ran into the millions: 4–5 million *forints* (about £10,000) were not unheard of in 1998–99.

Another fashionable gift consisted of tickets for the honeymoon (*nászút*), an important institution considered far from outmoded, and usually lasting ten days, to afford the young couple time to 'be alone to enjoy their youth'. Most honeymooners go to Lake Balaton, but going to the West is becoming the rule rather than the exception. An engineering couple, for example, selected a trip to Austria. 'After the children come, we will probably never have another chance to go anywhere. So we decided that this is the best gift we can receive.' Travel to a western country is almost unheard of for blue-collar youth, not because they, too, believe that children will limit their mobility but because, as one cultural worker assured me, 'they have a mental distance from such things, inhibiting them from appreciating the bourgeois ambience of Paris or Basle'. Whether from a special mentality, or simply lack of initial interest, blue-collar youth travelled abroad much less often.

## YOUTH AND THEIR FAMILIES

While in classic urban anthropology of the 1960s–1970s, studies of urban family maintenance and networks were essential, sociological studies on Hungarian urban families, focusing on difficulties such as lack of parental authority, broken or dysfunctional families, the generation gap and weakening family ties were few and far between (Gazsó 1987; Török 1986). In Hungarian ethnography, moreover, the 'family' – whether extended or nuclear – encompassed the rural, 'peasant' type (Fél and Hofer 1969; Hann 1980; Bell 1984), and focused on the reproduction of values, gender relations and patterns of familial connections. In contrast, in these pages I point to the importance of the diversity of working-class family patterns and

the ways in which young people voiced their feelings and values concerning the family.

Even before the wedding, the young couple's major concern is usually housing. Their own home in the vicinity is preferred. In Csepel the familiar saying one hears is 'don't live round your parents' neck'. While this was a desired – and, for that matter, ideal – solution, over the past few decades, few couples have been able to start married life away from their parents.

Despite the varied life-styles of workers in the Csepel Works, certain elements are common to most blue-collar families, which tend to be nuclear and rarely include grandparents. With few exceptions, the family is patriarchal: the father, a skilled worker, at the head of the household; the mother, also a breadwinner, taking care of the finances. For women controlling the domestic economy has been the single most important function that contributes to their sense of entitlement to resources and power in the domestic domain, undoubtedly a result of the restructuring of labour after the late 1960s.<sup>11</sup> Most families I visited lived in apartment complexes and, depending on the family's situation, owned a small weekend cottage outside the district or a 'garden allotment'.

The *család* (family) is the most important thing parents live and work for. It is, however, considered to be complete only when there are one or two children, hence the term denotes 'children' as well as 'family'. Kin are not considered part of the family proper but belong to the category of 'relatives' (*rokonok*) who visit each other on major occasions such as holidays, name days, birthdays, weddings, funerals and other family rituals. Relatives living in the countryside are referred to as 'country-folk' (*vidékiek*), a term with subtle derogatory connotations to Csepelers who consider themselves to be part of the capital. They also meet fairly often, since public transportation is adequate and more families now possess their own car.

Whether the family is well off, lives in an apartment complex or possesses a house in the outlying areas of the district has a bearing on family life-style, for a separate private house with an adjacent plot of land, a small vegetable garden and a few animals are decisive in determining the allocation of time and tasks to youth in the family. More money is required for household items, tools, building materials and feed to maintain such 'extras'. By contrast, a broken home is thought to have a devastating impact on the lives of youth. The following narrative illustrates the severe consequences of such family patterns and points to the fact that social reproduction within family and informal networks was also decisive in perpetuating diversity among Csepel's working youth.

Zozo (diminutive of Zoltán, an old Hungarian name), who comes from a blue-collar, fatherless family (his father died last year) and now lives with his mother and his younger brother, had just celebrated his twentieth birthday: for the occasion, he organized a party to which he invited his best friends. He is, in his own words, a 'bike freak', having purchased a motorbike two years before. He spends most of his salary maintaining it on the road,

and claims that the money he and his mother earned is sufficient for the family, for his grandmother is an administrator and a counsellor for a VGMK group and earns about 8,000–10,000 *forints* a month. As a service mechanic, Zozo made about 5,000 *forints* a month, but with overtime he could make almost twice that. Zozo kept nearly a third of his salary for himself, spending most of it on records, tapes and, most importantly, maintaining his bike. 'My little brother is almost as tall as I am, so he can wear my clothes', he said when asked about spending money. Then he added: 'My mother is also an excellent seamstress and she makes basic clothes (*gönc*) for us.' This meant that a heavy financial burden was placed on his mother to clothe her sons. Since Zozo did not have a father he was considered the 'man' of the house, having a say in matters concerning the welfare of the whole family. He stressed, 'Being the oldest son, I was able to shorten my military service to just a few months because my earnings were crucial to the maintenance of the family.' He admitted that he helped with the housework regularly, shopped and even cooked occasionally. He also confessed, however, that he often bribed his brother by giving him pocket money to do these chores. He argued that cooking, in general, was a task best suited to his mother:

When my mum had her name day, I bought her a nice bread-slicer and a seltzer maker. She really appreciated these household items because they make her work in the kitchen easier. She knows I don't like being in the kitchen. The only time I cook is when we are on a trip with my buddies. Even then all I do is make fish soup or stew. But since we cannot live on these two dishes every day, it would be silly for me to be in the kitchen. Anyway, my mum is an excellent cook, and I couldn't match her skills.

The conflict, however, was not about the availability of cash or the allocation of domestic resources or tasks, but the instability of Zozo's relationship with his mother. She was in her early forties and an attractive woman, dating several men from the factory, which resulted in mother/son disputes. Zozo explained:

The last guy my mum dated looked OK to me at first. Then he started to drink too much. Then we also found out that he was under police surveillance (*refjes*) because he was skipping from job to job. He also had some embezzlement case round his neck. Finally, I said so long to him. My mum didn't like that, but one night he came home totally 'soaked' (*elázva*, drunk). So she asked him to leave and he never came back. Since then, she dates more normal guys, and has become very critical of my dates as well.

Note how the mother's decision not only solved the conflict but also self-consciously reflected on her behaviour, which, she finally realized, had to change in order to keep the family peace. At the same time, however, Zozo, and many of his counterparts in similar family settings, became aware of their power to control the whole family, including the mother. This form of imprinting was reproduced when new families were formed and fathers continued to rule over the household.

As we have seen from these excerpts, unlike Hungarian youth in general, young workers in Csepel turned against the family only when there was friction. Obvious differences pertained in the ways in which males and females viewed the family, and roles were thus reproduced along gender and age lines. Broadly speaking, girls did most of the housework and looked after the younger children. Cooking and cleaning are also considered part of their upbringing while men continue to expect women to know such skills by the time they marry, so that they can be properly socialized as 'domestic' (*házas*).

As boys perform most of the heavier work in and around the house, these tasks have been defined as 'masculine' (*férfias*). The father's profession and skills are essential in determining what boys learn from them. Gardening, building, maintenance of machinery and moving heavy objects were not divided evenly between the sexes, but were assigned to men. It was also common to find parents who worked a second shift to leave notes for the children assigning them daily chores. Vocational school students, when asked about their free time activities, frequently mentioned cleaning, shopping and cooking as activities 'forced on them'. A young machinist listed the following:

When I finish school, my first responsibility is to do the shopping. I go the ABC supermarket and buy everything that's on the list: beer, meat, bread and vegetables. Then I go home and clean up the messy house. Then I see if there are any other messages for me. Then I do some of my home assignments for school. Only then can I think about going out and seeing my friends.

It is easy to ascertain from these narratives that young people find household chores burdensome and time-consuming. Complaints notwithstanding, children of working parents must learn everyday responsibilities very early. A toolmaker remembered his father's word:

I wasn't even twelve when I already knew how to use tools, file and use a drill. My dad had a little workshop where we used to make things we needed around the house. Just by watching him, I was able to pick up almost everything he knew. When he had overtime, sometimes I did these things by myself.

Young people viewed parental authority with disdain because of what they call 'strict parental rule', claiming that well into their late teens they were 'kept on a short leash' (*rövid pórázon*). This concept entailed not being able to play with friends, date certain kinds of people, not enough spending money and corporal punishment by either parent. To evoke only the more common sources of conflict, a third-year vocational student told this story:

My mum never hit me. My dad would first warn me and then slap me. He was really strict. For example, he would ask me if I had finished my schoolwork and, if I lied, he would slap me. Not really hard, but about once a week we got our respective *nyakleves* [literally 'neck-soup', meaning beating].

A clerk in her mid-twenties recalled her strict father:

He didn't like it if we hung out on the streets after dark. He hated my first dates too. He'd never hit me or anything like that, he just stared at me. His looks could kill. My mum, on the contrary, would always slap us left and right. Once I lost the shopping money. When I told her, she just started to slap me. Somehow we never took her seriously. But we knew that if my father slapped us, it would be the end. He was very strong; he worked at the steel-mill. That's why we were afraid of him more than of Mum.

We learn here of the connection between harsh parenting, physical punishment or abuse, and the parents' own fatigue and overwork. Young people conceded this relationship and understood their parents' behaviour in those terms, realizing that being over-tired and/or having a few shots of brandy after work added to the problem. A semi-skilled crane operator recalled her childhood with bitterness:

My father was a drunkard (*részezes*), addicted to tobacco and soccer. He didn't care much about us. My mother was weak and had all the family responsibilities. She started to drink too, I suppose to forget about my father. When drunk, she would scream at us like a real 'monster' (*házisárkány*, literally house-dragon). She died at 45. My father is still alive but he is a 'dishrag' (*mosogatórongy*). So I couldn't wait to get out of the house and start living on my own.

Overwork, fatigue and alcohol are common sources of conflict in working-class households and often produce alienated children and adults. Not all the informants' life-stories were so unremittingly bleak, however. There has always been a special group of Csepel youth and, one suspects, Hungarian youth in general, who have been mistreated because of their parents' values and marginal existence. A large percentage of unskilled and semi-skilled households have been severely harmed in this way. And there have always been parents who would do anything for their children and spoil them, arguing that, since their own lives were so difficult, they wanted their children to have a better start in life. Such children got used to such privileges as private tuition, paid vacations and hard-to-get consumer items, and, as some of these excerpts indicate, conflict in these families was less severe, or mentioned less often by the young people themselves.

They were called 'spoiled brats' (*elkényeztetettek*) by blue-collar youth, for they had material goods others could only dream about. An engineer in his late twenties boasted about the following items his parents and relatives had given him: an electric guitar, motorcycle, colour television and a car in the offing as a wedding gift. A young clerk admitted that she smoked western brand cigarettes because she still lived at home and therefore paid no rent or for food, which allowed her to spend all her earnings on herself, a luxury enjoyed by very few blue-collar Hungarian youth. Her father reassured her that after marriage housing would pose no problem, for her parents had already begun building a house for her in a prestigious quarter of the district. In this special privileged case, even inheritance (*öröklés*) – in a pattern not common in blue-collar families except following a death – played an



important role, for parents provided an apartment and a 'vegetable garden' for their children, as was the case of the well-off accountant in Chapter 5.

It is important to realize that class continues to play a determining role in the way in which young people view their families, friends and peer group. The upwardly mobile group, not an insignificant percentage of my informants, had a more optimistic outlook on themselves and on the future, embodying values much closer to those of western middle-class families than to working-class families in general. Unlike white-collar Hungarian youth, blue-collar youth rely on friends and friendship ties in important matters. Their attitudes are epitomized in the saying: 'you can recognize a bird by its feathers, and a man by his friends'. Friends are turned to in times of trouble, for daily material and emotional support, and for companionship; they represent security to some, and, to others, a necessity for personal as well as professional progress. But these are but a few examples differentiating the formal, state and informal institutions in the minds of youthful citizens, for their actual participation in leisure activities outside the kinship and family structures, as described below, is of great importance.



9 'Greetings from Csepel'. Early 1980s postcard showing the connectedness of work and leisure: the entrances to the Communist Party headquarters and the Csepel Works, a heroes statue, a newly opened coffee shop and a cultural centre (author's collection).

## LEISURE TIME

Having examined the activities of youth within the family, I turn now to an investigation of their life-styles beyond its confines through an analysis of cultural constructs affecting the lives of these workers that are also mediated

by class and age. In this section, my purpose is to examine informal institutions with regard to their relations to and beyond the state. In this chapter, I have shown that through the parents' world, youth are connected to the past and are thus able to weave networks and alliances important to them. In so doing they reproduce values and ideas essential to their consciousness as workers and as Csepelers, and as an age-specific group. I have thereby attempted to construct a composite picture to illuminate the issue of working-class consciousness as it is influenced by peer groups, within structured and informal contexts, networks that reveal a high degree of fluidity and mobility.

As noted earlier, young people complained about not having enough time to spend with their friends, indicating that leisure activities far outweighed the importance of family, kinship relations and participation in informal sectors of the economy. Urban youth regarded these matters somewhat differently from rural youth, among whom family and kinship played a more serious (if not intimate) role. Workers in their mid-twenties had a 'much more serious outlook on life' and their immediate concerns centred on building a house and starting a family, interests that intensified their eagerness to participate in activities that increased their earning power. 'Got to earn more juice', was the common rationale. Single young men and girls generally agreed that 'you should have the time of your life while you are unmarried and young'.<sup>12</sup> For young blue-collar males the years after army service were crucial, for it was then that they were expected 'to settle down and get serious'. For white-collar males – who benefited from the relaxed policies of the Ministry of Defence concerning university students – higher educational institutions extended this period into their mid- to late twenties, when they graduated and started work. Until then, however, the extraordinary importance of leisure activities separated young and old, unmarried and married youth. Below I will describe the activities most important to blue-collar youth.

### THE MUNKÁSOTTHON

When asked, most Csepelers in their thirties and older answered yes to the question: do you know where the Workers' Home is? The name of this place has a special significance to most Csepelers. A large portion of the recreational life of youth during state socialism was connected to cultural establishments known as 'Culture Centres', institutions created and administered by the district for cultural and recreational programmes, as described in Chapter 5. In the district, there are four such establishments, exclusive of clubs and buildings under the jurisdiction of separate schools and companies among which the Workers' Home, or *Munkásotthon*, has been pre-eminent for its long history of organizing and supporting the cultural life of Csepel workers.

After the war, the Workers' Home became a centre of 'socialist culture', enjoying massive state support and financing. In 1965, the old building was

demolished and, today, a three-storey building carries on this tradition, with a staff of approximately 55 university- and high school-educated instructors, cleaners and porters. Its annual budget for 1986 was about 22 million *forints*, most of which was produced by its own activities, while the balance came from the Csepel Works and the state. In the same year, some 45,000 people, almost half the population of the district, visited the Workers' Home and actively participated in its programmes. After the 1989–90 reorganization, the Workers' Home sustained a major setback when companies withdrew financial support, forcing it to initiate new projects with its considerable profits directed towards the maintenance of this historical recreational centre.

In addressing the nature of activities for young people at the Workers' Home we must ask to what extent it has been successful in responding to their cultural and recreational needs. Like most state-run cultural institutions in Hungary, the Workers' Home lacked sufficient youthful participation in its events, of which three major areas of activities predominated throughout the 1970s and 1980s: regular clubs, workshops and the more informally organized weekend activities, with a total membership of 3,000. While clubs were open to members only, most recreational facilities served the general public, covering a wide spectrum, including amateur photography, popular astrology, local history, arts and crafts, the auto club, the writers' and readers' club, a folk dance group, choir and brass band. There were also periodic study clubs, such as English, computer studies, German, Russian and aerobics and, since 1990, when a new director was elected, computer and data programming evening classes. In addition, a small restaurant and bar were opened on its premises, while a printing service and rental of rooms and facilities for social events began drawing more people in, essential if the centre was to remain open. Weekend activities were almost always plays, rock concerts, dinner dances and discos. Typical examples of clubs and their membership were as follows:

Club	Number of Members
Brass-band players	30
Adult choir	40
Children's folk dance group	120
Adult folk dance group	36
Amateur photographers	30
Arts and crafts	26
Local history	4
English for children	68
English for adults	278
Aerobics and gymnastics for children	360
Aerobics and gymnastics for adults	40
Computer studies for children	24
Computer studies for adults	24

Recreational centres like this have existed almost everywhere in Hungary where there was an active 'Culture Centre' and where local government took up the responsibilities of maintenance and support after the collapse of most central state funds in 1990. Despite the small numbers of registered club members, attendance at evening and weekend activities is telling:

Events in 1986	Number of Visitors
Theatre performances (6)	1,922
Classical music concerts (4)	1,018
Dinner-dances (17)	4,234
Discos (72)	19,153
Balls (2)	713
Fairs and craft shows (33)	3,750

We can see that while organized clubs and workshops (*szakkör*) were not popular after-hours activities for working youth, attendance was fairly high for weekend activities.<sup>13</sup> Intentionally or not, these *szakkörs* replicated the formal institutional frameworks and activities experienced as coercive by young people at school and in the workplace. An instructor of a recently created computer workshop explained:

We do have a lot of problems recruiting young people for our club. For one thing, young people with no background in computers are either afraid of it or simply don't care. Others who have had university or engineering background are working all day so they don't want to spend their free evenings at the club doing more on the computer. It will take a good many years to change this attitude. That's why we put the emphasis on the children.

The head of the Csepel folk dance group, a performing ensemble recognized nationally for its artistic merit and lively shows, argued similarly:

Our problem is winning young people over from the discos. I can't really complain, but if you look at the numbers you can see that folk dancing is very low on their priorities. Five years ago I had over 70 people in our adult group. But the numbers are coming down. This year we hit the lowest. With children it's different, they can be influenced and they will come to practice. As soon as they finish high school they leave without even saying good-bye and they are gone.<sup>14</sup>

As these interviews indicate, formal club activities and workshops attracted only a small percentage of youth into the Workers' Home, which was not, as the director of the institution put it, 'good business'. However, young men and women crowded into the Workers' Home for concerts, discos and dinner-dances, and middle-aged and older people attended more frequently when their favourite popular entertainment was offered. Younger people preferred concerts and discos, those in their thirties and beyond musicals, comedies, dinner-dances and popular folk singing (*nótaest*) performances. These events were (usually) held every week, making a tidy profit for the Workers' Home,

while the clubs and workshops and more informal weekend shows and dances were interdependent. The former were frequented by a small group of devotees, while the latter reached a larger public and helped to subsidize the former activities, in an economic cycle the director of the Workers' Home noted hopefully but not unrealistically:

Popular-style entertainment is crucial to keeping the institution going. In the period between 1986 and 1990, our annual income has remained at roughly 20 million *forints*. Of this, about five million came as a direct contribution from the Csepel Works, only about one million from the state, and the rest we had to come up with. Serving the cultural needs of the twenty-first district is our purpose. But the truth of the matter is that the library, clubs and workshops do not make any real profit; moreover, membership has been decreasing. What's left for us is to offer what the people want.

The director went on to criticize the entertainment aspects of these activities:

I personally would prefer more serious cultural events such as dramatic plays, educational programmes, poetry readings and others that have been the hallmark of this place in the past. I can't make people read the classics when they only want sci-fi, gossipy novels, crime stories and 'do-it-yourself' books. The fact is that when we show a western or French movie, or have a hard-rock concert, the house is packed. What's more, we are making a profit: for kids we organized the 'Tini Disco' and for adults the 'Ringo Disco'.

Friends and families gathered for such occasions spent cash not only on tickets, but also on drinks in the Workers' Home's bar, buying food and sweets for children, cigarettes and raffles. The profits contributed to the central fund of the Workers' Home, which goes a long way to explaining why this institution alone still manages to keep going while others have been struggling.<sup>15</sup>

## THEATRES AND CINEMAS

When I asked my young informants about their preference for theatres and films, their answers surprised me: regardless of age, family and regional background, or occupation, all liked going to the cinema, and said they 'love to go to the pictures with friends and family members'. Theatre-going, however, was considered as too 'aristocratic' or 'bourgeois' especially by vocational school students, who rarely went to the theatre unless the performance was organized by the school and required for class work. A surprisingly large number of young women from a liberal high school background expressed a desire to see plays and dramas, but said they didn't have enough time and money to do so. Administrative and clerical workers agreed, but evidence demonstrates that their attendance at the theatre was similar to that of white-collar males in their twenties and thirties, who took advantage of season tickets provided at a discount by the company's KISZ or the trade union. Young people who said the theatre was 'too intellectual', 'meaningless and overcomplicated' or even 'boring' confessed:

What can I get from Shakespeare or Molière? Can they help me with my current problems? I don't think so. Then there's the situation with 'Cats'. For months and months everybody was talking about it, so a couple of us decided to go to see it. But we couldn't get tickets. Finally, my buddy got some on the black market for 500 a piece. What a rip-off. Three days' salary for a stupid amateurish imitation of cats. And, what's more, the actors and actresses couldn't even do it right. Why do they bother imitating cats? Why don't they try to imitate real people? That's more worthwhile and difficult too.<sup>16</sup>

This was typical of blue-collar youth's attitude to the theatre, and was reinforced by the fact that the district has no permanent theatres. Hence shows could be seen only at culture centres elsewhere. Theatre-goers agreed that these plays were inferior to what was on offer in the inner-city theatres. Moreover, since the tradition of the 'workers' theatre movement' (*munkásszínhátszás*) had become obsolete after the 1950s, workers were not encouraged to learn how to appreciate the theatre instead of stand-up comedy or popular song contests (Drucker 1964: 60–2). These latter activities are an essential form of recreational activity for most blue-collar and, to a certain extent, lower-level managerial workers, uniting their tastes across the divide of class.

Until 1990, cinema was a favourite pastime of young and old alike although television has increasingly become the national pastime for Hungarians as films – especially Western European and American productions – have attracted more and more young people. The three primary reasons for their appeal were: (1) the availability of cinemas (Budapest boasted 88, of which Csepel had four); (2) relatively inexpensive tickets (increasing from 20–30 *forints* in 1986 to 80–120 *forints* in 1992); and (3) young people's fascination with films made in the West. Hungarian and other East European films – half the total number of films screened in the 1980s – fared less well with youthful audiences. One youngster said: 'We are living in Hungarian reality; we don't need to be lectured about it again and again, which Hungarian films are notorious for doing.'<sup>17</sup> It is also essential to note that young people, with little disposable income and wanting privacy, friends and dates, depended on the cinema as a ritualized social event of great significance. For families with young children, it provided sociability and an entertaining as well as educational activity for their children. A clerical worker said: 'Sometimes the idea of going to the cinema is more important than the film itself. Sometimes we tell our parents that we are going and we end up somewhere else.' Obviously, going to the cinema had been important to youth in the past. And despite the fact that attendance has been steadily declining – a fact connected to the increasing popularity of the video rental and cable television networks – young people continue to centre their social activity on watching films either in new multiplex theatres or in video clubs. This apparent disparity is accounted for in part, I suggest, by their fascination with the West, and the importance accorded to film representations in shaping these young people's sense of self.

## SPORTING ACTIVITIES AND TRAVEL

Another important aspect in the leisure life of youth is sport, of which there were two types outside of organized KISZ athletic activities: athletic clubs for members only and mass sports for the general public. According to a survey by two local sports historians, in 1962 Csepel had 19 sport clubs with over 1,350 members (Vedres and Zsolt 1962: 141). Organized club life increased in the 1970s, although membership stagnated at around 2,000 throughout the 1980s. As a result of changes in attitude concerning participation in state-sponsored sports activities, however, sport clubs and membership continued to decline: in 1986 there were 670 sport clubs in Budapest, with 304,800 registered members; in 1989 this had gone down to 587 clubs, and 208,793 registered members, one-third of whom were women (KSH 1987: 238; KSH 1990: 144).

In Hungary, children and adolescents were usually channelled into sport activities in elementary and secondary schools, a trend repeated throughout much of Csepel's Stalinist and state socialist periods. The most common sports organized under the aegis of the Csepel Athletic League were, for the youngest age-bracket, callisthenics, tennis, basketball, volleyball and soccer, while for those over 30, hiking was increasing in popularity. In gymnastics and athletics, women were well represented, while other sports such as boxing, weight-lifting and wrestling were predominantly male in profile. A marked change can be seen in the participation of young people in fitness programmes and such easily available sporting events as jogging, swimming, soccer and hiking. Joggers can be seen in parks and along the banks of the Danube, while on the streets and in playgrounds, youngsters play soccer, the team sport most closely identified with working-class tradition not only in Hungary but elsewhere in Europe (Hobsbawm 1983).

Definitions of the nature of 'sport' have been flexible in the local lexicon since fishing, for instance, is considered a sport, although it is not a vigorous physical activity. Fathers fishing with their sons are often seen on the Small Danube, a well-known fisherman's paradise. I saw no women fishing there, although couples were known to share their favoured fishing spots. A few kilometres south there are small artificial lakes made of former sandpits, where small fishing-huts were built. Thus, for blue-collar young men, fishing has been an important masculine 'sporting event' although not as fetishized and commercialized as in North America.

Among those I interviewed, blue-collar youth identified chess and card games as favoured 'sports', and such parties were organized from time to time at social gatherings, but only white-collar young men did so regularly, as for example the group of upwardly mobile electrical engineers from the Non-Ferrous Metal Works who met every Thursday night to play bridge. While chess transcends age and occupational categories, certain card games reveal a particular class and age distinction. Vocational school students did

not usually play bridge, gin rummy or canasta, preferring games played with special Hungarian – or more precisely, German – cards (*ulti, zsirozás, huszonegy, hatvanhat*). Young commuters frequently played cards to pass the time on the train or bus to and from work when serious games were always played for money, beer or cigarettes. Young men do not consider women to be good card players and consequently women play only rarely, such as at house parties. (I should note that those with whom I played were often more skilled players than the men.) Men often teased and insulted each other, frequently uttering comments such as ‘You guys are no good, even a woman could beat you’ or ‘You guys are drunk and that’s why you can’t win.’ Even such innocent recreational activities as card games, as revealed, indicate class distinction and adherence to specific male blue-collar tastes and traditions.

More than card games, however, among young men, cars and motorcycle racing occupy a special status, and although none of my informants was involved, many enjoyed talking and arguing about the latest, fastest and most attractive cars and motorcycles on the market. Few went so far as to attend car and motorcycle races – the expense and distances required for travel to such events kept them away – but many bought magazines specializing in this subject. Young people do not generally own cars until well into their thirties, unless their families already possess them. Motorcycles, however, were a different matter: owning a motorcycle was seen as a symbol of masculinity, and an expensive one was clearly a mark of prestige for younger men. By 17 or 18 it was almost an obsession for vocational students to obtain a *motor* which was achieved through personal and youth bank loans, enabling them to commute to work. Symbolically, however, speed and time were considered to be extremely important. Despite the national speed limit, conversations often revolved around ways in which one could get away with speeding. To these youngsters, notions of the machine, speed, power and manliness were one and the same as bike owners spent their free time maintaining, tuning and riding their bikes. Interestingly, though not unexpectedly, when starting a family, the love of motorcycles is transferred to passenger cars, which for men quickly become an identical obsession.

While the desire to travel presented serious obstacles, it was not altogether impossible for young people to do so. Time and money constraints were the fundamental hindrances, added to which were difficulties in obtaining a passport and visas for travel outside Hungary. In January 1988, a new law was passed permitting easier access to passports and visas for those who legally obtained hard currency. Although it was not unusual to see Hungarian tourists travelling in Europe in their small ‘Trabants’ or ‘Wartburgs’, by the late 1980s, Hungarian licence plates could be seen all over the Continent.<sup>18</sup>

For Hungarian workers of the 1980s several types of travel existed: summer holiday (*nyaralás*), school trips (*vakáció*), travelling holidays (*üdtülés*) and outings (*kirándulás* or *kiruccanás*). For students, the most characteristic



form has been 'vacation travel', either in a formally organized school trip or with the family. The trade union bonus vacation (*szakszervezeti beutaló*) was also a popular and relatively inexpensive means of travelling to company resorts, as described earlier. Those who owned motorcycles organized summer trips, going as far as Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia and East Germany; and, after 1989, to the West. Many youngsters left the country for the first, and probably the last time, in this way. In Hungary, the most popular resort under state socialism was Lake Balaton where organized trips were also part of the KISZ work.

Travel for young people required staggering expenditure, often draining savings and loans, forcing them to organize small motorcycle excursions for which funds were pooled, with camping often preferred for affordability. The accepted pattern for secondary school students in Csepel (like their counterparts elsewhere in the country) was to ensure a last trip before taking a job in the factories in September, a principle that appeared to hold true for young men who indulged in 'a final blowout' before military service. Spring and the summer were peak seasons, and on sunny weekends, the district seemed almost deserted, while the banks of the Danube were crowded with those tending vegetable gardens, working on cottages, fishing, swimming, playing or relaxing.

Until 1990, 99 per cent of vocational students and blue-collar workers interviewed admitted never having visited a country in Western Europe, whereas almost one-third of university-educated white-collar workers had travelled to the West (Austria, West Germany, France and the Nordic countries). Rural youth seemed to travel less frequently than their urban counterparts, and white-collar youth, knowing a foreign language and earning a better salary, could more easily afford travel to the West. Gender, it seemed, had little bearing on travel, and women were equally represented in at least some formally organized company and KISZ travel expeditions before 1989.

## IN THE DISCOS

More than any other recreational activities, 'going out' on Friday and Saturday nights was mentioned as the favourite activity of blue- and white-collar, female and male young workers. These informal weekend activities are essential in forming and maintaining friendships and cohesion among those working together in the factories. 'Going out' in Csepel meant spending hours in smoky, noisy clubs and bars dancing or hanging out ('going to the disco'). Although the 1980s saw a European variant of 'break' music and dance (*breko*) – and being in discos remains to this day a way of life for the young denizens of Csepel – it is invoked variously as noun, verb and adjective. It was easy enough to distinguish young Csepel disco regulars from the rest of the crowd on Fridays and Saturdays as they flocked to their favourite

hangouts: in the lexicon of current slang, they had to look hip, fashionable or decked out (*kicsipve, kinyalva, bazi jól néznek ki, tők jők*). These expressions referred not only to clothing – usually the latest city fashions purchased in ‘boutiques’ – but to hipness and ‘cool’ (sophisticated) behaviour as well.

Since Csepel is administratively a part of Budapest, with frequent buses and an electric rail service, young people can be mobile in selecting fashionable night-spots, gathering at around 5 or 6 o’clock in train or bus stations, preparing for an evening out in the inner city (Belváros) or the Cultural Centre in a neighbouring district that was known as Csili. Most, however, favoured the local ‘hot’ clubs, such as the Workers’ Home, the Youth Park, the Rideg or the Radnóti (Csepel’s Culture Centres), Papirgyár (the disco at the Paper Factory), and others at restaurants around the city. Going to factory clubs, as opposed to neutral places, reinforced a sense of belonging to youth and occupation groups but did not necessarily mean a conscious devotion to the factory. Peer pressure, special events and/or discos hosting performances by popular bands determined the selection of location for a good night out. Since clubs featuring live bands may charge two to three times that of the average ticket, the price of admission was a decisive factor, discouraging many who could not afford exorbitant entrance fees. Those who still decided to attend either sacrificed their small savings or scholarships, or borrowed money from their parents or, especially, friends. This latter form of borrowing, referred to as ‘begging’ (*lejmolás*) or ‘mooching’ (*kunyerálás*), was extremely important in creating lasting bonds between friends. At the same time, it also provided youth with a necessary value system combining trust, truthfulness and loyalty. Not paying back, or not reciprocating, could result in serious breach of friendship and stigmatization. Young men and women defined real friendship (*igaz barátság*) by including in the notion of ‘complete trust’ (*megbízhatóság*) that money and goods borrowed would always be returned to the lender.

Good and trusted friendship among young workers had other bases as well. Deciding where to go was inseparable from the choice of companions, for going to a dance alone was not an option. Instead, friends decided their destination beforehand, the number to assemble in their party for the occasion, the duration of the evening, the amount to be contributed by each companion, the formality or informality of the ‘szerezés’ (literally ‘equipment’) to be harmonized or individualized. Such decisions involved intricate networks of interconnected friends at distant shops or offices at the factory. Since movement in and out of the shops was fairly limited, and because shift and brigade leaders were instructed to monitor younger workers and vocational school apprentices, word of such decisions spread at lunch-time, in the locker room, bathrooms, by messenger or by chance. These young workers found ingenious ways to meet the challenge of managerial control, for example, by devising pressing ‘problems to be discussed’ in the offices, or a tool ‘to be borrowed from another shop’ for which a special messenger was assigned to relay information: this might involve an exchange of cigarettes

or newspapers as well. Not unlike the way rumours circulate in prisons, in this manner information collected in the morning from the organizers could reach its destination by the end of the shift. Such informal networks were important in enabling youth to keep in touch with each other within the confines of the factory.

The success of such evening outings was based on a structured format, beginning with the appropriate meeting place and scrutiny of new arrivals through critical comments, an anticipated part of the scene. Nor were couples appearing together spared such inspection, and comments such as 'you look good', 'your hair is OK', 'your new jacket looks great' reverberated as new acquaintances were introduced briefly with a handshake, a hug or a kiss on both cheeks. It is not unusual for men to kiss when shaking hands and while this practice was not common among youths working together on a daily basis, it was frequent with those who congregated weekly. This friendly greeting is not called a *csók* (kiss), but rather a *puszi* meaning a 'peck' or a small 'kiss'. Once the gathering was complete, the group proceeded to the disco or club, selecting the route according to styles accepted by younger as opposed to older generations, which also governed the flexibility of time allotted. While older people could decide to meet at their destination, or at home, and proceed immediately to the disco after the rendezvous, youngsters insisted on more leeway, deciding peremptorily to drop in on a friend who lived on the route or suggesting a stop at a bar or restaurant for a drink 'to get warmed up'.

Their behaviour throughout the evening reflected a confidence and group solidarity that go far towards explaining why, at the disco, the group would often occupy a large table or select a corner. The usual progression of events was that, once settled, a member of the party – usually male – ordered a round of drinks for everyone. Young women rarely gave the order to the waiter or paid the tab. A mechanic explained: 'If I pay for a round, my friends have to honour it and reciprocate the round. Paying is a man's responsibility. That's the rule.' Drinking, which was excessive throughout the night, was restricted primarily to beer, with occasional shots of hard liquor 'to speed things up' (*gyorsító*). A man in his early twenties explained this as a necessity: 'When we go out I don't want to wait until I've drunk 4 or 5 beers to feel its effect. So we mix the drinks or use hard liquor in addition to beer.'<sup>19</sup>

After considerable drinking, talking and dancing, young workers always split into two groups: those who liked dancing and those who didn't. It was not uncommon to see one or two youngsters at a table or strolling about: 'I just can't dance. I come here for my friends and to be with them', said one young man who was considered to be painfully shy by his friends. Young women and men who were going out together danced only with each other. Unattached men 'tried out several partners', both from within their friendship circle or, after teasing from friends, sought other dancing partners. Asking women to dance was polite but not formal: 'May I have this dance with you?' was never asked. Instead, young men just muttered abrupt

expressions such as 'do you want to?', 'let's go' or 'how about it?' Rejection was not considered rude and in fact was quite common, as (unlike in sexual relations described in foregoing pages) young women were free to refuse anyone not to their liking. According to young males, 'this is only one of those games women play with them' and, after the second or third request, or an invitation for a drink, they often succeeded.

While choosing dancing partners and dates may reveal few formalized courtesies, the help of friends in monitoring the 'right' selection is of paramount significance. The criteria for selecting partners may resemble those in the non-disco context and both young men and women agreed that looks and clothing were essential (*a ruha teszi az embert, és főleg a nőt* – 'Clothing makes the man, but especially the woman'). As Paul Willis notes 'clothes, style and fashion have long been recognized as key elements in young people's expression, exploration and making of their own individual and collective identities' (1990: 85). Hungarian youth are no exception. Both sexes consider fashionable looks – the *szerkó* or *szerelés* – as extremely important and men openly stare at a woman to decide whether she is sexually attractive, erotically dressed or has a good figure. Young males openly discuss these topics and put pressure on their girlfriends to comply. Girlfriends also may glance at men, albeit more cursorily, and then discuss their observations. Once the initial impressions are reinforced and agreed by both parties, more glances may be exchanged until the young man decides to act and asks the woman to dance.

While the selection of clubs was important, throughout the 1980s, Euro-pop disco music was widespread in Hungary and, in rhythm, form and instrumentation, nearly identical from one disco to the next. Only at live concerts did one sense a different type of youthful behaviour, as these were arenas for bands and audience alike to act out youthful rebellion and sing songs that overtly opposed the authorities and official standards. Vocational students predominantly favoured heavy metal and traditional rock concerts. Both young men and women were able to sing the songs of their favourite artists and bands.<sup>20</sup> The type of dance performed to this Euro-disco music was homogenized throughout the country and only in slow dance numbers did couples hold each other, while during faster tempo numbers they danced without touching, looking at each other only occasionally. Young males were persuaded that dancing together was the first stage in 'pushing forward' towards a decision of compatibility. If this was not the case, either the woman or the man could utter a simple 'thanks' and return to their respective groups. Upon becoming better acquainted, the man might invite her to his table and offer her drinks, cigarettes and snacks and, after more dancing and time spent with their respective friends, he might offer to accompany her home even if she lived at the other end of the city, after which ritual more serious friendship and dating might develop.

In the course of such evenings, in the absence of suitable partners, young men and women stayed with their friends to drink, dance and joke. As more

alcohol was consumed, the group became uninhibited and even rowdy. In most cases, depending on one's circle of friends, such behaviour was merely sociable; all the same, police patrols regularly visited discos and restaurants offering entertainment, singling out young people for periodic identification checks. Establishments known to police as 'trouble-spots' were visited more frequently by the patrol than others and since the drinking-age in Hungary is 18, a substantial proportion of vocational school students, out with older friends, were issued citations for drinking in a public place. In such cases warnings or even fines were handed out.

The decision to leave terminates the group's evening out, often taking place at closing time when revellers are asked to leave by the management. The group may then decide to go elsewhere to continue the revelry at a nearby pub or bar. As we have seen, the key to working-class youth's recreational 'outing' in discos is a quintessential bond of mutual reliance and common revelry.

#### 'HANGING OUT' AND PARTIES

Few young people have their own flat, so most resort to 'hanging out' in parks, on street corners and at entrances to stations or housing complexes. When seeking to discover why certain places in Csepel were favoured over others, I was quoted a few lines from rock music lyrics my informant had refashioned:

I was born and raised in Csepel,  
I know that there's a nicer and better town,  
But it's Csepel that pulls me down.<sup>21</sup>

Lacking funds and a specific destination, young people nevertheless spent time together in a pastime called hanging out or loafing (*lébecolás*, *lődörgés* or *csövezés*), meaning not working or killing time, wandering aimlessly or not being at home. Although in popular parlance *csövezés* refers to unemployed and homeless youth, among the young it may also refer to hanging out with friends and spending time elsewhere than at home. These terms, and the mentality they describe, are dialectically opposed to concepts of *munka* and *meló* (work) described in earlier chapters with reference to a strict work ethic and controlled productive relations on factory premises.

Such seemingly aimless activity is none the less as important to young people as weekend nights out and may indeed take up a whole afternoon or evening, never considered as boring, or wasted time. Indeed, these small groups of three to five youths are never completely immobile or devoid of activity: on the contrary, they may engage in a surprising variety of conversations or tasks, discussing in detail, for example, the latest news in the workplace, clarifying or continuing to reproduce local gossip. During the 1980s, just as during much of the 1990s, the favourite reading matter of

young males included the latest issue of *Popular Sport* or *Auto-Motor* and far outweighed others in popularity among youth, with the possible exception of light reading on political affairs. For them the centre of attention might be the latest games of the national soccer league or a new series of automobiles on the market. Only a small percentage of working-class youth own computers and most utilize them for games. By the late 1990s, this number had increased significantly as schools began specialized computer classes.

As mentioned earlier, cigarettes play a symbolic role in the informal lives of youths as most smoke heavily, with the exception of athletes. Cigarettes (variously referred to as *cigi*, *bagó*, *csikk*, *slukk*, *bűzrúd*, *szivar*, *dohány*) are a means of making acquaintance and a common conversational ploy. Smoking in company represents a substantial cash outlay, for it is customary to offer cigarettes to companions, especially popular brands such as Sophiane and Symphonia, although from time to time a special western brand makes the rounds, affording prestige to the purchaser and a sense of cohesion to the group. It was common for the whole company to share a last cigarette by passing it around until it disappeared, and then to lament the lack of cigarettes with a sigh or a joke, at which point a runner would be sent to replenish the supply. Contributions were either collected equally from all, or one person would give the runner enough for a packet. It is perhaps telling that the Hungarian state, having a virtual monopoly on the tobacco industry, has never embarked on a campaign to deter young people from smoking and does not espouse non-smoking workplaces. As a result men and women alike are chain-smokers, a behaviour that is no doubt laden with symbolic and social meaning.

During 'hanging out' activities, popular topics of conversation might centre on family affairs, dating, extraordinary political or cultural events and passers-by, although when women were present, the conversation turned to other topics as well, such as current fashions or problems in dating. With women, however, discussions took on a special edge 'kidding, or playing with one's head' (*cikizés* or *ugratás*) or 'sucking' (*szivatás*), the teasing behaviour to which young males are expected to adhere even on the shop floor, as illustrated in Chapter 5. Overtly sexual jokes are told with clear references to body parts and bodily functions, but most conversations only implicitly concern sexuality. Among themselves, they may appreciate in detail the attributes of a woman passing on the street, even though such comments were strictly forbidden with respect to their own girlfriends. As a bachelor admitted:

To joke about other women is a necessity for we must know what our friends like and think. By doing so we form a kind of collective agreement, shaping each other's ideas about what is nice, fashionable and acceptable. Once you have a girlfriend you really don't have to do that any more because by that time we've all selected our partners who are acceptable to our friends as well.

Men also teased each other, especially if younger members were present with a new hair-cut, revealed a disfigurement, wore the wrong type of

clothing or drove a beaten-up motorcycle. These were targets for derision, sometimes pushed to their limit, yet fighting only rarely broke out and was limited to curses or a few slaps on the face. Real physical beating, though rare, was aimed at outsiders, mostly 'strangers' from other districts, or Poles and Gypsies who worked as migrant workers at the Csepel Works, and most often as a result of skirmishes and alcohol. Most important, however, was collective pressure exerted on the parties who sooner or later yielded the decision admitting that 'it was just a joke'. Since heavy drinking was not frequent, fights, vandalism and other petty criminal acts were minimal as a consequence of these small-scale get-togethers. Drug abuse, or its Hungarian variant 'glue-sniffing' (*szipózás*), while acknowledged, was rare and considered self-destructive. This is not meant to suggest that young people avoided experimenting with drugs: cases of drug use were in fact reported most often among male vocational students, a practice that became more widespread during the mid-1990s (Bácskai and Gerevich 1997: 76–81). But as one mechanic asserted: 'I'm not crazy enough to spend ten *rongy* [literally rag, but meaning 10,000 *forints*] on hard drugs. Two or three *féldeci* [shots] of brandy does the job for me.'

The places where 'hanging out' took place in Csepel warrant special attention, for they reveal a sense of youthful workers' identity with space and its symbolic significance. The Aquarium Bistro, the main park in the centre of town, and the lovers' lane along the shores of the Small Danube have for decades been favourite spots and hold special meaning in the collective memory. The Aquarium, also known as the Glass House (in honour of its huge store-front windows and the drinking associated with it), was a favourite hangout for young and old alike, especially for brief, informal get-togethers immediately after a shift. Young workers, especially males, got acquainted with the Aquarium during their apprenticeship when invited there by older workers, a few of whom stopped by in the morning for a quick coffee or breakfast. But its main attraction has always been alcohol, served only after 9 o'clock as a result of the nationally implemented rule in the early 1980s. Albeit rarely with women and girlfriends, young men could gather for a beer or two (during wintertime, for mulled wine), to discuss the daily details of their work and celebrate togetherness, an informal custom probably inherited from the pre-war *Einstand* discussed in Chapter 4.

Csepel youth could also be found after work and at weekends in the park in the centre of town, just behind the Roman Catholic Church, which has several enclosures including a playground and an area with benches for playing cards and chess. They met here to stroll in safety, knowing the police station was nearby, a situation that altered considerably after 1990 when police subsidies were cut back and patrolling the parks became increasingly rare. It became common to see young men socializing with older or retired men and, by playing chess or cards, growing accustomed to a life-style that might well be theirs one day.

During the mid- to late 1980s, gangs were not fashionable among blue-collar males and most viewed them with some trepidation. In fact, several expressed disdain when they heard racist and anti-Semitic attacks or vandalism by skinheads or neo-Nazi gangs in other areas of the capital.<sup>22</sup> They did, however, enjoy hearing and telling skinhead jokes. By the early 1990s, several youths were involved with local skinhead gangs, all well known to the local police for the minor offences they committed.

One aspect of blue-collar youth that resembled youth gangs was the group formation that they preferred in public. Both men and women hated being in public alone. Interestingly, someone walking alone in public elicited either jokes or negative comments like 'are you sick, or something?' or 'where are you hurrying to?' The lovers' lane along the Small Danube was used primarily by young lovers or married couples strolling in its quiet, serene surroundings, favoured for its proximity to the livelier bars and restaurants known locally by the unromantic term 'knife-throwers' (*késdobáló*), and for their dimly-lit wooded areas. In the afternoon one could find the shore crowded with solitary fishermen or fathers with sons, angling for a fat carp for their dinner, and with their early evening departure, the shore became a lovers' paradise. Many young people, especially those living in the workers' hotels, recalled nostalgically 'strolling there to do things that are impossible in the crowded and noisy workers' hostels'. While young people also frequent other parks, playgrounds and secluded wooded areas, the Danube shore was most often mentioned as an 'ideal place for them'. A small park within this area, known as 'Friendship Park', was created through the joint efforts of various factory KISZ organizations with the help of the Soviet army units stationed at the Tököl air base until 1991: ironically, the park reflects Csepel's socialist history without the intended meaning of 'love between the two countries', resonating instead at a more personal level.

The final informal gathering for working-class youth, which was essential in establishing a sense of belonging, is the 'party' (*házibuli*). Youth in Hungary have certainly been as fond of parties as their counterparts elsewhere, and the youth of Csepel are no exception, hindered only by the shortage of available flats. None the less, house parties took place on a monthly basis. Young and old, blue-collar and white-collar alike favoured hosting or participating in parties. Referred to as *házibuli*, or as *buli* or *hábé* (most such parties are included in this category), the true *hábé* took place on Friday or Saturday nights in the house of a friend whose parents were away. A tape-recorder or record-player was a requirement, as was alcohol and food, depending on the number of friends and newcomers invited by regulars. It may be organized as a special occasion for a birthday, anniversary, name day, military service induction or to introduce new girlfriends or boyfriends to the friendship circle. Name days were extremely important and celebrated by both men and women. To be invited to celebrate a friend's name day (*névnapot köszönteni*) was not only an honour but also assured the cementing of solidarity among young people. The



special flavour and the care with which they prepared for such an occasion is revealed in the following interview:

My friends always know my name day and I know theirs too. Almost every other week there is a name-day party. Last night I had to prepare a dish, which I am taking to today's special occasion: we are going to celebrate Steven's day [in Hungarian the expression is *István napot ülni* 'to sit on Steven's day']. Now Steven is a common name so there will be at least four of them at the party. This means at least four bottles of champagne, cognac or cartons of cigarettes for them. But what the hell, I know that I will get a lot for my own 'Ica-day' [*Ica napra*].

While name days were extremely important to young people, *buli*, on the other hand, required no such special occasion. The random nature of house parties is, of course, characteristic of the younger generation, who organize parties on the spur of the moment, and enjoy the freedom to 'drop by' without invitation.

Young people think it is wrong to come to a *buli* empty-handed. Women were responsible for bringing food, while men provided cigarettes, drinks and music. No organized pattern of events was prescribed, and no official hosts designated, but the person whose flat was used held tacit decision-making power. Celebrants and their close friends tended to become 'blasted' and 'loaded' (*kapatos, beszívott, elázott, pityókás, or hótt részeg*) as young men especially drank to excess as a sign of masculinity and virility, a behaviour sanctioned and recalled for days afterward. Friends were urged to drink, by boasting and teasing, sanctioned by practices such as the 'alcohol-brotherhood' (*szesztestvér*), drinking together the identical amount of alcohol until the competitors reeled in a drunken state.<sup>23</sup> Excessive smoking, eating and dancing were considered to be basic elements of a good *buli* and television – and, more recently, rented videos – and necking were permissible and even encouraged, especially the latter due to the shortage of privacy for young lovers. As everywhere, Csepel parties could end by carrying a drunken friend or celebrant home, with the early arrival of parents or, in a few instances, with a visit from the police, summoned by angry neighbours. Yet a successful gathering for youth was never a party with visitors politely saying 'Good-bye' to each other. As a tool- and die-maker summed it up sarcastically, but in a way that aptly captured the disillusioned world-view of many in the factory: 'Then there is nothing to talk about next week in the factory.'

## IN CONCLUSION

In summary, as I have described in this chapter, youth in the state socialist period wished to regard themselves as active participants in making their own lives and galvanizing the dynamics of their own existence through channels of their own choice. This awareness is intrinsic to the paradoxical nature of being young, as exhibited in the dialectics of sexuality, which

oscillated between carefree libertine behaviour and puritanical censoriousness. We see, then, the integration of several factors working to reproduce values and patterns that coalesced into a specific working-class culture and consciousness. First, the matter of local and socio-economic background: it is clear that togetherness and homogeneity reproduced class membership and created a common ground for identity. Reserving friendship ties through casual activities with individuals of their own liking served the political function of maintaining existing class relations. The neighbourhood in which they played, the 'hangouts' they preferred, the family members rejected and non-relatives accepted are all indices of a desired sense of self and, for that matter, a redefinition of others, however fragile or assailed it may at times have been. Second, the question of personality and taste factors: Csepel youth were bearers of particular personality traits, consumerist desires and popular fashion as certain brands of cigarettes, music, clothing and activities also served the political function of attesting to the values, habits and norms which have been internalized by youth. Taken together, these informal cultural functions helped to maintain the social reproduction of class membership by creating a homogeneous but not inflexible value system, a generation and gender-specific process fostering group interdependence and class-consciousness.

## 8 HUNGARY'S MANHATTAN: THE VELVET 'REVOLUTION' AND THE REMAKING OF CAPITALIST YOUTH<sup>1</sup>

*Vom Arbeitervolk zum Volk ohne Arbeit!*

[From the working class to the class without work!]

slogan of the Leipzig demonstrators, 8 April 1991)

This motto evokes the period of intense and rapid social and economic transition in Hungary after 1988 when central Communist Party directives were abandoned in favour of a market-based economy. At the same time, free elections paved the way for a multi-party system, parliamentary democracy was enacted and joint industrial ventures between Hungarian and western companies escalated. How did all this affect working youth in Hungary? Did this contribute to the erosion of working-class consciousness and the alienation of youth from their own identity and the ongoing political processes? A growing foreign debt and 'hidden unemployment' among industrial workers contributed to public attitudes that differed radically from the official party line. For as the European economist Ralph Dahrendorf has suggested, 'No constitutional "right to work" can prevent unemployment; all it does is to discredit the constitution because it promises something which no judge can provide' (1990: 67).

Csepel offers an unusually apt point of departure for grasping more fully the responses of workers during that period: to that end, this chapter analyses three distinct, yet interrelated, constitutive elements of this fundamental political and economic transformation, a phenomenon that many have termed the emergence of the contestation of 'regime transitions' and that of 'civil society' in Eastern Europe (Fehér and Arato 1991; Fischer 1996; Hann 1990; Rau 1991). In so doing, I hope to describe a crucial determinative upheaval in the community of Csepel, proposing a number of social and cultural factors that immediately followed the 'springtime of the people', as the 1989 revolutions in Eastern Europe were named. First among these is the resurgence of a new, and more nationalistic, ethnic consciousness, instead of the consolidation of a working-class value system that might be expected during times of crisis; second is the political pluralism that followed in the wake of the weakening of the Communist Party's hegemonic power; and finally, the creation of new, productive relations and a

reorganization of labour by means of joint business ventures between Eastern Europe and the West.

Interpretations of the velocity of social change must, I believe, be evaluated in relation to more gradual modifications at the social level and not simply with the jubilant tone hailing the sudden disappearance of state socialism and the immediate arrival of democracy (Kirkpatrick 1990; Muravchik 1991). The changes, as I have described them elsewhere in more detail, were under way in the 1980s when the Kádár government consented to several major reform policies such as the legitimization of the right to form independent working units, the VGMK, and permission for citizens to engage in the official (legal) 'second economy', as described in the previous chapters (Andorka, Kolosi and Vukovich 1990). In Hungary, as in Poland and the Czech Republic, the revolutions were in reality more like what some scholars rightly referred to as 'negotiated transitions' or 'negotiated revolutions' (Ágh 1998: 140–2; Tótkés 1996: 11–12). This relatively seamless surface functioning of a reform-centred system was ensured by a 'social contract', a phrase that J. F. Brown has ironically termed the Kádárist 'social compact' (1991: 98–9). This agreement was certainly a bargain between the state (the *nomenklatura*) and its citizens, in which the latter were allowed to pursue private material interests in exchange for withdrawal from political life and state administrative responsibilities. At the same time, personal liberty and the rights of each to form independent associations were tolerated, if not supported (Misztal 1990: 76–7). However, by mid-1992, inflation had reached 35 per cent, unemployment had risen to over half a million and the young, women and the elderly felt that they were suffocating (Ferge 1992; Szalai 1992; Szeman 1992). Yet another, far more profound, political-economic transformation had overtaken the country.

#### THE POST-SOCIALIST SPACE: OPPOSITION, ETHNICITY AND RELIGION

The transformations or transitions of the former Soviet bloc, their causes, nature and differences have given new directions for social scientists, especially anthropologists, to study this region as a laboratory for social and cultural change (Abrahams 1996; Atal 1999; Berdahl 1999; Berdahl, Bunzl, and Lampland 2000; Braun and Baranyi 1999; Burawoy and Verdery 1999; Creed 1998; DeSoto and Anderson 1993; Holy 1996; Kideckel 1995; Kligman 1998; Kürti and Langman 1997; Lampland 1995; Lemon 2000; Minnich 1998; Ries 1997; Schwartz 1996; Stewart 1997; Verdery 1996; Wanner 1998; Wedel 1998). European scholars have also followed suit by offering various, often conflicting, interpretations as to the exact meanings of sociocultural change and the contestations of individual and collective identities at the local level (Buchowski 1997; Feischmidt, Magyari-Vincze and Zentai 1997; Giordano and Rolshoven 1999; Jambresic-Kirin and

Povrazanovic 1996; Kokot and Dracklé 1996; Kürti and Barna 1997; Szomolanyi and Meseznikov 1994).<sup>2</sup>



10 The last socialist state ritual in front of the Lenin statue in Csepel celebrating the Great October Socialist Revolution, 7 November 1988. The workers' militia provided the guard of honour (author's collection).

The winds of change blew powerfully across the former Soviet bloc after 1989: the Soviet Union disintegrated, Czechoslovakia divided into Czech and Slovak states, East Germany merged into West Germany, to form one of the most powerful economic polities in the world, and the Yugoslav state, hailed as a model of workers' self-management, fragmented into hostile nation-states. The new political and economic and international climate that ensued reverberated across the social science disciplinary landscape providing

scholars with material for decades to come. The new anthropology of Europe, and especially that of Eastern and Central Europe, came as almost a natural response to these, a reorientation that has generated a flourishing of interesting as well as controversial monographs (Kürti 2000a: 407). Nevertheless, the waning of state socialist rule in Hungary, as suggested in previous chapters, has been in the making since the regime's policies paved the way for 'goulash' communism, as the softer dictatorship of the period of the 1980s came to be known. Csepel's sense of itself was accomplished in incremental stages that invariably reshaped not only the town's self-image but also the workers' own consciousness. As we have seen, after the Second World War, Csepel earned an honorary 'socialist' image: it had a marginalized religious life, with churches receiving minimal or no support and vocational students discouraged from church attendance; it was considered to be a homogeneous working class without ethnic diversity, for most of Csepel's Schwabs were expelled and ethnicity relegated to the purportedly simple folklorist affairs of pariah Gypsies and South Slavs from Csepel Island; and it was supported by a committed KISZ vanguard youth, all in the name of Communist Party legitimacy. Aside from isolated and brief instances, opposition to this power image took place either at an individual level or was simply non-existent. In fact, until the mid-1980s, in Hungary there was a single minor political opposition known as the 'democratic opposition', a loose coalition of two factions often identified as including the 'urbanists' and the 'populists' (Gal 1991: 446; Glenny 1990: 72–5). Briefly, that intellectual disparity, dating back to the 1930s, refers to the tension between a more conservative political stance with regard to Hungary's external relations and a more liberal one. For their part, the populists stress the importance of the country's history and culture as a mobilizing force and advocate a more gradual integration into a privatized, western-style market economy. On the other hand, the 'urbanites' (the Free Democrats, the Young Democrats and the Social Democrats) advocate a liberal, Western orientation that emphasizes civil liberties, stronger political and cultural ties to the West, and complete free-market liberalization. Gábor Demszky, elected mayor of Budapest in 1990, has summarized the way in which the opposition recognized the waning of the communists' power as part of this 'urbanist agenda':

The question of the very survival of communism increasingly brought Kierkegaard's *Either/Or* to mind. We discovered, in other words, that there was no such thing as the 'social market economy': there was either socialism or market economy. Likewise, there was no 'socialist democracy': there was either socialism or democracy. (Demszky 1991: 46)

Although both 'populists' and 'urbanites' have concerned themselves with questions of 'democracy' and a liberalized economic structure, the urbanists' emphasis has clearly focused on these issues rather than on notions of 'Hungarian-ness' (*magyarság*) or the 'Hungarian culture' (*magyar kultúra*)

as elements for political unity and power. However, by mid-1988, when Hungary was experiencing an influx of Hungarian refugees from neighbouring Romania, Hungarian popular attention turned favourably towards the oppositional force emerging as the 'Democratic Forum' and espousing the plight of ethnic Hungarians outside Hungary. The language of this newly emerging political discourse was anti-state and overtly populist, and openly addressed what it considered to be the devastating impact of 35 years of communist rule. After 1987, when the historic Democratic Forum summit took place at Lakitelek, its critical issues centred on ecological disasters, poverty, police brutality, illegally stationed Soviet troops, lack of funding for health and education and especially the plight of the Hungarian Diaspora in neighbouring states, issues wholly avoided by the HSWP and the KISZ, as shown in Chapter 6. It was indeed by virtue of the latter that the opposition was able to gain the confidence and support of both the national and the international public. By debunking communist slogans ('Eight hour working day ...' and 'Forward to building a socialist internationalism', incantations often heard at May Day parades) and confidently claiming the perpetuation of grave human rights violations in Romania and Czechoslovakia, this intellectual movement had become an accepted political force by 1988 when one of the first (and largest) peaceful demonstrations took place in Budapest on 27 June 1988. This solidarity march, condemning Nicolae Ceausescu's genocidal plan to raze thousands of Saxon, Hungarian and Romanian villages in Transylvania, was tantamount to a victory procession for the opposition and, at the same time, a funeral cortege for communism. With regard to these largely 'intellectual' pursuits, despite the participation of a few Csepelers in the procession, the district's residents were soon introduced to this new 'Hungarian consciousness' (*magyarságtudat*) when their workers' hostel was targeted as a site to provide affordable housing to Hungarian refugees from Romania, including some dozen families with their children. 'The responsibility,' proclaimed an editorial in the local paper, 'for the fate of Hungarians in Transylvania is ours; and the way in which the refugees will assimilate here will depend on every one of us' (*Csepel*, 22 June 1988, p. 6). Although not the first wave of Transylvanian refugees (see Chapter 3), to the generation of the late 1980s, it none the less posed a new threat to their already shaken class identification as the refugee issue was soon taken up as a nation-wide concern to build an agenda favouring 'Hungarian-ness' or national culture. Interesting in this development was that in order for the social memory to cleanse itself of communist domination even the name of Manfred Weiss and his family were restored when the district's only hospital was renamed after the factory's founder. Beyond any doubt, this name shift signalled that Csepel was on the threshold of a new era.

Following the more relaxed atmosphere of the short-lived Grósz government, churches took up the welfare issue of refugees and their families who stayed behind, thereby emerging, in the words of a local church leader, as a 'radical anti-state force capable of uniting along these lines'. Catholic

and Protestant, Evangelical and Baptist churches in Hungary thereby spoke with one voice to re-radicalize grass-roots religious communities marginalized during much of the preceding three decades but now re-emerging powerfully. This would certainly lend credence to the Dutch anthropologist Mart Bax's observation concerning the significance of religion in state-formation, for the newly emerging state (non-communist and religious) relied heavily on the symbols and power derived from Catholic and Protestant icons and ideology, a transformation that was abundantly evident in the visits of John Paul II to Poland (Bax 1991: 7–8, see also Kubik 1994: 123–52). During this remaking of Hungarian national identity, the Csepel Evangelical parish, for example, adopted the Romanian town of Sacale (Bácsfalu, with a sizeable Hungarian minority) as its 'twin city' (*testvérváros*) in November 1988, a gesture that soon encouraged other cities to follow suit. And immediately after the first free elections, visits back and forth between such towns became common occurrences, dealing a blow to the socialist image of a town whose residents' identity was supposed to be bound up with official communism, industrialization and a unified working-class tradition.

Workers in Csepel, both young and old, had eagerly participated in the national as well as the local free and democratic elections after 40 years of socialist rule. After the spring elections of 1990, this new nationalistic spirit continued unabated, more open now than previously, with the exception of the interwar period described in Chapter 3. As a result of the growing hostility between the Hungarian and Romanian states, in March 1990, the local Democratic Forum (MDF) organized a Transylvanian photographic exhibit, a cultural event that subsequently was to exert far-reaching political influence in a climate over-heated by propaganda from the forthcoming local election. This Transylvanian-centred agenda of the ruling MDF, as many observers noted, substantially facilitated its popular support in the workers' town. The now official 'Transylvanian connection' continued during the summer of 1991 when the local government sponsored the summer vacations of 35 Hungarian children from Romania, a gesture with historical antecedents in Hungary. In the same mood, the Transylvanian Federation in Szigethalom, for example, sponsored a dinner-dance on 24 April 1991, to foster community and maintain connections with ethnic Hungarians in Transylvania. Nevertheless, the emphasis on such nationalistic ideology proved to be detrimental to MDF politics in Csepel for the MDF and its allies sustained significant losses in the 1994 elections when the engine of unchecked nationalistic spirit had already been set in motion. As a result, the 1990s witnessed the remaking of most of Hungary's national holidays, which became historically, nationalistically (15 March, 23 October) or religiously determined (20 August). Consequently, all former communist or working-class celebrations (May Day, 21 March and 7 November) have now been relegated to the annals of history.



Such revival of ethnic consciousness, however, has also worked to 'resuscitate' minority identities and minority rights issues throughout the region. However, as Katherine Verdery states:

Contrary to the view widespread in America, the resuscitation of those ethnic conflicts is not simply a revival of 'traditional' enmities from the interwar years – as if the intervening half-century were inconsequential. To begin with, ethnic ideologies were reinforced rather than diminished by socialism's 'shortage economies,' which favoured any social device that reduced competition for unavailable goods. Ethnic ideas, with their drawing of clear boundaries between 'in' and 'out,' are ... one such device. Second, with the end of government repression, ethnonational resentments flare up in an environment extremely unpropitious to managing them: an environment devoid of any intermediate institutions for settling disagreements peaceably. (1991b: 433)

As a result, and to counter such overtly state-sponsored nationalistic behaviour, other smaller ethnic groups and associations surfaced in the vacuum not only in Csepel, long considered to be a town of workers and nothing more, but in Hungary at large. The two most controversial nationality organizations to take the stage were the local Gypsy group (*Rom*) and the Schwabian-German Cultural Association of Csepel. The former was reluctantly accepted by workers, and then only as a minor political party known as Brotherhood (*Phralipe*), the latter simply as a 'cultural' organization and not a political body. Residents of the district openly elaborated the reasons for the ambiguous status of these groups. The Gypsy community, while fairly sizeable (estimates range from 5,000 to 10,000), was regarded as a newcomer to Csepel and hence not of working-class origin. Although specific to the district, these objections nevertheless adumbrate commonly held ethnocentric and racist values of Hungarians concerning Gypsies in their country (Bell 1983; Hann 1980). In this connection, recall the anti-Gypsy sentiments of the parents of a young man who wanted to go out with a Gypsy girl (Chapter 7), a feeling of superiority among the Magyar populations one could detect almost everywhere in Hungary. Chalked graffiti proclaiming neighbourhoods to be 'Gypsy-free zones' have been common in Csepel as well as in other cities ever since this neo-Nazi slogan was first introduced by Hungary's infamous punk-rock band, 'Smile' (*Mos-oi*) in the early 1980s.<sup>3</sup> Disaffected youth, who had lost everything (jobs, membership in political organization, identities), were no more receptive to ideas that were 'hip', 'new' and, above all, illegal and forbidden during state socialism. Among working-class vocational students, skinhead fashions – jackboots, bomber jackets, shaved head and various body piercing and tattoos – became accepted standards, a swing in consumer mood that reflected the wider national and international trends of the late 1980s and early 1990s.

Increasingly, however, white-collar and skilled worker residents shifted to the centre-right as their political attitudes became more openly anti-communist, ethnic-bound and religious. Their children have also been

slowly socialized into these new forms of identity mechanisms. The re-emergence of the Schwabian (*Sváb*) nationality, a group decimated in Csepel after 1945 as I have shown in Chapter 5, may be also seen as a response to insecurities created by rising unemployment, relaxed state policies and dominant proponents of 'Hungarian-ness'. Curiously enough, despite the substantial number of Schwabian communities on Csepel Island and around Budapest which survived anti-German expatriation and prejudice, a coherent political agenda could not emerge. This was largely the result of the uneasiness and bias with which German identity was viewed by many throughout the country. Its foundation rested on the negative image because of the German community's wartime alliance with Nazi Germany. Resulting perhaps from the state's iron-hand policy concerning ethno-cultural and folkloristic programmes — subsidizing a token number of South Slavic, German, Slovak and Gypsy communities — a viable German ethno-political agenda still remains to be forged in Csepel.

Nevertheless, the district was not spared the nationalistic political propaganda that emerged in the wake of dissolving socialism. As the new Budapest government debated whether it should cancel the World Fair scheduled for 1996, it became clear that not Csepel — the site originally targeted for large-scale real-estate development and construction of hotels, roads and businesses in a vision of a 'Hungarian Manhattan' — but the south Buda half of the capital was to receive the funding required to expand its budget. It was at that point that a decision was made to cancel the World Fair and to offer the opportunity of naturalization to residents of Hong Kong who wished to settle in Hungary in order to bring business into the country. Far-fetched though these schemes may appear, Csepel citizens actually argued in favour of subsidies of such developments. During my stay in the early 1990s in the town, I could not help but wonder (together with Csepelers themselves) how a town whose conservative value system had succeeded in maintaining the marginalization of non-Magyar groups would be able to sustain the influx of hundreds of Chinese families. Despite this crypto-capitalist fantasy of skyscrapers, resorts and ethnic melange, Csepel's history was to prevent it from becoming Hungary's Manhattan, and the World Fair brouhaha was finally settled in favour of a more culturally-oriented event held in 1996. During the millennial celebrations of the summer of 2000, when I talked to some workers in the district they laughed at this story as nonsensical.

However, all this high-politicking notwithstanding, in the first years of the 1990s Csepel's working-class heritage received a tremendous blow as ethnic minority identity and the larger national identity had become incongruous in the eyes of many. Working-class families, especially young citizens, could not understand all this reconstruction. To many, and the racist and extremist youth groups mushrooming around Budapest certainly attested to that, all this national rejuvenation and policies catering to it were nothing but more control from above. Symbols and political speeches meant

nothing to them, especially when their jobs, security and family resources were at stake. Naturally, alternative political, economic and cultural ways had started to emerge.

#### POLITICAL CULTURE, ELECTIONS AND RECONSTRUCTION (AGAIN)

We have seen that the repoliticization of youth, the generation of a new generation, began immediately the old regime started collapsing and before the new regime had fully emerged. Alienated workers turned to religion and ethnicity immediately after the collapse of state socialism in a social vacuum left by the Communist Party and its supporting institutions. The power of the party state, however, as described in previous chapters, had been steadily eroding through the final years of the Kádár regime, and by 1988, it was evident that the elderly ruler would soon no longer be in office. A replacement was found in the person of the liberal communist Károly Grósz, who was nominated in May of the same year. Milovan Djilas, a long-time ardent observer of the East European communist system, however, has observed: 'Nations under communist rule today cannot take up new challenges, nor can they maintain their distinctive and spiritual position among developed nations. The only remedy is democratic rule' (1989: 121). This prophecy proved true in Hungary: Grósz's rise to power lasted less than a year, when the 'gang of four' (as the quartet of Miklós Németh, Rezső Nyers, Imre Pozsgay and Mátyás Szűrös were known) took office and remained in place until the election of Spring 1990 forced them to step down (Andorka, Kolosi and Vukovich 1990). The transfer of power nevertheless was neither as simple nor as rapid as this synopsis might suggest, certainly in the case of Csepel, once known as an international stronghold of the communist movement.

Thanks in part to communist conservatism new parties emerged on the scene perhaps less rapidly in Csepel than in other parts of the country and, also in the 1930s, political micro-factions contained only a handful of members on their roster. The nationalistic programme of the Democratic Forum and the re-emergence of publicly expressed religious values contributed to reshaping the local political landscape accordingly as the major opposition groups, the Alliance of Free Democrats (SZDSZ) and the its youthful *alter ego*, the Young Democrats (FIDESZ) – both emerging in 1988 as separate entities split off from the loose coalition of 'democratic opposition' – were still in their infancy, operating for the most part as intellectual forums largely isolated from the masses. The majority of parties in the district acquired their legal framework during the turbulent final months of 1989, when it became obvious that the oppositional roundtable talks, like the political dialogue between the ruling government and the 'democratic opposition', were allowing greater freedom of individual expression and liberal attitudes to surface (Gal 1991).

In the district, most of the major factions first gained acceptance as intellectual movements emanating from *Belváros*, in the words of a young mechanic, 'creeping upon us like an autumn mist'. In retrospect, what seems inevitable today was neither systematic nor profound in its evolution. Posters of the emerging parties and slogans painted on public buildings and the walls of the Csepel Works – a symbolic structure defending the establishment and its ideology – contributed in no small measure to the systematic delegitimization of the government. Graffiti expressed dissatisfaction with the HSWP's attempt to regain control by voicing its relationship to the dreaded AVO (Internal Security Forces) of the 1950s, or emphasized its 'Nazi-like' ideology; one slogan, for instance, read: 'You were the AVO, now you are the Nazis.'<sup>4</sup>

With these developments, two events deserve special mention: one was the reinternment on 16 June 1989, of Imre Nagy, the executed prime minister of the 1956 revolutionary government in a nationally televised state funeral comparable in size and importance to the 1988 Transylvanian demonstration, except that this time the whole nation was mobilized (Kürti 1990b). According to surveys, millions watched Nagy and his executed colleagues receive a heroes' funeral while the nation mourned its revolutionary martyrs and celebrated its current victory over the previous regime. More significant for Csepelers' worm's-eye perspective, however, was the 'larded bread' happening organized by the October Party, a political grouping under the spell of the 1956 revolution requesting acceptance through calculated demonstrations to dramatize their programme. Staged in front of the gates of the Csepel Works, workers leaving their shifts received freely distributed larded bread and soup (*zsiroskenyér és rántott leves*), both symbols of poverty, in a bold re-enactment of the broken promises of the socialist state, an act by which the October Party thumbed its nose at the establishment. Organized on 4 August 1989, and eliciting only mild criticism, mostly from older workers who understood well what 'larded bread' symbolized, it was nevertheless a powerful media event that ranked first among numerous efforts to ridicule the still-ruling socialist party, accelerating its demise and giving workers a sense of this lathe-operator's sarcastic view: 'Well, this is what communism had to offer for us for doing back-breaking work for thirty years.'

Such a loss of face prompted the local Csepel intelligentsia and the communist leadership to reassemble into a more moderate but undeniably still 'socialist' force known as the Socialist Party (MSZP), and to instil fear among the populace by highlighting the inexperience of the emerging new parties and the chaos that would inevitably follow. These political changes, like those of previous turbulent socio-economic eras, also structured the ways in which young people were recategorized according to age groups: the KISZ was revamped as a 'Democratic Youth Federation' – 'democratic' being a common political 'buzz-word' during the events of 1989 – and even as a loosely structured Leftist Youth Organization. Quite naturally, its youthful *alter ego*, the Pioneer organization, quickly lost its legitimacy and,

concomitant with religious revivalism, for the first time since 1948, boy scouts were seen singing pre-war Christian anthems, their brand-new brown uniforms replacing the familiar red scarves of their communist forebears. However, by the time elections took place, popular resentment had grown so strong against the former socialist organizations that their election success was wholly in doubt among Csepelers, workers and intellectuals alike. Equally so was the image of the Young Democrats, who Paul Marer saw as 'an idealistic group of mostly young people' (1991: 231). Such sarcasm, however, was not unwarranted, especially by workers who viewed with well-founded suspicion (yet another) formation of a youth organization. A local observer adamantly declared:

When we look at the members of this new youth party, we see long hair, blue jeans, and sounding off about 'the needs of young people'. We have heard that line many times before. What we see is another new party by and for university brats, those under the age of 35, or those who still would like to be at that age.

The use of the plural in this interview reflects a view popular with a majority of workers, both those who had once been supporters of and those who refrained from KISZ activities.

As the socialist party and openly leftist parties were attacked as such, many of the high and middle-level ex-Communist Party cadres of these organs simply disappeared from Csepel 'like a grey donkey in the fog', in the local argot. These cadres, among whom were certain informants from the first period of my fieldwork, became the 'parachuters' (*ejtőernyős*), an expression that refers sardonically to those former party bureaucrats desperately attempting to maintain positions and salaries by moving to other firms and positions, a change of face we have already encountered in Chapter 6 with regard to the two young Communist Party Executive secretaries who accomplished this kind of about-face most successfully.

The law that delegitimized the presence of political parties in the workplace was put into effect at the beginning of 1990; it should be seen, I think, as an indispensable step towards facilitating the waning of the party state in Hungary. Reluctant at first to accept this legal change, the HSWP, the KISZ and their paramilitary organ, the workers' militia, finally conceded, and when large stores of ammunition and weapons were shipped out of the factory premises, Hungary's fate was sealed, leaving behind 35 years of communism. A former militia captain of the district recounted these final days with more fear than nostalgia:

After I left the KISZ and took over the leadership of the militia in 1987, I was still under the spell of communist ideology. I thought that as the workers' militia, we were defending the fruits of socialism. Little did I know that within two years, I would be facing the crisis of my life. By the middle of 1989, there were even people pressing for distribution of weapons, and I was afraid that workers would charge in and simply take them. In a sense, I was envisioning 1956 all over again. When finally the weapons and ammunitions had gone, I felt at ease, and with the disbanding of the militia I realized that the 1956 revolution would never happen again.

In keeping with the experience of other communities, the old image of 'Red Csepel' was renegotiated and reinforced with each round of the elections of 1990 as Hungary was the first country of the former Soviet bloc to announce free elections, as its citizens participated in two rounds of voting to elect representatives to the new multi-party parliament. The rapidity with which intellectuals and the oppositional elite moved to the forefront of politics can be seen in the rapid registration of 54 parties nationwide (although it was clear early on that only twelve had gained enough popular support to put forward national lists with a total of 1,621 candidates). On 27 March and 8 April, despite election fever, party propaganda had failed to reach out to all. To paraphrase a worker, 'a lot of time was spent barking up the wrong tree': this sentiment represents deep resentment on the part of a large segment of the population for the way in which, in the absence of well-established multi-party structures, political sloganeering and election campaigning was experienced as a burden by young and old alike; more importantly, however, it addresses the significant losses sustained at polling stations as the result of workers' disinterest in the former HSWP, its newer variant, the Socialists, and the Social Democratic Party.<sup>5</sup> A recently elected local member of the district council accurately observed that 'The three P-words – parties, parliament, politics – are held in low esteem by the public.' This point of view aptly characterizes the 1990 elections.

But while workers in the district of Csepel were 'fed up' with the election, their atomization and indifference can also be discerned from the outcome in that no independent candidates received support from the electorate, as revealed by the breakdown of the national election and the distribution of parliamentary seats:

Table 8.1. Hungarian Election Results, 1990

Party	Percentage of Vote	Seats Won
Democratic Forum (MDF)	24.71%	64
Free Democrats (SZDSZ)	21.38%	92
Smallholders (Fgkp)	11.76%	44
Socialists (MSZP)	10.89%	33
Young Democrats (FIDESZ)	8.94%	22
Christian Democrats (Kdnp)	6.46%	21
Agrarian Alliance	3.15%	2
Independent candidates	–	6
Two-party Candidates	–	2
Total	100%	386

Sources: Ágh (1990: 107–8) and Körösényi (1990: 42–3).

The new parliamentary election thus represented the nationalistic and religious shift in the political tapestry as three parties with such overt programmes – the Democratic Forum, Smallholders and Christian Democrats – garnered the majority of the votes. As a district of Budapest, this meant that Csepel could send two representatives to parliament: one from the ruling Democratic Forum (MDF), the other from its rival, the Free Democrats (SZDSZ), signalling that yet another era had begun.

What was the immediate impact of the national elections on Csepelers and their sense of working-class identity and culture? One indicator is the 1990 LXVth Law on Local Governments which removed all power from former city councils, legitimized the position of mayor and that of a representatives' council, composed of elected board members of the major parties of Csepel, and paved the way for the country as a whole to hold local elections during that autumn, a step which galvanized Csepelers to mobilize accordingly. As indicated previously, the overtly nationalistic propaganda of the Democratic Forum's campaign contributed to its demise, leaving the Young Democrats and the Free Democrats to become serious contenders for power. The revamped socialist party (MSZP) sought to address workers by appealing to their socialist conscience and rekindling a sense of working-class heritage by inviting Csepel Rezső Nyers, a capable reformer known for his role in the creation of the New Economic Mechanism of 1968 in a gesture that none the less failed to salvage the party's dwindling membership and power. As György Konrád writes: 'The single-party state created the single-party people' (1991: 52) – a party that could not, we might add, prevail when it was challenged right after the fall of state socialism.

By October, 12 parties had gathered sufficient popular support to be included on the balloting list in the district, a number which in no way reflected heterogeneity or chaos; rather, it suggested continued disinterest by workers who had for decades been manipulated by central plans and political commitments to voluntarism and mass rallies.<sup>6</sup> Subsequently, the turnout for the two rounds of elections was relatively low, considering that these were the first local elections in 40 years, and resulted in 28.4 per cent and 26.6 per cent participation respectively, or about 34,000 voters in the district altogether. This outcome surprised even the most experienced politicians: of the 35 seats for this important position, 29 went to the Free and the Young Democrats jointly; and, while only three seats were won by Hungary's ruling party, the Democratic Forum, the Socialists, the former communists, and the Christian Democrats were each able to secure one member in the new local government. Thus, as one local councillor lamented, it seemed to some to be the case that Csepel had come under the 'rule of an SZDSZ-FIDESZ gang'.<sup>7</sup>

Although signalling by their very creation the altered nature of the local community, with its ecological, grass-roots and minority representations, many parties nevertheless sustained grievous losses, while the populace accepted the radicalism of the Young Democrats as an alternative to

religiosity and fundamentalist nationalism. Taken together with the overwhelming losses of the peasant- and Christian-based parties, this development indicates three important facets of the new political climate. First, that the town of Csepel could not regain, if only symbolically, even a vestige of its former agricultural heritage; second, that 35 years of Marxist-Leninist indoctrination had cushioned reaction to the resurgence of radical and fundamentalist, Christian-right political fervour so characteristic of other communities around the country; and, perhaps most important, the ironic legacy of the KISZ movement which through a political party, the Young Democrats – based on age as the sole criterion – still managed to linger on. In fact, until 1998 when the FIDESZ abandoned its upper age-limit, Hungary was the only country in the former Eastern bloc, if not beyond, with a legitimate party uniting those under 35. In the words of a representative of this organization:

We knew that KISZ youth were demoralized by the last years of the 1980s. To create a party for them to cater to their own needs thus seemed an obvious choice. It will take time to get rid of an image of a youthful or juvenile party; of people with long hair; of people who like rock music. I think time will tell that democracy and youth are not incompatible.

Whether or not these words truly represent the majority of Young Democrats, Csepel youth did not as a rule flock to join its ranks, a pattern that was prevalent all over in Hungary in the early 1990s (Bella 1994; Nagy 2000). More faithful to Csepelers' feelings would be Vasary's characterization of those voting for the Young Democrats 'among [whom were] not only young voters but pensioners too: older people, as if disillusioned by their children's generation, voted for their grandchildren' (1991: 6). As the country's foreign debt increased to \$20 billion, state-supported projects such as housing construction and funding for schools and pensions were drastically cut, causing grave difficulties for young married couples, women and the elderly.<sup>8</sup> Not surprisingly, the distance between the former ruling party and its descendants, what they represented and idealized, and the working masses increased, creating not only a distance between the two but lending credence to the ideology of the emerging parties whose promises seemed to ring truer.

In this spirit of rejuvenation, the removal of the statue of Lenin was an event in a string of 'statue removals' (*szobordöntögetések*) which characterized not only Hungary but perhaps the whole of the former Eastern bloc during much of the early 1990s. One day before the national holiday, on 14 March, the colossal statue of Lenin that had towered for 30 years as a reminder of communism was removed from its pedestal, with only minor objections on the part of the minuscule Communist and Socialist Parties. Although local leaders were quite suspicious of this act, coming as it did on the heels of the larded bread event, the opposition parties SZDSZ and FIDESZ took charge of planning a secret removal before the set date, and ordered a crane and truck in good time.<sup>9</sup>





11 The last moments of the Lenin statue at the entrance to the Csepel Works, 14 March 1990 (author's collection).

But the loss of central party control was discernible elsewhere, especially in reconfigured power relations within the economic sphere, creating a national politics that had accelerated into previously unimaginable turmoil. The local newspaper *Csepel's* monopoly (for 30 years under party supervision) in controlling the media was shaken when two new papers, *The Island (Sziget)* and *Csepel Mirror (Csepeli Tükör)*, appeared on the newspaper stands. While the former has been, since its inception, a wholly independent enterprise, featuring articles and community news, the latter was created as the 'official organ' of the newly elected local government and mayoral office. Thus, with the removal of the HSWP's holdings the future of *Csepel* was cast

in doubt until a clever former editor took it upon herself to carry out the paper's stated function; thus another form of media and publishing – without overt political control and financial constraints – had come into being, undoubtedly foregrounding that times were indeed changing.

This period of intense social reconstruction was emblematic of East European states' eagerness to shed their communist heritage: for the very symbols of the town's communist heritage came under rapid but incessant attack in the latter half of 1989, enduring through much of 1990. The frenzied activities in the district further increased with the closing of the election booths in October 1990, and by the end of the same year, the remaking of the district followed the general sweep of transformation visible across the country. The newly inaugurated mayor's office took decisive steps to rename Csepel and – in the words of a councillor – 'to cleanse our town of its dreaded "red" heritage'. Belatedly following in the path of other Budapest districts, street names were changed, either returning to their original pre-war nomenclature – as in the case of Kalamár Street renamed as Saint Stephen (reflecting the religious fundamentalism of the new era) – or given more neutral names.<sup>10</sup> The story of this street and its historic monument is instructive: Kalamár, Csepel's mayor between 1945 and 1956, was one of the now 'anti-revolutionary' martyrs killed 'accidentally' during the uprising of 1956. In its efforts to garner local support on a mass scale and to create a positive historic heroic ideal for working youth, the Kádár government had named a street after him, an action that was followed by the district party council erecting a monument to his memory in 1982. The street was renamed and, after several desecrations, Kalamár's monument removed by the new government on 17 April. As anthropological data reveal, these local-level renegotiations and reconfiguring of communities and nation-state symbols were uniform throughout the former Soviet bloc (Borneman 1992; Creed 1998; Kubik 1994; Wanner 1998). All emblems of communist power, the ubiquitous red star and the hammer and the sickle in particular, were taken down in response to public outcries. The same action prompted a member of Csepel's minuscule Smallholders' Party (FgKP) to publish a letter addressing the district's new mayor with the following text: 'The Red Star atop the radio tower at the entrance to our district should be removed, for it gives every passenger the impression that Csepel is inhabited by communists and, as you well know, that is not true.'<sup>11</sup>

Together with anti-communist sentiments, religious fundamentalism was intensifying after 35 years of dormancy, a revealing indication of which may be seen in the apparently extraordinary practice of street christening ceremonies consecrated by a priest as awe-struck workers looked on, in a district celebrated for decades as 'atheist'. This religious and conservative revitalization was further legitimized during the summer of 1991 when Pope John Paul II visited Hungary, a ceremonious occasion of pomp-and-circumstance that virtually halted normal business for a week, costing tens of millions in state funds in a time of economic crisis, and attracting many

thousands of visitors from neighbouring countries (as well as prompting many Hungarians to leave the country for the duration). Arguably analogous to the Pope's visits to Poland, this papal blessing may be read as a significant symbolization of the rightward turn of Hungarian high politics, the long-term consequences of which remain to be determined.

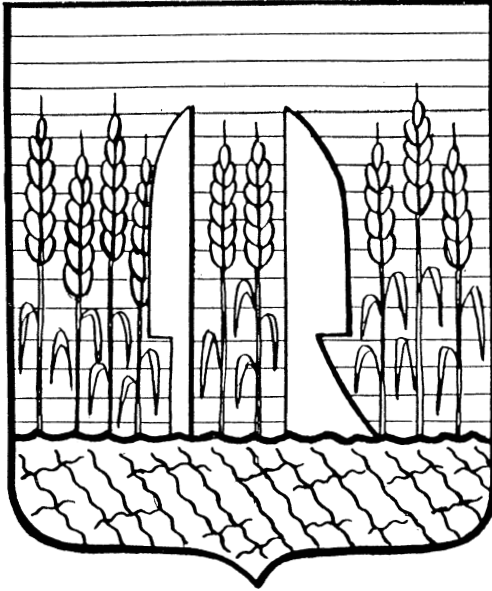
These actions were milestones in Csepel's re-invention of its daily (non-communist) history. Others, albeit seemingly insignificant, also signalled the new political consciousness of workers. Specifically, the purging of ex-communist officials through show-trials (not unlike those of the early 1950s) could not avoid placing the district again in the eyes of the national media. While a large percentage of Hungarians dismissed such actions, in neighbouring former Soviet bloc countries debates continued to rage well into the mid-1990s concerning legal trials of communists and factory management for charges ranging from bribery to embezzlement and exchange of illegal western currency.<sup>12</sup> In the Csepel case, it concerned a former mayor and other high-level city council members, and alleged embezzlement of funds and granting permission to former workers' militia leaders to obtain inexpensive, state-constructed houses (*lakáspanama*). While most workers expressed serious doubt concerning the accuracy of these charges, the court nevertheless found four individuals guilty and fined them accordingly, in addition to administering a sentence of probation. Needless to say, this case offered some workers and the new leadership of Csepel a certain compensatory satisfaction for years of frustrating and chaotic housing shortages. Though the case ended abruptly with no real punishments, its symbolic value far outstripped its actual status. A resident expressed her point of view:

Real victory over the Stalinist rulers of our town was achieved in this trial. The fines are not much, but what's more important is that the guilty had to learn that they were not above us, ordinary citizens. This is what the new system means: we are all equal before the law. This small victory is much greater when people realize that it is also the victory of democracy over the communist party-state.<sup>13</sup>

Thus, while these words aptly characterize the sentiments of young workers and the pleasure they took in some of these staged rituals of a new era, they are also significant as a demarcating political message: for both the workers and the new leadership celebrated the demise of the Communist Party's rule, while being made increasingly aware that, in the new climate, freedom could be taken literally, and that symbols of the communist movements were no longer sacred.

## JOINT VENTURES

However, it was not only at the ideological level that workers realized that the party-state was no longer functioning. As I have described in Chapter 7, workers were also conscious of the eroding political control over the economic sphere. Perhaps one of the most important developments affecting



12 The newly designed coat of arms of the Csepel local government showing its connectedness to the past; the Danube, agriculture and steel (author's collection).

the specific way in which East European economic and political transformation occurred was the creation of joint industrial ventures between eastern and western companies. The arrival of globalization (Hannerz 1996; Rothstein and Blim 1992, Yoder 2000) was perhaps the catalyst for national leaders to envisage their countries on the road to democracy and capitalism. As usual, local leaders saw the immediate possibilities for economic development and progress of outmoded infrastructures. Csepel's elites, both the reformed communists as well as the non-communists, saw Csepel as a technologically rebuilt Island of Manhattan of Hungary, a idea predicated upon the leaders' unique ability to transform the system from above, a dynamic that Timothy Garton Ash has termed 'refolution'. To borrow another phrase (this time from Mark Palmer, the talented and controversial former US ambassador to Hungary during that crucial moment), 'Danube fever' had gripped Europe and Hungary by the late 1980s. Americans were in the forefront to provide assistance or to 'export democracy' (Muravchik 1991). In order to do so, 'Many Americans, sensing history in the making, want to lend a helping hand' (Howard 1991: 9). During this time of tumultuous reforms and velvet negotiated revolution, western aid took many forms, some helpful and necessary, others superficial or unnecessary (Wedel 1998). However, at that moment, the utility and thus the proliferation of such ventures in some sense became the immediate primary agenda for

Hungary's leaders. And surely times were hopeful for both the regime and the workers in the nation's capital: most of the companies with foreign interests have been located in Budapest and its environs (with 14,560 firms), 6,713 more are in the western part of the country, while the eastern part of the country has 4,857 joint venture companies. Thus, between 1990 and 1997, the total foreign investment in Hungary is estimated at almost \$17 billion, slightly less than that invested in the Austrian economy. We should also mention that the European Union invested 1 billion ECU in Hungary, through its PHARE programme.

In this section I describe only those features that were to have a direct bearing on Csepel and the influence of these ventures on workers' consciousness, life-styles and changing social relations. Joint ventures were relatively new not only to Csepelers but to Hungary as a whole, so some contextual material is in order. First, the increasing number of joint ventures, while placing Hungary ahead of its East European neighbours and revitalizing production and trade, nevertheless created specific sets of preconditions for the demise of old industries and labour relations. At the same time, such a radical turn from central control to a more market-determined economy helped to undermine the hegemony of the ruling Communist Party over the economy, state planning, and control over consumer goods and trade.<sup>14</sup> This allowed workers to engage actively in the second economy, such as the VGMKs discussed earlier, and subsequently to maintain outwardly nonchalant, indifferent attitudes towards official HSWP party matters.

Unlike grass-roots parochialization and ethnic revitalization among citizens, the original joint ventures were the brainchild of the reform circles of the Kádár government. However variegated and symbolic in meaning and number they may have been, such co-operative endeavours (*vegyesvállalkozás*) were extremely rare during the early period of the Kádár era. The first was set up in 1972, no doubt under the influence of the New Economic Mechanism discussed in Chapter 4 and, until 1982, such firms numbered about one a year. However, by mid-1989, Hungary boasted over 300, a figure well above that of the Soviet Union (270) and Yugoslavia (230). In 1989 alone, 1,200 new firms had been established with foreign holding interests, and by the middle of 1991, there were over 5,200 joint ventures.<sup>15</sup> Undoubtedly, such substantive change occurred in 1989 when Act XXIV on Foreign Investment lifted government control and allowed concessions, ranging from the repatriation of all profit to freedom from taxation on investments for up to five years. Together with the Amendment of 1990, this legislation opened up the possibility for true venture capitalism in Hungary, especially in shortage areas of the economy such as commerce, services and telecommunications. Such ventures were clearly a necessity for a country swamped by a budgetary deficit, for even as the Grósz government took office in 1988 Hungary's external hard-currency debt was the highest per capita in Eastern Europe, totalling \$18.7 billion. With the advent of liberalization and democratization, this debt was reduced somewhat by the end

of the year, only to rise again to over \$20 billion within a few months, an indication of inchoate economic performance cycles in the Hungarian economy as a whole.

Most of these companies took the form known by the Hungarian abbreviations as *Rt* or *Kft* – coinciding with the British *Ltd* or the German *GmbH* – and many of those involved in such ventures received their initial skills and training through prior experience within the legalized ‘second economy’ *VGMKs* discussed earlier. The novelty of such private enterprises, while hardly unique in the West, has proved to be of great importance to Hungary, especially since 1990 when, together with its East-Central European neighbours, the country suffered the loss of the Soviet market and gradually attempted to rearrange its trade relations with the former COMECON countries. This activity took the form of loose co-operative agreements with these neighbouring countries, perhaps the most important being the tripartite economic assistance and trade agreements signed in February 1990 – a historic meeting known as *The Visegrád Summit* – by Lech Walesa, Vaclav Havel and József Antall.

Still more important for workers and their families were the consequences of these supranational transformations as they made themselves felt in their own lives. The development of joint ventures in *Csepel* at first took an unexpected turn: the celebrations of the socialist collapse did not subside even when the first signs appeared on the horizons that not everything is what it appears.

The first East–West joint ventures did not and could not save the traditionally skilled industrial working class, causing enormous resentment among workers and their families. The failures of western capital, technology and labour methods are instructive of the way in which runaway capitalist firms attempted to strike it rich and leave. The first years were hopeful for everyone as the tax advantages and the presence of cheap labour made Hungarian industrial communities prime targets of western investment. In this regard, the *Machine-Tool Factory*, the *Schwinn–Csepel Bicycle Factory* and the *Huss–Csepel* joint ventures deserve special mention for their role in revitalizing heavy industrial production; they were among the most celebrated media cases, both illustrating in general the development of western-style production and management methods and, in particular, the way in which a labour force was re-created in response to a sudden turn of events.

The *Machine-Tool Factory* went through several reorganizations. The factory, for instance, described in great detail in Chapter 5, with its ageing machine-park and troubled market relations (especially since the gradual loosening of the Soviet market) was singled out as having great potential for restructuring. Its rescue was achieved through union with German firm *F + K GmbH*, on 1 March 1991, which proved to be a decisive step for several reasons: it spared the company from being taken into receivership by the state, a fate that befell many industrial plants such as the *Pipe Factory* and

the Steel Works.<sup>16</sup> But the crafting of a new working class was neither as rapid nor as successful as many had hoped: former workers lamented this move and its subsequent sacrifices.<sup>17</sup> This German–Hungarian joint venture, hailed initially as a model for post-socialist industry, received a boost. This was achieved through international loans and by restructuring the labour force. The new leadership halved an already decreased labour force to 620 and, in so doing, contributed to the ranks of thousands of unemployed already collecting benefits in the district. Thus did unemployment as a reality become a working-class concern and an issue for the newly emerging trade union movement. As more effort poured into unemployment agencies and retraining of workers for new technologies and service-based industries, Csepelers, like their counterparts throughout the country, felt the need to follow in the footsteps of successful joint ventures in search of security and employment. A former skilled machinist commented:

As soon as gossip started floating around about closing down part of the factory, workers became frantic. Everybody was talking about loss of jobs, cuts in pay cheques, and moving elsewhere. When, at the first company meeting, it became clear that some of the gossip indeed was fact, we had to take extreme measures. Some of my friends immediately left on their own and searched for jobs in other districts. One colleague of mine, a foreman, joined forces with his son and opened a car breaking shop. But most of us stayed in Csepel, hoping, and turning to friends from whom we hoped for insights.

Such informal techniques, which recall the 'skirt-protection' of the 1920–30s described in Chapter 3, were quite important during 1990–92 when workers with highly skilled qualifications and connections were re-employed at these newly founded joint ventures. This joint venture, however, immediately felt the side-effects of global capitalism going haywire: at the end of 1992 the German partner announced that its German operation had gone bankrupt and the Csepel company was placed in government receivership. The following drastic steps were not expected, however; only 170 workers were offered contracts on a yearly basis. This company barely managed to keep production going for two years. In 1995, a new company, the Singapore-based Excel Machine-Tools, bought the Csepel firm promising a new start for the company and the workers.<sup>18</sup>

The Bicycle Factory's story is equally telling of how the presence of venture capitalist firms reorganized labour by the de-skilling process described originally by Harry Braverman and discussed in Chapter 1 (Braverman 1974; see also Salaman 1986). This joint venture was created in 1988 from the original bicycle factory of the Csepel Works (*Kerékpárgyár*), an outdated and financially unsuccessful factory, and the US concern, Schwinn Inc. For the greater part of the 1980s, the Bicycle Factory's annual quota had been decreasing, profits were in the negative and, lacking state support, it ranked well below those profitable and privileged socialist companies such as the Machine-Tool Factory and Non-Ferrous Metal Works. Its immediate fate would undoubtedly have been similar to that of the hundreds of state firms

that were shut down, privatized through auctions or dissolved into small independent units under the sway of the privatization plan of the government. Ownership of the firm was also a new idea to many workers: instead of 'belonging to the people' (i.e. state ownership), the new company now belonged to the holders of company shares. The Chicago-based Schwinn company provided an impressive initial working capital and thus owned 41 per cent, another 40 per cent belonged to the Hungarian partner. The remainder has been divided between the US firm, Willie Bicycle Company of Bethlehem (Pennsylvania) and the Hungarian Institute of Energy (*Energiagazdálkodási Intézet*), with 9.9 per cent and 9 per cent respectively. Truly a joint East–West venture, it nevertheless needed US 'know-how'. Schwinn's new machine-park and management method – including a reduction of 'middle-level' cadres and rigorously enforced quality control – were among many of the new inventions with which Hungarian workers were forced to contend if they wished to retain their jobs.

The Schwinn contract was not, however, without teething troubles, among which were a negative popular image caused on the one hand by the 'cliquish' stance of a highly selected and protected workforce, and, on the other, the high-priced bicycles it produced, well beyond the reach of most workers. It may be for this very reason that Schwinn stores also began to service and repolish second-hand bicycles throughout Hungary, branching out into service while remaining at the same time a producer. As old brigade structures, the four-corners of decision-making, and labour methods were eliminated, a discontented customer confessed: 'I take home a monthly salary that is half of what a new Schwinn bike costs.' In the case of the worker mentioned above, a unique pattern developed as a result: some former blue-collar skilled workers were transformed into skilled service workers within the same firm. However, while change of ownership and restructuring of the labour force were accepted grudgingly by workers, the news of another sale of the company was shocking. In 1994, the American owners decided to sell the company, arguing the lack of a buyers' market in Hungary for the new, but expensive bikes. This also meant more job losses and insecurity. The new owners could not revitalize production and sales and the company was sold to YBM, an international firm with questionable connections to corporate crime.<sup>19</sup> This deal lasted only two years, when YBM announced that the bike company was up for sale once more. By this time, however, the workforce was greatly reduced, leaving only the most trusted and devoted inner-circle of workers on the pay-roll.

The final example, the Huss Machine concern, although small by western industrial standards, is also important as an indicator of new industrial developments and their consequences for and the transformation of workers' self-image and consciousness. While the Csepel Small Appliance Machine Company (*Egyedi Gépgyár*) provided buildings, machinery and (in the eyes of the Germans) inexpensive labour, the German partner, Huss GmbH of Bremen, brought in one million German marks to rejuvenate old machinery,



renovate buildings and eliminate the former bureaucratic management. Unskilled blue-collar and administrative workers were laid off immediately in a pattern that recalled similar occurrences throughout the country. Women, young and older workers suffered most under these radical changes. The foundation of these joint ventures – which were viewed by the new government as a welcome development – included not only firing workers and managers but, to the delight of some, the illegalization of the trade unions (*Szakszervezet*). As a young worker quipped sarcastically 'They kicked the union in the butt' (*seggbe rúgták a szakszervezetet*). Thus, strange though it may seem, workers at the new Huss company have no organized protection or representation, a curiosity especially in view of the fact that, in the Bremen half of the corporation, an efficient labour organization protects the rights of workers. A displaced worker in his mid-thirties who worked under the old management for ten years articulated his thoughts in this way:

The trade union is an outdated idea from the end of the last century. The workers' council should have been established after the 1956 revolution. The old labour union does not have a place here any more, what we need is an able management enjoying the mutual trust of the workers.

Whether or not his wish will become a reality in the future reorganization processes, this idea seemed quite a radical change for Hungarian workers who under state control benefited from the trade union's protection. The new management took immediate steps to create favourable conditions for them, refurbishing and modernizing showers and the old locker room, which 'hadn't seen a lick of paint in 20 years', as one employee commented. The second-economy work units – the VGMKs and the 'company councils' discussed in previous chapters and hailed by the former management as a 'part of the real socialist reforms' – under new regulations became superfluous and were immediately eliminated. However, as workers' discontent grew in proportion to rapid price increases and inflationary changes, the hourly wage was raised threefold, and those workers who agreed were taken to Munich at the company's expense to celebrate a fake German *Oktoberfest*. Not only was there no cost to Csepelers for this junket, but they were also provided a modest stipend of 'pocket-money' for the trip. This type of recreational activity is indeed far from the traditional, homogenized union-sponsored vacation (*beutaló*) at the company's vacation retreat, a common practice mentioned earlier with regard to socialization.<sup>20</sup> It remains to be seen how far such concessions and management styles will cater to workers and help create a workforce capable of boosting Hungary's sluggish economy. There are indications, however, that workers' disenchantment with the new forms has, despite such initial benefits, been substantial. A worker in his early twenties, who, fearing reprisal, did not wish to be identified, commented in a way that was unexpected to me but less so to his partners who joined our conversation:

Workers are not interested in politics. We don't care whether it is called democracy or state socialism. The important thing is to have bread on the table and good working conditions. Everyone curses the previous Kádár era now, and while it's true that they did make mistakes, the general quality of life was better for us. At least we felt more secure and protected.<sup>21</sup>

Such a common feeling among workers is based on a somewhat contradictory principle of antagonism concerning unions: on the one hand, many rejected the single, centrally directed organized labour structures as outmoded remnants of state socialism unable to implement the results of joint ventures brought by economic reorganization; and, on the other, while many lamented the passing of trade union organizations, they were too weak to unionize in defence of their own rights. As a small highly trained core of blue- and white-collar workers were elevated to privileged positions, others were left out of thriving joint ventures. Thus not only was alienation reproduced under the new economic and political reorganizations, but it was subsequently further intensified as masses of workers, youth, women and the elderly became disenfranchised and marginalized; at the same time, a new technically skilled labour force was created in tandem with the intelligentsia. The sense that 'nobody cares about us' (*senki sem törődik velünk*) might well have been a galvanizing element in the formation of a future labour organization and working-class movement.

What these stories of East–West joint ventures really show is a tragic yet not unexpected development. As is clear from the Csepel firms sold, not all privatized firms with western ownership were success stories. For most firms within the conglomerate of the heavy industrial Csepel Works the experience of the transition to a capitalist market economy was painful. This experimentation with western capitalism – new managerial techniques, production cycles and hierarchy – however, did cost thousands of jobs affecting the very nature of both blue- and white-collar existence. In fact, by the late 1990s, the Csepel image of the 'Manhattan of Hungary' was tainted and the ironic expression 'Island of the thousand unemployed' was used increasingly by disillusioned residents.<sup>22</sup>

That this period fundamentally altered the political economy and labour relations may easily be discerned in young workers' transformed sense of identities. Both work and labour was so altered that talking about them simply became a joke among the district residents. As a young worker argued: 'To work here now means you can do a new task every morning. Once they tell you to sweep the dust, the next morning they ask you to haul some object, the next to screw some screws on the assembly line. Finally, they inform you that they need a manager-type of worker. My father is turning in his grave.' What I found astonishing in Csepel by the mid-1990s was that no informants referred to themselves as a 'worker' (*munkás*) and the expression *ifjúmunkás* – a phrase invented by the early communist movement as discussed before – caused uproarious laughter among young

workers. Both titles were old-fashioned and left a bitter taste in their mouths recalling Stalinism and state socialism. Yet many felt that their class inheritance, place in the new hierarchy and interests were common, giving them a strong sense of urgency to find new means to fight for their rights, benefits and jobs. Others lamented the fact that despite its faults state socialism gave them some sort of security, a right to work and secure employment.

In the new global industrial relations, however, only a small percentage of young workers, especially the more energetic and educated ones, have been able to adjust quickly by finding jobs in the slowly emerging high-tech industry and the service sector. Those not so lucky have been forced to extend their school years enjoying state scholarships; others even less fortunate are trying to make ends meet by doing various part-time jobs. Not having enough to live on on their own, many in their mid- to late thirties have remained at home adding to the size of their natal families. Under the sway not of the official but the global youth culture, this generation has been influential in extending the category of youth – so much so that by the late 1990s the term ‘infantilization of society’ was being used to describe labour relations and their societal consequences.<sup>23</sup>

As several scholars have argued, as the new regimes of the former Eastern bloc attempt to implement the market economy and integrate within the European Union and the world market, a new class system and politics somewhat comparable to that of Western Europe are emerging (Elster, Offe and Preuss 1998; Halpern and Wyplosz 1998; Stark and Bruszt 1998; Szelényi 1998). As the stories related here reveal, the structure and politics of this new societal transformation will be the result of transformed productive relations and political and economic life, of which East–West joint industrial ventures are but a single aspect. Yet, as I have shown, this transformation is a fundamental one in which people will develop new possibilities and strategies for survival as the labour process coexists with everyday cultural practices. In this development, working-class districts such as Csepel will have a hard lesson to offer to other communities.<sup>24</sup>

## EPILOGUE: CLASS, YOUTH AND THE STATE

To conclude this study, let us recall its original hypothesis: that production, consciousness and reproduction form parts of a complex historical phenomenon, for reproducing social relations depends on the ideological constituents of the relations of production and expressions of class consciousness. My goal has not been to provide a monocausal explanation of why state socialism collapsed, nor an economic reductionist argument for the emergence of a working community. Rather, my intention is to show how politics (ideology), economy (work) and reproduction (socialization) are intertwined, directly and indirectly, in different historical periods, to facilitate the emergence of what has commonly been considered a 'working class'. As Gerald Sider argues with regard to late twentieth-century working-class communities in Newfoundland, these areas of analysis are flexible and culturally relevant, and participation in class formation and reproduction of class relations (the 'political process') are not necessarily as they were during industrialism and capitalism (1988: 182). In a similar vein, Michael Blim suggests that the 'global factory is shaped in important ways by the actions of and conflicts between a variety of agents – from nation-states and capitalist classes to workers and communities' (1992: 19). Italo Pardo, in another context, suggests that as anthropologists we must go 'beyond the recognition of social and cultural tension and of the unequal distribution of power, authority and resources' (1996: 187) in order to comprehend fully life in urban Europe and the individuals' place in society.

In this case study I have argued that through the ethnographic microcosm of Csepel, during the war economy of the 1910s and 1930s–1940s, Stakhanovism of the 1950s, mismanaged state enterprises of late state socialism, or fledgling East–West joint ventures of the 1990s, working-class developments followed closely on the heels of alterations in local and international political economic processes. The analyses of the lives of working youth have provided a key to understanding these processes. Moreover, I have attempted to place youth in the centre of anthropological inquiry for what Michael Shanahan writes for sociologists should also concern anthropologists: 'The possibility that the transition to adulthood has become less predictable and more precarious requires further study at the level of both the society and the individual' (2000: 685–6). As I hope to have demonstrated,

for workers problems within the production sphere indicate above all problems within the realm of reproduction as family, friendship and informal neighbourhood networks provide workers with a solid base for consolidating alliances and developing mutual interests. Contrary to these non-state informal institutions, formal organizations, parties and official central policies of the state operated under the banner of political education, claiming to serve the 'best interests of workers', especially younger workers. It is often argued – whether from the left or the right – that young people require central directives, organized activities, formal schooling and a bureaucratized political socialization in order to become faithful – conservative and religious – citizens as during the interwar period or the 'vanguard' socialist youth between 1949 and 1988, committed to the state. In order to achieve full political indoctrination the regimes structured and fully monitored the recreational outlets of youth, and political rallies were filled with dogmatic speeches. Similarly, tightly controlled vocational training was created for youth and, despite the fact that some cultural organizations were flexible enough to encourage individual initiatives, political activities tended to be tightly structured and homogenized. Yet, as anthropologists have suggested, social relations in state socialist societies were not abstract entities but the loci of a multiplicity of practices and discourse of negotiations and contestations. Other disciplines have come to similar conclusions: 'Learning to use the dissipative structures culture provides to alleviate frustration is the main task of maturity' (Csikszentmihalyi and Larson 1984: 278). It should come as no surprise that working-class youth, before and after state socialism, found outlets beyond the avenues provided by the state. It is therefore to be expected that Csepel youth's attitudes and life-styles resembled those of their peers in the West, or, more remotely, their predecessors in their quest to maintain their identity and organize their world. For the working-class youth studied here, that world was replete with officially sanctioned entities and bureaucratic hurdles, resulting not only in 'frustrations' but also in loss of identity as well as atomization both from state structures and from one another.

However, as historical anthropological studies of European urban working-class life have revealed (Kalb 1997; Pardo 1996; Rotenberg 1992) individuals do manage to forge a multiplicity of shifting alliances, multifaceted relations and powerful local networks in order to construct, maintain and improve their positions, power base and identities. Of primary importance among these considerations is the way in which Hungarian workers managed to sustain identities and institutions despite such challenges throughout successive periods: royalist-fascist, Stalinist and 'mature' (now moribund) state socialist regimes. The history of these years is perhaps best summarized by invoking three names: Horthy, Rákosi and Kádár, whose successive reigns coincided with periods of crises and revolutions in which diverse state political economies sought to control and manipulate young workers for the state's productive and reproductive needs.

While these periods embody important differences, the similarities are essential to note since all three epochs were based on strong central control of the economy, politics and culture, and all were preceded and followed by a transitional phase, filled with crises and turmoil that included not only economic and industrial upheaval but concomitant cultural developments. In tandem with their youthful counterparts in the East, economic and political reorganizations affected the ways in which a distinctive youthful ethos evolved in Hungary, contributing to a widening generation gap and disaffection with state ideology. Consequently, by focusing on youth as an age-manipulated target group – however elusive this concept may be – these periods reveal themselves to be not only the interpreter's constructions, but an intellectual model of comparison, analysis and differentiation.

In the last century of the second millennium, industrial workers all over the world experienced major cataclysms as urban life-ways were transformed. Hungarian workers have, as a result of the socio-economic dispositions described in this book, forged new attitudes and actions based on their common background, educational practice and mode of production. Few communities have experienced such socio-economic and political upheavals as the steel-mill town of Csepel; few segments of society have been so alternately claimed, dispossessed and abandoned by successive regimes and ideologies as the industrial workers of this island. Most industrial communities, whether they wished it or not, have found themselves in the vortex of powerful outside influences transforming their lives, first, from small-scale peasants to agro-proletariat, then to industrial wage-labourers and subsequently, from unemployed beggars to vanguard socialist workers to a 'joint-venture proletariat'. Under capitalism and fascism, youthful Csepel workers were allied against management and the National Organization of Industrialists (GYOSZ) by incorporating radical ideas of western working-class movements. What drove this generation was a radical sense of class identity and consciousness participating, willingly and without coercion, along the lines directed by the leftist and social-democratic grass-roots organizations in making of their own lives, a process concomitant with the conditions of the exploited nature and poverty of the Hungarian working class in general.

When Stalinism was established in 1948, Csepel represented a complex conglomerate of cultures, reproducing its capitalist heritage and subsequently creating the antithesis of that legacy. From this fusion, a complicated social seesaw emerged; a process that goes well beyond the imagination of those for whom class – its nature and formation – is viewed as a unidirectional and homogeneous entity. Thus Csepel became identified as a model socialist industrial town, a small-scale replica not of an ideal society but an experimental stage towards a society with ideals. To this, Stalinism added another transformation: a new labour force, more numerous and, obviously, more powerful than ever before, manipulated through central directives, as

boom-and-bust cycles followed the need for restructuring during much of the 1950s and 1960s.

After 1956, and as a result of socialist reorganization, the re-adoption of Marxist-Leninist ideas, and refashioned yet still dogmatic Stalinist policies, the state increasingly infiltrated the private lives of its citizenry. No longer seen as religious converts, 'bourgeois ethnics' or uneducated apprentices at the mercy of privileged master workers, young workers were offered an official identity with the KISZ movement monitoring their lives and educating them according to the state's needs. Like their counterparts during the interwar period, youth in the 1960s and 1970s – and, I might add, even today – found themselves in a web of diverse and often contradictory interests. As a result of de-Stalinization, for example, a strong sense of duality – a kind of psychological 'splitting' – pervaded their consciousness and class position: on the one hand, they preserved aspects of the pre-war heritage of Red Csepel, while, on the other, they were ideologically subjected to the concerns of the new crisis-ridden, socialist nation-state. An added difficulty was to be exhibited in the youthful expressions of their age, both in private life and popular culture, so often in sharp contradistinction to the rigid models set by state policies and executed by the youth organ, the Communist Youth League. Their informal relations, private lives and patterns of popular culture can be interpreted as a form of youthful resistance to state directives without the much commercialized nature of western youth sub-cultures. In such a context, 'consciousness', in the strictest sense of the word, should be understood as a conglomerate of ideas, values and aspirations based on subjective and objective exigent experiences in everyday life, which maintained a youthful identity aside from its official inscription. The material and mental aspects of their lives – following the French anthropologist Maurice Godelier (1990), who argues for a flexible infusion of these categories – thus formed a coherent system that determined their identities and propensity for political action in reconsolidating their positions in society.

The original premise of socialist regimes was clear and unambiguous: the political socialization of youth was supposed to enhance life goals and improve economic, political and cultural opportunities. However, by limiting participation, space and events the communist youth organization also constrained youth. In accordance with company regulations, KISZ events took place at the end of the working day. Regular club meetings were scheduled from 4 to 6 or 7 o'clock. Sometimes these monthly club afternoons (*klubdélután*) were scheduled immediately after the regular bi-monthly KISZ meetings. Thus, those who attended the meeting stayed to eat, dance, play and socialize. A popular pastime was watching rented videos of foreign films that had not been released nationally. 'We love the action, colour and the American scenery', one member said, in favour of foreign videos. Programmes such as this were well attended even though few really understood what took place in the US-made *Escape from New York*, for

instance. Clearly, such club events reflected a KISZ leader's sense that 'Hungarian youth have an insatiable hunger for learning about the West and not enough about their own country's heritage.'

This 'hunger' for western culture and commodities was well known in the former Soviet bloc, Cuba and even China (Hooper 1985: 133–5). However, it remained unsatisfied despite the fact that these more informal gatherings provided opportunities for members to socialize. Most young workers whose favourite pastime had been to stop for a beer at the Aquarium Bistro complained of the lack of alcohol at these institutionalized 'club afternoons'. One mechanic said: 'Look, after a whole day's work at the milling-shop, I want to wash the steel-dust down with a beer. So what's wrong with that?' While it may appear from this remark that friction was attributable to the absence of alcohol, it was nevertheless clear that it represented yet another strategy: the KISZ followed governmental directives to keep its members under the watchful eyes of 'Big Brother'. Another major problem noted by members concerned the age and occupational segregation of members, for this atomization seemed to reflect the general factionalism in the firm. Those who worked together in the shops tended to form cohorts and, within that group, young people remained within their own enclave, as in the offices. Members in their late twenties and early thirties considered age separation to be a factor in this factionalism: 'What can I, a 30-year-old engineer with two children and a half-built house and car re-payments, talk about with an 18- or 19-year-old who has no knowledge of these things?' an official asked me. Another functionary remarked, 'People come to the club to enjoy themselves. Whether from the offices or the shops, they like to dance, listen to rock music and watch TV.' However, as another youth argued, group feeling seemed to change once young people returned to their respective places in the company's hierarchy: 'You spend time together and then you go back where you came from.' Favouritism and fissioning undermined the cohesion and ideological unity desired by leaders as participants self-segregated into age, gender and regional groups.

The final consideration of these more informal get-togethers is best summarized by a worker from the sheet-metal shop: 'When I work nine-ten hours a day in the factory I don't want to spend my free time in the factory.' Evening and weekend activities such as hiking, trips to other cities, dinner-dances and parties with youths visiting from other socialist countries were even more problematic for many members because of the time they had to sacrifice away from families and friends. Children were often mentioned as the main drawback to parents' involvement with the youth organization and its activities. Separation of members into white- and blue-collar groups revealed distinctive cultural tastes with clear class differences. Purchase of special passes and season tickets, provided by the Communist Party, to opera, jazz, classical music and theatre was common only among white-collar members in their late twenties and early thirties. Younger working-class youth preferred rock concerts (though over-priced tickets often prevented



them from attending) but reading was another leisure pursuit, divided by class and age.

Clearly, gender, regional and class backgrounds were an important basis for forming alliances as well as separating youth from one another. Young males with higher education found pleasure in reading technical studies and classical and popular literature. Women read and bought biographies and books on health and child-care, handicrafts, poetry and novels. In contrast, blue-collar youth preferred travelogues, science fiction, sports and even home improvement and do-it-yourself literature. When I asked a political leader about ideological literature he admitted, 'Only the most committed leaders and functionaries regularly read books and magazines that relate to their official political work' – a statement that seemed to be the general consensus among other leaders as well.

Participation in more formal political affairs had its own problems, as the middle and high-level leadership were usually present on these occasions and the 'resort functionaries' were the next group from which participants were recruited; their close associates and friends made up the third group of participants. Taken as a whole, active participation in formal events represented roughly one-third of the total membership, as different events drew different youth. Among the socialist traditions, the May Day demonstration and the '15 March' celebration of the Revolutionary Youth Days attracted more members than others. Some young people felt a sense of pride on these days: 'I remember the heroes who fought for the freedom of Hungary', said one youth. 'I like to commemorate our past, both the socialist and beyond', another youth commented after the official May Day demonstration. Some participated because friends organized the events; others enjoyed the carnival atmosphere, while still others were there 'just for the heck of it' (*csak a hecc kedvéért*). These were provocative matters, which sparked disagreements within the youth organization.

Thus, the low level of participation in the official youth movement can be accounted for by several factors. The first is the lukewarm attitude to participation in political life by company officials, non-party older workers, and parents and relatives alike. The non-politicized nature of private lives was also responsible for a lack of interest in functionary positions. Numbers notwithstanding, leaders, functionaries and counsellors were core members to be mobilized rapidly at any given time and who participated in the political educational processes. The heterogeneous and constantly fluctuating membership contributed to the difficulties of organized party work and activities. Planning and uniformity foisted upon each group by the Central Committee was also responsible for preventing each organization from conducting its affairs according to its own needs.

The second factor in this socialist experimentation had to do with the contradiction between the political goals of the state and the workers' own desires. The heavy work load and the leadership's pressures on youth to

participate in the political education and institutional forms of recreational activities were simply overwhelming (cf. also Szelényi 1998: 127).

It is easy to see that in contrast to their Czechoslovak, Romanian and Polish counterparts – who were able to forge strong alliances in the form of Charter 77, workers' uprising and Solidarity, respectively – Hungarian workers during the 30 years of Kádárist rule were far from being in the forefront of radical attempts to develop the 'national road to socialism' whose form varied in these state socialisms. However, workers' movements and the nature of working-class consciousness, as argued in recent studies, may differ fundamentally in accordance with national position in the world market, local specificities of the industry in question and traditions of working-class alliance (Agar 1986; Burawoy 1989; Fantasia 1988; Nash 1983; Pardo 1996; Sider 1989; Simpson 1989).

As it happened, the worldwide integration of production since the late 1960s brought in its wake realignments within the labour force not only in the First and Third Worlds (Calagione, Francis and Nugent 1992; Nash 1983; Rothstein and Blim 1992; Vallas 1987), but in the former Soviet-dominated Second World as well. The division of labour in Hungary based on gender, age and, to a lesser extent, ethnicity was exacerbated as the socialist nations of Eastern Europe experienced global crises on a massive scale. As the history of the Csepel factories illustrates, Hungarian society has been in a state of foment since the mid- to late 1980s; as heavy industry was reorganized, agriculture liberalized and the blue-collar labour force reduced, service industry and white-collar occupations have increased, and the educational system has been restructured accordingly. The totality of these factors determined the possibility of strong workers' organizations and their propensity for unified action if not for the creation of a democratic civil society by the beginning of the early 1990s but certainly the delegitimation of state socialist rule by the late 1980s. The social and historical contexts I have analysed in this study provide an insight into the interplay between workers' culture and everyday lives – the backbone of individual as well as collective identities and the dynamic labour movements – and the reproduction of these organizations on the local scale.

These changes at the waning of state socialism paralleled the turmoil of the legal and political spheres, as exemplified by the creation of new parties, independent associations and media and grass-roots organizations, as well as a degree of cooperation with the West – both in politics and in the economy – unknown since the interwar period. In the formation of a civil society, the legitimacy of the Kádár government came to be questioned not in open confrontation but in subtle, often symbolic fashion, mirroring that of neighbouring states (Feher and Arato 1991; Gati 1989; Laba 1991; Ost 1990; Ramet 1990; Rau 1991; Riordan 1989; Skilling 1989; Swain 1992; Tismaneanu 1990; Tokes 1996). As Hungary's well-known literary figure and social critic, György Konrád, observes:

People freed themselves from a dominant paradigm and created another for themselves. A new sensibility appeared which manifested itself in many shapes and political schools of thought. In any event, it was capable of producing the dissolution of the dictatorship. It did not stop there; it also knows how to organize a party and how to take its place in Parliament, in boardrooms and in the academies, and makes its presence felt even there. (1991: 61)

Interestingly, this new intellectual thinking came together with the wholesale adoption of capitalist ideology. As Nancy Ries put it with regard to the Russians: 'The marketization of all sectors of society was widely envisioned as a cure-all for the problems of people, and socialist ideals were held by many to be rubbish of long-term propaganda' (1997: 176). And surely there have been serious mistakes with regard to western aid (Wedel 1998) and industrial partnerships in the process of the reconfiguration of state power (Verdery 1996: 225). Needless to say, all socio-cultural change is easier to envisage than to implement.

However, this post-industrialist and post-Kádárist transformation stood in dialectical relationship to the way in which Hungarians – workers and intellectuals alike – perceived themselves and the world around them. On the one hand, they sought to improve their position; on the other, once the desired changes had been incorporated into their daily existence, further repercussions followed. Just as during the tumultuous era between the two world wars, these molecular metamorphoses of the late 1980s and 1990s were brought into being by the workers themselves – in the industrial centres of Csepel, Ózd, Diósgyőr, Dunaújváros and Miskolc – through their response to alterations in their lives and consciousness. Less radical and adamant than Polish workers of Gdansk and Gdynia, not as desperate or violent as Romanians in Brasov and Bucharest, Hungarian workers quietly continued to work not to fulfil any established quota but to re-establish their standard of living and thus continued their vocation and expressed their political negation.

By 1989, for the first time in their history, the KISZ and the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party were unable to meet their challenge, and a decrease in membership followed on the heels of these recent transformations. In this analysis, I have demonstrated that Csepel youth were (and continue to be) mortgaged to a heritage unique in Hungarian history for no other group can claim such a relationship, questionable though it may be in today's 'post-communist' climate, to Lenin, Stalin, Brezhnev and Gorbachev. Simultaneously, they were linked to the opposite side of the ideological spectrum: to Manfred Weiss, bloody Thursdays, the street fights of 1956, the removal of the statue of Lenin outside the gates of the Csepel Works and, ultimately, to the reintroduction of joint East–West industrial enterprises and work ethic. While Hungarian youth represent one small segment of the Hungarian population of 4,305,000 under the age of 30 (about 40 per cent out of Hungary's 10 million in 2001), their history, concerns and aspirations point far beyond the weight of their numbers and the pervasive

undercurrents within that society, its workings and legacy. It is clear that these age-specific groups have always been hard-working, eager and socially conscious, willing to participate in the building of a civil as well uncivil society that *they* feel belongs to *them* (Kürti 1999b, 1998, 2001; Nagy 2000). As I have suggested, some critics would argue that Hungarian workers are dispossessed and thus unable to identify common goals, a view that does not, I believe, adequately account for the fact that technological innovations and strict management control in the workplace are only a part of the totality of social forces actively shaping workers' consciousness (Burawoy and Lukács 1992; Clawson 1980; Lukács 1978).

While blue-collar youth have been an undeniably dispossessed and exploited group in Hungary (as elsewhere in the industrial world), the causes of their status are attributable in part to their marginalization by respective regimes as well as to their relative inexperience and lack of participation in political and economic life (Gábor 1993; Gábor et al. 1996; Gzásó and Stumpf 1995). As I hope to have shown, this particular working generation ought not to be viewed simply as a homogeneous group, for differences based on age, gender, regional, educational and occupational background have prevented them from achieving solidarity within the institutional framework of political organizations. The examples introduced in the foregoing chapters suggest, then, that their position on the social seesaw has not been universal but differentiated according to the political and productive roles they occupy.

The upheavals of the late 1980s in Hungary resemble Bogdan Denitch's distinction between liberalization and democratization with regard to the former Yugoslavia: the former, he considers, refers to top-down reorganization efforts by the country's ruling technocracy and middle classes (1990). Democratization – a notion similar to what Timothy Garton Ash has referred to as 'refolution' – is a 'messier, more turbulent, uncontrolled, and contested process' from below (1990: 39). I have sought to explain in the previous chapters that in Hungary, the former process had in fact been in effect since the last few years of state socialism. It might also be argued that when Hungary's ageing ruler, János Kádár, was demoted in 1988, and replaced by Károly Grósz, the 'legitimation deficit' (Heller 1990: 10) of the communist government was nearly instantaneous. It is the second process, democratization, I have aimed to trace here: the specificities of working lives forging alliances and maintaining pressures from the local level upward that enabled workers and intellectual oppositional undercurrents to break free and appear publicly (Haraszi 1991; Szabó 1991).

The 1990s were not kind to societies that broke free from the Soviet yoke. The attempted coup in Moscow, the violence of vigilante miners in Bucharest and the vicious civil wars raging in Yugoslavia and parts of the former Soviet Union quite overshadowed the more subtle developments in Hungary. At the same time, in Hungary, three historic developments warrant particular attention: the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact, the disbanding of the economic organization, the COMECON, and the complete and unconditional

withdrawal of Soviet troops from Hungary. All took place in a relatively brief period, although they had been in progress for at least a decade, during which time these issues came under regular attack by members of the opposition and youth activists. These considerations highlight that the data I have presented here on industrial crisis and political culture, when seen from the 'worm's eye view', suggest a more feasible thesis somewhere between the inherent structuralist, economic reductionist and the '*Blitzkrieg*' explanatory paradigms. In short, the primary explanation for the party's – 'the country's leading force' – loss of its legitimating power may be found in the societal processes of the Soviet bloc *during* the 1980s. At least in Hungary, as Csepelers themselves explain, the ruling Communist Party slowly lost its legitimacy and power to rule as its popularity faded, especially in the mid-1980s as disenchantment with the system continued apace. Concomitantly, its youth organizations, the official trade union and the workers' guard were affected equally through losses in membership, catering to only a small, committed, yet increasingly powerless group. In the case of the Communist Youth League, statements proffered by members themselves (as indicated in previous chapters) suggest that the events taking place after 1988 were a direct result of the abandonment of the party and its ideology by the masses since the early 1980s. Clearly, a momentum was created in Hungary, just as in much of the former Soviet bloc by the peoples who wished to free themselves from the tyranny of the party-state and who wished to live in a more democratic society capable of adjusting to their needs. There are, to be sure, dangers in this evolutionary path. Adam Michnik, Poland's famous labour organizer and a member of the freely elected Polish Parliament, writes:

The greatest threat to democracy today is no longer communism, either as a political movement or as an ideology. The threat grows instead from a combination of chauvinism, xenophobia, populism, and authoritarianism, all of them connected with the sense of frustration typical of great social upheavals. This is the perspective from which we must view the old conflicts that are now flaring up again in Central and Eastern Europe. (1991: 196)

While we may empathize with Michnik and his fellow former dissidents-turned-statesmen, it should be noted in light of this study that no democratic nation-state at this globalized historical moment, with whatever breadth or cultural relativism it may be defined, can survive the test of time without support from the working classes. That they do indeed have a say is illustrated by recent examples of the independent grass-roots movement and workers' collective action witnessed at the start of 1989 when the short-lived Grósz government announced a 15–30 per cent increase in consumer prices. For it was the workers of Csepel who voiced their dismay by demanding concomitant salary increases to which the government finally conceded. In the autumn of 1990, taxi drivers paralysed the country in a three-day stand-off to demand a reduction in fuel prices, while in the early days of 1991, train

conductors forced concessions from the Antall government, only a few months after it was sworn in. Other, smaller, actions are too numerous to itemize, yet it is clear that a lack of central planning of politics and economy coupled with unbridled capitalism had triggered political actions of working-class origin.

At present, for the first time since the Second World War, independent trade unions are mushrooming all over the country as factories reorganize, joint East–West ventures are established and multi-party politics take shape. As European integration is progressing, and the European Union itself faces mounting political, economic and social difficulties in the treacherous trajectory in the next decades (Shore 2000), it can only be hoped that this will not take place at the expense of ordinary citizens in its various regions. With the worldwide integration of capital and labour, working-class life will certainly face tremendous difficulties and problems. Whether a viable political working-class agenda might be achieved among isolated and regionalized political actions is too soon to know; such unity and force will depend not only upon people's wish for democracy and 'Europeanness', but on realignments in national social and political structure, and on the configuration of the global economy. Throughout the major periods workers – while under the sway of dominant state ideology – were none the less able to unite and endure oppression and exploitation, making their voices heard throughout these upheavals. As even distant regions are drawn into worldwide productive and consumerist markets, workers of Csepel will confront the consequences of maintaining or rejecting their history, radicalism and cultural heritage at the beginning of a new millennium. The places of youth in this confrontation need to be elicited and, eventually, empowered. For, as the planners – socialists, liberals and conservatives alike – know all too well, the future belongs to youth. They should, however, consider one more thing seriously: that the present is not without them either. This holds true for anthropologists as well.

During the periods known as Stalinism and, later, state socialism, as I have described in Chapter 4, the industrial town of Csepel was incorporated into Budapest as one of its outlying districts. Known as the twenty-first district, Csepelers were placed in the limelight of the 'reconstruction' following the war. The working class lost its identity and legitimacy as a class on its own and, instead, was refashioned as *the* class of and for the Communist Party. Youth, whether male or female, were entrusted with the legacy not only of Marx, Engels and Lenin, but of Stalin, Rákosi and, subsequently, János Kádár. No longer an 'unconscious generation' or 'helpless exploited workers' as the party *apparatchik* believed, they were singled out to become the vanguard to fulfil the party's task: to build the communist utopia of the future by transforming the present according to the wishes of party dreamers. Their whole lives, from crèche to vocational training, were monitored accordingly. In order to fulfil these expectations, young people were given not only an opportunity to obtain housing, education and

recreation but, in exchange, were to remain true to the working-class generational spirit as embodied by the political organization of the DISZ and its post-Stalinist *alter ego*, the KISZ. After 1956, by all counts a radical turning point for the party whose leaders realized that to keep peace in the country it must provide concessions (the socialist 'social contract') and, especially following the 1968 reorganizations, the post-war baby-boomers were becoming a more integral part of the production sphere. As hard-line communist ideology waned, youth were asked to work harder and more efficiently for, as the leaders assumed, through work – and demagoguery – a socialist society would eventually materialize. This propaganda clearly stood behind the creation of the VT and the second economy work units, the VGMK. By releasing its grip on the productive sphere, however, the Communist Party was also admitting its failure.

Curious though it may seem, the district as a whole continued to benefit from this crisis and the state socialist urban planning under way from the mid- to late 1980s. By 1990, Csepel's population had reached an all-time high of 90,000. While between 1980 and 1985, a total of 5,243 homes were built, housing fever – an important element to counter the Hungarian shortage economy discussed by Kornai (1990) – showed a gradual decline in the nation's capital, and in 1989, only 308 houses were constructed in Csepel (KSH 1990: 95). Along the Danube, private homes and 'gardens plots' (*hobbikertek*, small private vegetable allotments) proliferated, providing their owners with a sense of privacy and independence. As the former heavy industrial nature of Csepel gave away to a more modern cosmopolitan milieu, private shops and businesses flourished. During my first fieldwork phase in Csepel, I was constantly reminded by my youthful informants of a popular joke in Hungary that the real political and economic system in Hungary during the Kádár era was not socialism but *gebinizmus* (family business), the new form of private enterprise system capable of existing only under state socialism. Many precedents can be cited for such a transformation, for example those during the interwar period described in Chapter 3, but none so specific and refined. Throughout the earlier political upheavals and economic crises, Csepel had incurred heavy losses, yet managed to survive. It would seem that during the late 1980s, Csepel faced another long and challenging road: to continue to confront hardships in a society undergoing a major reassessment and, perhaps, to accept the extinction of the very patterns that made it unique for nearly a century. When one of the last workers' quarters built by Manfred Weiss in the mid-1910s was demolished in 1986 – watched by dozens of families with tears in their eyes – the original Csepel Iron and Metal Works had become but a shadow of its former glory. The industrial capitalism that had stamped its mark on Csepel for so long – so abhorred by the Kádár regime and its Csepel supporters – was successfully eradicated. This transformation, as we have seen in Chapter 8, has had its own version of self-irony with the 'refolution of 1989'

(Ash 1990) and the implementation of market economic principles and East–West joint ventures.

Apart from committed party leaders, in the eyes of most young Csepelers, these changes were welcomed, for they were eager to shed the negative connotations of their town's former proletarian heritage. The price to maintain their relative independence from the factory (production) and politics (ideology), and the way in which the *modus operandi* and *modus vivendi* of this transformation took place, raises important questions about relationships between politics and youth culture.

The diverse activities I have discussed in this study, especially Chapter 7, do not engage all young people, just as fishermen would refuse to play chess with older men in the central park of the city, while young women would not be seen unescorted at a Sunday afternoon soccer game. While some youngsters periodically visited the Workers' Home only at the weekend and never used the library or workshops, youth who commuted to Csepel factories on a daily basis did not participate in the leisure activities of their fellow workers, but left the city soon after their shift. Others were prevented from participation in these collective and informal gatherings because of time and monetary considerations or responsibilities at home. What is clear, however, is the fact that youthful activity carves out its meaning and significance in time and space.

Going out with young people to parks, lovers' lanes or parties, has been, for me, a perplexing experience: what, I asked myself, is the importance of these seemingly aimless, meaningless informal get-togethers for youth? Comparative studies on young people's experiences with public space and the street suggest that youth prefer areas they feel belong to them (Bolin 1995; Corrigan 1979). In fact, there is a growing agreement among scholars viewing urban youth cultures that 'the space of the street is often the only autonomous space that young people are able to carve out for themselves and that hanging around, and larking about, on the streets, parks and in shopping malls, is one form of youthful resistance (conscious and unconscious) to adult power' (Valentine, Skelton and Chambers 1998: 7). Smith makes a compelling point with regard to former East German youth that they reverted to spaces for resistance by 'using margins of or subverting the use of significance of official spaces' (1998: 291). Drawing together the various activities presented as characteristic of the leisure life-style of young workers, I conclude that diversity, flexibility and being together are of primary importance in their development. A wide range of activities for them is a way of life to survive against all odds. In this struggle a deeply felt need to satisfy their heterogeneous and labile needs throughout the urban pathway has been at the core of their consciousness. During vocational schooling and immediately afterwards in the factory, lives of working youth have been constantly monitored and regulated by the clock and laws governing their existence. Free, unstructured time is, then, closely interrelated with the idea of autonomy. Further, since much of their work, political



and family activity was directed from above, either by managers or elders representing the KISZ, the HSWP, the trade union or management, these get-togethers, on the contrary, did not have an institutional flavour or framework, and were entirely self-regulated by them. As rhetoric, the friendly advice and open criticism are anchored in their behaviour, and not easily accessible for use in schools or the workplace. The state socialist system endeavoured to be an authority *in loco parentis* but rarely succeeded in overpowering the mutually agreeable conventions made by age-specific groups. In this sense, the socialist state did not, and could not, simply withdraw from intervening in the private lives of ordinary citizens as Lampland suggests (1995: 185). On the contrary, it tried to extend labour relations, political hierarchy and age-categories outside the office, the political organizations and the factories. By so doing, mostly consciously but also inadvertently, men and women, young and old alike, felt the intrusion of the state in the private aspects of their lives.

Youthful citizens, however, are never so helpless and without their own means to survive and counter state policies and official propaganda dimensions. The aim of these activities is sociability and leisure away from home and factory, destinations of their own choosing; whether the occasion was having a beer or going to the disco, sitting on park benches or playing soccer, these activities tend to bring youth of the same generation, class and occupational background together. They make sure that authority and power of the institutional kind are beyond the scope of these activities allowing youth to move freely in and out while maintaining a sense of being a part of their own choice. As a way of life of working youth, these informal networks have certainly been anti-state in that they turned them away from the confinements of state institutions. In this new climate, the elites and educated youth were pushing for more and more changes. Independent opposition movements emerged, out of which the university students' peace movement the 'Dialogue' group received nation-wide attention (Haraszti 1990: 75–6). For most working youth, however, informal networks, the thriving second economy and consumerist popular culture provided all they needed. That such participation has been a part of a youthful life-style is obvious, for it is time- and space-specific. Taking part in such activities, and the nature of the activities themselves, did change once the problems of housing, family and children took precedence. A skilled worker claimed: 'Today's youth are tomorrow's adults, today's girlfriend is tomorrow's mother, and today's beer drinker is tomorrow's alcoholic. That's the way of life in Csepel' – a gloomy yet none the less realistic prediction evoking a particular sense of being young at a time when youthful status itself was undermined by an authoritarian system and the collective voice was monitored from cradle to grave.

## GLOSSARY

- adó* tax, as in *egyházi* (church) or *teho* (community development tax)
- aki nem dolgozik ne is egyék* ['he who doesn't work doesn't eat'] a slogan originating during the height of Stalinism
- alapszervezet* basic organization, cells of social organizations and parties at firms (KISZ, MSZMP) until 1990
- Alkotó Ifjúság Pályázat* Creative Youth Competition and the *Szakma Ifjú Mestere* (Young Masters' Title) work competition awarded by the firms and the KISZ until 1989
- amerikázás* slang (lit. 'americanization') referring to slowdowns by workers to sabotage industrial production
- Ausgleich* The Compromise of 1867, the beginning of the Dual Monarchy, economic and political concessions gained by Hungary from the Habsburgs
- Bácska* and *Bánát* regions in the northern part of Serbia with considerable ethnic diversity, also sites of substantial emigration after the First and Second World Wars, and during the 1990s
- Bajági Vocational School* both a vocational training (*szakmunkásképző*) and technical high school (*szakközépiskola*) in Csepel district
- barát* friend, also rendered by *haver* (pal)
- beutaló* assigned company vacation administered by the trade union allowing workers and their families to spend time at the company's resort
- biró* judge
- Blaumontag* Blue Monday, the practice of taking Mondays off in protest at the seven-day working week
- bolgárkertész* Bulgarian gardener, South Slavic horticulturalists credited for introducing intensive gardening and several species of vegetables in Hungary
- bütykölni* to putter about
- cigi* slang for cigarette
- cikizni* slang, to tease, to joke (similar to *heccelni*, *ugratni* or *szivatni*)
- COMECON acronym for the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance among the Soviet bloc countries organized to counter the economic power of the European Community and disassembled in 1990 (also known as CMEA)
- csaj* girlfriend, also used for girl
- csárdás* popular couples' dance
- csendőrség* gendermerie of the interwar period
- Csepel lótzied* horse-tax paid by Csepelers under early feudal rule
- Cserkészzet*, *Levente* and *Hubások* Christian rightist youth associations during the interwar period
- Csili* cultural centre in the district of Pesterzsébet
- dalárda* choral society, choir
- direktórium* executive directorship in 1918, following the Soviet prototype
- dumálás* of Russian origin, but in Hungarian it is a slang for chit-chat
- dzentri* gentry, in reference to the aspiring middle classes
- ebéldő* or *étkeзде* factory dining hall, cafeteria; frequently administered together with the *üzemikonyha* (factory kitchen)

*együtt járni* slang, to date (go out together)

*Einstand* German loan-word for a rite of passage marking progression from *inas* into the ranks of the *segéd*

*elázni* slang for drunk (literally 'soaked')

EME Union of Awakening Hungarians, together with MOVE (Hungarian National Defence League), MEP (Hungarian Revival Party) and the NEP (National Unity Party), the most influential Christian and nationalistic parties during the interwar period

*faliújság* bulletin-board

*fehtolva* slang, of German origin, used to describe an itinerant apprentice

*feketelista* blacklisting

*felvonulás, évforduló, tömeggyűlés* demonstration, anniversary, rally, events associated with the mass mobilization of workers

FIDESZ Federation of Young Democrats formed originally by university students in 1988, which became a major oppositional party during the 1990 elections

FIN Revolutionary Youth Days, three-week long socialist celebrations from 15 March to 4 April

*Fogaskerek* official paper of the HSWP at the Csepel Works from 1946 until 1957

*gebinizmus* slang for 'family business'

*gimnázium* a four-year liberal arts secondary school

*gönc* slang for clothing (also *szerelés*)

*gubanc* slang for trouble (literally 'knot')

*gyermeknap* children's day, a celebratory ritual of gift-giving and socialization of working-class children into factory life

GYOSZ the Association of National Industrialists (*Gyáriparosok Országos Szövetsége*) before the Second World War and reactivated in 1990

*hábé* party (also *buli*)

*Hangya* commercial associations during the interwar period (literally 'ant')

*hapsik* slang for 'men' or 'guys'

*hobbikertek* household plots ('hobby-gardens'), small private vegetable allotments popular since the mid-1970s

HSWP Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party (*Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt*, abbreviated as MSZMP) Hungary's Communist Party from 1956 to 1990

*ifjúsági parlament* youth parliament, an institution catering to the needs of youth until 1988

*igazgató* director

*inas* servant, little serf; dropped after the Second World War in favour of the more neutral *iparitanuló* (industrial-student)

*ispán* county judge, civil servant before the Second World War

*Jajtelep* literally 'ouch quarter,' the most impoverished pre-war district in Csepel

*jobbágy* sharecropper, as distinct from landless serfs (*zséller*)

*jóléti és kulturális alap* Welfare and Cultural Fund, an allocation from the company's budget set aside during state socialism

*kadarka* species of grape and red wine from which it was made, introduced into Hungarian viticulture from the Balkan Peninsula

*káderképzés* cadre education, political socialization of worker-members through party schools

*kétkezi munkás* lit. one who works with both hands; i.e. manual labourer

KIMSZ Young Communist Workers' League, the youth faction of the MKP in the early 1950s

*Királyerdő* neighbourhood in Csepel

*Kiskunság* region of the Great Plains, an area known before the First World War for its animal husbandry

KISZ Communist Youth League, youth faction of the HSWP founded in 1957 and disbanded in 1990

*komcsik, ávosok* and *spiclik* commies, secret policemen and police informers – slang terms used since the 1960s

*kommunista szombat* communist Saturday and *kommunista műszak* (communist shift) were the two unpaid weekend shifts modelled on the Soviet *subbotnik* system

*községi illetőség* local citizenship status required for voter registration during the interwar period

*Kaiserliche und Königlische* joint army of the Dual Monarchy

*Kiválló Vállalat* Outstanding Firm, a title given by the socialist Ministry of Industry as incentives to companies to work better

*klubfoglalkozás* club activity, usually connected to cultural affairs of the KISZ

*kultúr munka* a euphemistic Stalinist concept for ‘cultural work’

*lakó* inhabitant, also used for ‘tenant’ or ‘boarder’

*lakótelepek* apartment complexes; also refers to massive housing construction undertaken after the 1950s

*lé* slang for money (literally ‘juice’)

*lébecol* slang for hanging out (also *lödörög* and *csövezés*)

*lejmol* slang for begging (also *kunyerál*)

*MADISZ* Hungarian Workers’ Youth Federation

*Magyar Ifjúság* Hungarian Youth, together with *Ifjúsági Magazin* (Youth Magazine), the magazines of the 1970s and 1980s (the former was published by the KISZ)

*Magyar Kommunista Párt* Hungarian Communist Party, abbreviated as MKP

*majális* a festive picnic-like occasion held outdoors on May Day by workers

*MDF* Hungarian Democratic Forum, the ruling centre-right party in Hungary, founded in 1987

*MDP* Hungarian Workers’ Party, precursor of the MSZMP

*meló* work, introduced by Yiddish-speaking businessman and merchants

*meős* technical inspector in a factory

*mester* skilled worker

*MHSZ* Hungarian National Defence Sports League, a paramilitary organization of the MSZMP disbanded in 1990

*millennium* (the) state celebrations in 1896 to commemorate the conquest of the Carpathian Basin by Magyar tribes in 896

*mindenes* jack-of-all-trades

*MIOT* National Council of Hungarian Youth, the most important youth organization after the Second World War outlawed by the communists

*munka, dolog, tenni* and *csinálni* Hungarian (Magyar) words describing activities (work, task, to do, to make)

*Munkásőrség* Workers’ Militia, paramilitary guard founded by the Communist Party in 1957 and disbanded in 1990

*Munkásotthon* the Workers’ Culture Center originally founded in 1918 in Csepel

*munkásszínhátság* workers’ theatre movement during the interwar period which became obsolete in the 1950s

*MUSZ* Hungarian Pioneers’ Association, youth organization fashioned after the Soviet Young Pioneer Movement, the only Stalinist institution that survived to some extent after the 1989 reorganizations

*művezető* shop floor director

*nagyközség* from *község* (commune), a settlement between the size of a village and a town

*NEM* New Economic Mechanism, introduced on 1 January 1968, to revitalize Hungarian industry

*nemes* noble

*nem nem soha* ‘No, no never ...’ irredentist slogan used after the First World War against the Peace Treaties of Trianon

*Népszava* *People’s Word*, a newspaper of radical and left-wing social democrats founded in 1877

- nyenyer hurdy-gurdy*  
*Nyilaskeresztes Párt* The Arrow Cross Party formed in 1939  
*osztály* class, department  
*pálinka* brandy (often referred to as *féldeci* 'half-decilitre')  
*patronálási rendszer* system of patronage, an officially encouraged relationship between an older, skilled worker and one or more vocational students  
*pengő* interwar currency utilized until 1 August 1946 when it was replaced by the *forint*  
*pénz* money, currency  
*Pesterzsébet, Kőbánya* and *Ujpest* outlying districts of Budapest  
*polgári* civic secondary school  
*Rác* an ethnocentric Hungarian ethnonym for South Slavs, especially Serbs  
*Rákosi Works* the Csepel Works in the early 1950s named after Hungary's Stalinist ruler, Mátyás Rákosi (1892–1971)  
*reffes* people under police surveillance  
*rendőrség* police  
*robot* Slavic loan-word for forced labour (related to 'rab' meaning prisoner or slave)  
*rongy* or *rugó* literally 'rag' or 'spring', slang words from the early 1990s for 1,000, as in 10,000 *forint* note  
*Schachbrettdorf* chess-board village, symmetrical street and house construction in Eastern Europe associated with the influx of German ethnic groups  
*segéd* apprentice, helper  
*sessio* section system of land division, one section being equal to one *cadastre hold*  
*szakkör* club or workshop  
*szakszervezeti bizottság* trade union committee  
*szanálás* restructuring and elimination of houses and factories  
*SZDP* Social Democratic Party (*Szocialdemokrata Part*, founded in 1911, abolished in the 1950s, and revived in 1989)  
*SZDSZ* Alliance of Free Democrats, a liberal, social-democratic party in Hungary  
*Személyzeti és Tanulmányi Osztály* Personnel and Education Department, offices regulating the reproduction of the labour force  
*szerelés, szerkó* slang for fashionable looks and clothes  
*Szerszámgyár* Machine-Tool Factory (abbreviated as SZG)  
*SZIM* Machine-Tool Industrial Works, Hungary's largest machine-tool producer elevated to special status in the 1970s and 1980s  
*szípó* glue-sniffing  
*szocialistabrigád, szocialistabrigád mozgalom* socialist brigade, socialist brigade movement originating with Stalinism  
*Szocialista Munka Hőse* Hero of Socialist Labour and the 'Red Banner of Work' (*Munka Vörös Zászló Érdemrendje*), among the most prestigious prizes awarded under Stalinism  
*szoknyaprotekció* skirt connection, slang to describe flirtation with maids or cooks in the employ of engineers and managers, in the interest of gaining employment  
*sztahanovista* Stakhanovite, Stalinist model worker, fashioned after Soviet patterns in the 1930s  
*tanonc* vocational school student  
*tanonciskola* vocational school  
*társadalmi-tanulmányi ösztöndíj szerződés* social-study scholarship contract providing scholarship to engineering students during state socialism  
*telek* plot, as in *telkes gazda* (landed peasant)  
*testvér* sibling, literally 'body + blood' referring both to brother and sister but in youthful slang also means friend  
*titkár* originally a clerk but in trade unions and political parties a secretary with a functionary position in political organizations  
*tmk-személyzet* machinists responsible for safety and maintenance of machinery

*tunya* simpleton, 'Simple Simon', a derogatory label used against those who did not live up to standards promulgated by the KISZ in the 1950s

*üzemi négyyszög* the four corners of the shop floor, socialist organizational principle in factories

*vállalati gazdaságimunkaközösség* intra-enterprise economic association (abbreviated as VGMK)

*vállalati tanács* company executive council (or VT)

*Vegyesvállalkozás* joint East/West business ventures

*virilista* selectman and local councillor status before the Second World War

*Volksbund* an ethnic German organization created under the influence of the German revivalism of the 1930s

*Zipfer* German-speaking ethnic group from northern Slovakia ('Spiska' county in Slovakia)

*Zubringers* private employment agencies before the Second World War

*zsiroskenyér* slice of larded bread, symbol of poverty and hunger

# NOTES

## CHAPTER 1

1. The literature on children is vast, a legacy thanks to Margaret Mead. Sage publications, for instance, has a special 'Fieldwork and Research with Children' in its 2000/2001 catalogue.
2. The following documents will suffice: *Youth Policies in the European Union – Structure and Training*. Studies No. 7. European Training Youth, European Commission Youth Opinion, Youth Forum – Jeunesse, 1997; *Rainbow – Working Group on Youth Participation*. Council of Europe, Strasbourg, 1997; *Working Group on the Participation of Young People*. Council of Europe, Strasbourg, 1997; *Study on the Policies and Activities in the Youth Sector of the Council of Europe*. Strasbourg, 1997; *Position Paper – Youth Forum Jeunesse Europa ABC. A guide to the international youth work*. Youth Directorate, 1996. The web-site for the Youth Directorate of the Council of Europe is <http://www.coe.fr/youth>
3. This is especially interesting since one might imagine many aspects of the two former superpowers and their respective ideological principles that would make them strange yet quite compatible bedfellows (see Lukács 1978: 86).
4. For an historical treatment of urban processes in Eastern Europe, see Enyedi (1986) and Krekic (1987).
5. As Mary Kaldor (1991:27) points out, such a rigid division is the heritage of the Cold War mentality; see also Hann (1994).
6. Here the dilemma is similar to the difficulties anthropologists encounter in trying to define culture. I share the perspective of Tucker in claiming that separating the various 'political' institutions from other cultural institutions produces artificial boundaries while promoting biases, and that this is best handled by focusing on the 'political aspects of a culture' (1987: 6).
7. Historical interest in childhood socialization and youth is not new to the social sciences (Ariès 1962; Gillis 1981; Wohl 1979). Some historical works (Laqueur 1984; Springhall 1977) provide excellent accounts of the nature of upbringing as well as the political and cultural aspects of being young, something that was rarely followed by earlier anthropologists. In fact, one of the earliest anthropological articles by Margaret Mead and Martha Calas (1955) concerned the character development of Soviet children. This study set the tone for most politically critical literature for decades to come. The entrenchment of this practice helped to create an artificial gap between cultural institutions and political and economic structures (Spindler and Spindler 1987). For a study of pre-Tiananmen Square Chinese youth, see Hooper (1985); the literature on working youth in Great Britain is vast; for earlier works see, for example, Brake (1985), Jenkins (1983), and Mugham and Pearson (1976).
8. The classic model is Lenin's 'The Task of Revolutionary Youth' (1903).
9. Among some of the pioneering anthropological studies of the political economy of class relations and class consciousness, of which I mention only a few here: June Nash's study of Bolivian tin miners (1979); Ronald Dore's comparison of British and Japanese factories (1973); Hakken's study of workers' education (1988); White's

- ethnographic analysis of alienation and workers' resistance to management control over production in two English factories (1987); studies on other cross-cultural notions of work in Wallman (1979); the ethnography by White on urban working women in Turkey (1994); the ethnography of independent truckers by Agar (1986); and the collection of analyses by anthropologists in Rothstein and Blim (1992) and Calagione, Frances and Nugent (1992).
10. For Western European examples, see Brake (1985), Clarke and Jefferson (1976), Giovannini (1985), Jenkins (1983), and Willis (1981).
  11. I do not intend to rehearse the debate on whether East European societies were true representations of socialism. Variants in nomenclature can be found from 'etatism', 'Soviet-type society' and 'state totalitarianism' to 'existing socialism', 'state socialism' and 'state capitalism'. Instead, I argue for acceptance of these variants by critically examining not only the dominant ideology but also the practice of daily life, and the disparity between theory and practice in all systems of social formation.
  12. Bogdan Denitch has summarized this point (1990: 72). Laba (1991: 174–5) also discusses the intellectual/worker opposition in Poland in detail.
  13. For historical definitions of labour and work see the essays in Joyce (1987).
  14. On the generational problems under state socialism in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, see Denich (1990), Riordan (1989), Ramet (1991) and Tismaneanu (1990).
  15. Thus, while I see the value of presenting some Hungarian small family farmers as successful socialist entrepreneurs, I argue that peasants and workers alike form part of the same political economic system in Hungary, and, in turn, the world market at large. Both internal and external forces affecting the producing classes may yield diverse and even opposing results under different historical and socio-economic conditions (Andics 1984; Vajda and Zelenay 1984). The embourgeoisement of Hungarian peasants in the late 1970s and early 1980s to which I have referred should not, however, be generalized to the industrial working classes.

## CHAPTER 2

1. The historical discourse of Csepel has been of two kinds: on the one hand, the pre-Second World War historical scholarship emphasizing a pristine, rural peasant history before the foundation of the Manfred Weiss Works; and on the other, the decades since the turn of the twentieth century, with its enormous production and war economy. Socialist historians separated this discourse into a 'bourgeois' capitalist past and a 'socialist' progressive history (Berend and Ránki 1985; Kiss 1984; Perenyi 1934). Little has been published about Csepel before the nineteenth century, apart from demographic studies.
2. Many towns in this part of Eastern Europe have three or more names, reflecting the long and troubled relationship between political alliances and the contraction/expansion of the empires. This may also affect the imprecise boundaries and character of collective identities discernible in the histories of the various populations.
3. This symbiosis is well illustrated by Slavic loan-words for work. Indeed, of the four words Hungarians use to describe work (*munka*, *dolog*, *tenni* and *csinálni*), only the verb *tenni* (to do) is of Finno-Ugric origin; the rest are Slavic.
4. A later document, *Notitia Hungariae*, written by Mátyás Bél and published in Vienna in 1735–42, describes the small town with its handful of 'foreign' inhabitants as follows: 'During the last war the area became so sparsely populated that Csepel ranks below other places on the island. Along the river bank are scattered houses, surrounded by fields. To the north and east of these hamlets, wheat is grown, for the sandy soil is inadequate for anything else; it also needs constant fertilizing and three ploughings a year. Pastureland is minimal, and the small hay-field belongs to the landlord. There is no real forest here, only thickets situated between the river and the



- houses. From the island, people can also go to Promontorium [today Budafok] to work where they cultivate vineyards. As I mentioned, pasture is scarce so they are forced to keep their handful of underfed animals in stalls. Most of the people are Illyrians and a few Germans who arrived in Csepel a few years ago and settled at the upper end of the village. All the inhabitants are devout Roman Catholics and travel to Buda for mass. Csepel was settled in 1717 and belongs to the princely estate of Eugen of Savoy. It now has 21 free peasants, of whom ten are South Slavs, two Hungarians and nine Germans' (quoted in Ikvai 1977: 147; translation mine).
5. The historical origin of the second serfdom is anchored to the *Tripartitum* of Werbőczy, a strict legal code forcing low-class *jobbágy*s to remain on their landlords' estates, pay taxes and perform forced labour. On Csepel Island alone, the villages of Szigetszentmiklós and Makád, both with a Hungarian majority, remained under the yoke of second serfdom until 1848 (Berend and Ránki 1965: 18).
  6. The ennoblement of Jewish entrepreneurs in Hungary is the subject of recent studies by McCagg (1972) and Lengyel (1990).
  7. In order to illustrate the capacity of these ruling capitalist families for centralizing economic power, I shall list their most important business ventures. The Weiss brothers founded the First Hungarian Weaving and Knitting Company (*Első Magyar Szövő-és Kötőgyár Rt*) in Vác in 1890; the Hungarian Industrial and Commerce Bank (*Magyar Ipari és Kereskedelmi Bank*) in 1890; they contributed to the creation of the Hungarian Shipping and Machine Company (*Magyar Hajó-és Gépgyár Rt*, later known as *Danubius*); in 1891, together with other concerns, they played an essential role in establishing the Hungarian Rifle and Ammunition Company (*Magyar Fegyver-és Lőszergyár Rt*); and by the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, Manfred Weiss had become corporate executive director of several companies, among them the Austro-Hungarian Railroad Company, Fiume (Triest)-Budapest Metal and Chemical Works, Atheneum Printing and Publishing Company, National Transportation and Tariff Council, the Budapest Real Estate and Land Developing Company, Hungarian General Insurance Company, Hungarian Natural Gas Company, Sugar-Mill Works of Csongrád, Hungarian Textile Company, and many others of lesser renown.

### CHAPTER 3

1. The text was written by Antal Hidas to a song by the German Erich Weinert. The first verse of 'Red Csepel' urges hungry workers to break their silence and rebel. In 1932, workers responded by writing a popular song 'In response to Csepel' (T. Szerémi 1955: 126, 219). The two songs were sung together in illegal leftist youth circles.
2. In the same year, these organizations were put to another test. To aid the Russian revolution, the unions organized successful strikes and slowdowns to sabotage the production of ammunition and its sale to the Tsarist army (Berend and Ránki 1965: 188–9). Even the newly formed *Csepel Torna Klub* (Csepel Sports Club), founded in 1912, was a strictly working-class institution, catering to the workers' needs for recreational activities, thus becoming a politicized institution that fostered working-class alliance (Vedres and Zsolt 1962).
3. As recently as 1998 I was given the exact phrase by a mechanic who was determined to send his son to a vocational school to become an electrical mechanic: '*legyen a gyerekeknek egy rendes szakmája, ne túrja a földet egész életében mint a nagyapja*' (I'm sending him to school so he will have a real profession so he won't be an earth-digger for the rest of his life like his grandfather was).
4. For instance, both executive managers at the Manfred Weiss Works, Richard Stern and Jenő Kodár, were non-Hungarians with the honorific title *lovag* (originally a military distinction of honour but also used for meritorious non-military activities); on the ennoblement of foreigners in Hungary, see McCagg (1972) and the previous chapter.

5. Many of these leaders were active in the Soviet Union; for example, the Hungarian Communist Party and its youth factions (The KISZ and the Pioneers) (Király 1981: 13).
6. By 1925 there were 33 general stores, 32 carpenters, 22 machinists, 21 barbers, 21 shoemakers, 21 barkeepers, 20 masons, 20 butchers, 19 seamstresses, 18 tailors, 16 bakers, 16 inn keepers and 9 painters (Mathias 1926: 177–98). Some more specialized professions flourished as well, among them that of photographer, hat maker, chimney sweep, saddle-maker, soap maker, coppersmith and glazier.
7. This is also noticeable in the street-names and the names of the rail tracks inside the factory; see Berényi (1991).
8. See Csepeli Szabó (1977: 112).
9. This is not as strange as it sounds: during the 1980s, several KISZ youth admitted that they saw no conflict between membership of the KISZ and the Church.
10. Hungary's interwar period was the object of intensified scrutiny in 1990 when questions about the country's democratic past were rekindled. An entire issue of the historical journal, *Historia* takes up the figure of Miklós Horthy and his legacy; see volume XX (1990).
11. The phrase 'certificate of poverty' was used in the 1980s to refer to those who were not educated appropriately. By 1991 and 1992, such certificates would again be in use for those who had lost their jobs and were applying for unemployment benefits.
12. Attila József was a true working-class poet. Although he never openly identified himself with the dogmatism of the Communist Party, József's poetry provided some of the most scathing criticism of the interwar period; see Jozsef (1972).
13. For an historical study on factionalism among workers along political lines, see Lackó (1989: 3–43).
14. Little has been published on gender and youth during the interwar years in Hungary; for a fine initial attempt, see Cornelius (1996, 1998).
15. For comparative material, see articles on British, German and French youth during the interwar period (Becker 1946; Coutrot 1970; Layton-Henry 1976; Marwick 1970; Wohl 1979); and Andrej Micewski's brief yet useful essay on Polish youth (1969).
16. On the tragedy of Hungarian Jewry, see Braham (1986) and Lévai (1987).
17. Rural rebellion was not the only form of political protest: others ranging from emigration to indifference were also important. However, Csepel Island seems to be lacking in them altogether.

## CHAPTER 4

1. The secret political police (AVH) were one of the most important factors in establishing the Stalinist order in Hungary. They infiltrated all major institutions and wielded a reign of terror over the population. On 27 February 1947, the so-called 'conspiracy trials' began during which more than 200 people were sentenced in the 'People's Court', see Gati (1986) and Szent-Miklosy (1988).
2. In this study I do not analyse the culture of the Young Pioneers' League (*Uttörő Szövetség*) and the 'Little Drummer' (*Kisdobos*). While there are excellent studies of similar organizations in the West, few have been published about the Eastern bloc and the Soviet Union.
3. The growing interest in youth can be illustrated by the number of political youth organizations between 1945 and 1949; most, however, were eliminated by the communists in 1948 and 1950 (Gál and Szarvas 1981; Molnár 1981):

Democratic World Federation of Youth (DIVSZ)  
 Working Girls' National Association (DLOSZ)  
 Workers' College National Association (DOKOSZ)

'Americana,' Saint Emeric Friendship Society  
 United Peasant Youth National Association (EPOSZ)  
 Independent Youth Federation (FISZ)  
 Catholic Agrarian Youth Girls' Association (KALASZ)  
 Catholic Agrarian Youth Boys' Association (KALOT)  
 Catholic Working Girls' National Association (KDLSZ)  
 Hungarian Communist Working Youth's League (KIMSZ)  
 Catholic Merchant Youth National League (KIOE)  
 Hungarian Democratic Youth Association (MADISZ)  
 League of Hungarian University-College Associations (MEFESZ)  
 Hungarian People's Youth League (MINSZ)  
 Hungarian Youth National Council (MIOT)  
 Hungarian Scout Association (MCSSZ)  
 Hungarian Pioneers' Association (MUSZ)  
 National Association of People's Colleges (NEKOSZ)  
 Peoples' Youth Federation (NISZ)  
 National Youth Committee (OIB)  
 Guardians of the Heart (Szív Gárda)  
 Socialdemocratic Youth Movement (SZIM)  
 Trade Union and Youth, and Apprentice Movement (SZIT)  
 National Organization of Apprentices and Youth Hostels (TIOSZ).

4. The Workers' Youth Association, (*Dolgozó Ifjúsági Szövetség*, DISZ), was founded on 16 June 1950.
5. In addition to reparations payments, Hungary was also required to ship goods to the Soviet Union. When the dates were not met, surcharges were added. The timely and orderly shipment of reparation payments and goods was supervised by the special Office of Reparation. What caused even more hardship was the fact that, according to the Potsdam Peace Treaty, all factories and companies that were taken into Soviet ownership immediately in 1945 had to be paid for before they could be renationalized as Hungarian property. It was not until 20 January 1953, that Hungary finally was able to meet all the reparation payments.
6. A moving cinematic memento of these lawless children roaming the countryside, to be tamed for and by the Stalinist state, is Géza Radványi's 1948 *Somewhere in Europe* (*Valahol Európában*).
7. There is a plethora of literature on this matter, a recent example being the autobiographical 'sociography' by Hungary's respected literary figure, Erzsébet Galgóczi (1988).
8. Borbándi Gyula (1983: 450–53) describes the fate of a few compliant intellectuals: Ferenc Erdei and József Darvas both became ministers, posts they kept until 1956. Also from the March Front and the populist circle, János Gosztonyi took an important position in the communist youth organization, Jolán Majláth became the new women's organisation's leader, and András Hegedüs became prime minister.
9. Melissa Bokovoy discusses the similar fate that befell the peasants of Yugoslavia under Tito's regime (1998).
10. This is how two Soviet scholars saw this during the early 1970s: 'By taking an active part in strengthening and improving socialist farming, in the social and political life of the country, and in promoting cultural and communal standards and facilities in the village, rural youth thereby act as class-conscious participants in the building of a new society. They comprehend the purpose of life and their place within it, they associate their personal ideals with the great goals of the people' (Slepenkov and Knyazev 1977: 70).
11. For a thorough discussion of the Soviet Stakhanovite movement, see Siegelbaum (1990).

12. A segment of this newsreel is contained in Márta Mészáros' cinematic *tour de force*, *Diary for My Children* (1982), a film about the establishment of Stalinist hegemony in Hungary (Portuges 1993).
13. For other similar East European Stakhanovite 'success' stories, see Siegelbaum (1990: 306).
14. A superb analysis of the dynamics of East European Stalinism and the politics of higher education is Connelly (2000).
15. The term *elvtárs* was used during the interwar period by communists working underground. Since the term *bajtárs* (helping friends) was used by the Horthy military, the *elvtárs* was adopted after 1948 in the official state discourse. For the Pioneers, the term *pajtás* (pal) was coined. Only after the 1960s did the gendered equivalent *elvtársnő* (Mrs comrade) become widely accepted.
16. Interestingly, the words *jampec* and *jampekedés* originate from the 1920s Yiddish colloquialism for a 'dick' ('*jampec*'), a reference to stupidity but also careless buffoonery and youthful bravado. By the late 1940s, this word referred to middle-class youth culture in pre-war Europe and, especially, to the elevation of Western European and American popular culture into Hungarian youth culture.
17. Year-by-year growth of the DISZ membership is given in Petrus (1984: 62).
18. The work ethic included the 'overfulfilling of work quotas [as well as] bonuses for quality output' borrowed from the Soviet model (Rzhanitsina 1983: 142).
19. A popular song of the era piped over these public address systems was the Song of the Democratic World Youth Federation adopted from a Soviet original in 1949 (Tokaji 1983: 269).
20. In Hungarian, the term *ember* means both 'man' and 'human'. Etymologically the term is composed of *em*, originally meaning female, and *er*, referring to male and masculine properties. Thus, I would hypothetically argue that the original meaning of *ember* was 'fe + male', i.e. human, and only with the adoption of medieval Christian ideology was the usage limited to the masculine noun.
21. Elsewhere I have described in detail the changes affecting gender roles, see Kürti (1991a, 2000b).
22. The emphasis on the artificial language of esperanto, similar to organizations such as the National Peace Council (*Országos Békatanács*, MOB) or the Hungarian-Soviet Friendship Society (*Magyar-Szovjet Baráti Társaság*, MSZBT), was part of the 'internationalist' ideology of the Communist Party keen on eliminating ethnic and national (and nationalist) distinctions by creating an international proletariat class.
23. This and similar statements from revolutionaries who fled the country were collected by George Paloczi-Horvath, through the Columbia University Research Project on Hungary, in 1957.
24. In a speech to the Kremlin in 1945, Stalin declared: 'The Soviet Union does not wish to meddle in the internal affairs of Hungary' (quoted in Felkay 1989: 34).
25. The literature on the 1956 revolution and its aftermath is vast and (often) contradictory. Among the more useful texts are Meray (1969), Kopacsi (1988), Kiraly and Jonas (1977).
26. The age-grouping scheme in the Soviet Union is analysed by Markowitz (2000: 21).
27. Michael Stewart has analysed the situation of Gypsies and Gypsy/non-Gypsy relations in socialist Hungary with specific reference to wage-labour policies (1997: 97–111).
28. The language utilized in Hungarian trade union is telling of the way the trade unions were set up. Trade unions leaders were not referred to as 'secretary', a term reserved strictly for the Communist Party and the KISZ, but were called 'trustee' or 'fiduciary' (in Hungarian *bizalmi*). What the nature of relationship was between the HSWP and the trade unions, and who were these entrusted high officials, are described by György Marosán (1982).

29. For the New Economic Mechanism, see Berend and Ránki (1985), Csikos Nagy (1973), Felkay (1989), Kornai (1990), Kozma (1982), Timár (1975) and Vajna (1982).
30. For further discussions on this important matter, see Berend and Ránki (1985), Gomulka (1986), Hare (1986) and Marer (1986, 1991).
31. A more detailed analysis of the problems of technology under state socialism can be found in Kulpinska (1986).
32. The reform process is discussed in detail in Brada and Dobozi (1990), Gomulka, Ha and Kim (1989) and Marer (1991).
33. Kornai's model of the necessity of 'shortage economy' in existing state socialism is described in English (1982, 1990).

## CHAPTER 5

1. The Stalinist politicization of age is evident from the Twelve Points of the Trade Union Youth Organization, SZIT:
  1. Members of the SZIT love their people and country – but hate its enemies;
  2. They are conscious fighters for proletarian internationalism, ready in the spirit of war or liberation to fight for peace;
  3. Through work, they make certain that the socialist Plan will be victorious;
  4. Their skills and education are for the benefit of the people;
  5. Through systematic study of Marxism and Leninism they develop a clear political vision;
  6. They are brave and joyous, conscientious and orderly;
  7. They are ready to sacrifice in building socialism; do not get discouraged by difficulties;
  8. They are comrades-in-arms with democratic youth around the world and follow their ideal, the heroic Soviet youth;
  9. They build the unity of Hungarian youth and reinforce the alliance of peasant and working youth;
  10. Through healthy recreation, a pleasant manner, and physical culture, they prepare to meet challenge;
  11. They protect and defend the Hungarian People's Republic and its wealth;
  12. The honourable goal of members of the youth organization is to earn the privilege of joining the vanguard of the Hungarian working class through its organization, the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party.
2. For a critical sociological analysis of children in Hungarian working-class families, see Lisko (1986–87).
3. For a thorough analysis of vocational training, see Ferge (1976).
4. The actual breakdown of the vocational student population can be seen from the following table:

Trade	1980	1989
Mining	781	602
Steel	1,880	2,969
Machine-Tool	46,501	54,517
Metallurgy	208	185
Electro Machine-Tool	9,349	9,492
Electromechanics	6,304	6,498
Construction Material	996	1,229
Chemical	1,425	1,437

Lumber/Forestry	5,172	8,747
Paper	147	388
Printing	1,534	1,924
Textile	2,534	4,218
Leather and Fur	3,252	5,918
Clothing	10,904	18,090
General Servicing	5,507	8,181
Building Construction	15,939	22,742
Plant and Garden Cultivation	6,212	7,319
Animal Husbandry	1,752	2,005
Food Processing	4,949	8,583
Commerce	19,737	25,261
Catering/Restaurant	8,544	10,332
Transport and Telecommunication	469	1,065
Total	154,096	201,702

5. The following table indicates the growth of family businesses since the mid-1980s:

	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989
Number of businesses	43,406	43,530	44,071	46,995	49,934
Number of people in family businesses	53,000	54,000	59,000	70,000	nd
Volume of trade (in billion <i>forints</i> )	18	20.5	23.5	31.2	nd

Note: Figures are calculated from the *Hungarian Statistical Pocket Books* (1985, 1986, 1987, 1988, 1989).

6. In a different cultural context Paul Willis remarks that, 'Despite the increasing numbers of women employed, the most fundamental ethos of the factory is still profoundly masculine' (1981: 53).
7. To illustrate how fundamental patronage was for the socialist system, consider the children's political socialization. In the Little Drummer organization and the Young Pioneers' League, new recruits took an oath of allegiance to the goals and requirements of the youth organizations. During the ceremony special 'oath-parents' (*avatószüllők*) were appointed to tie the blue or red scarves around the necks of young recruits.
8. I have described the workings of the four corners decision-making in Csepel in my 'Hierarchy and Workers' Power in a Csepel Factory' (1990a: 70–2).
9. Commuting (*bejárás* or *ingázás*) has been a way of life for Csepel workers for decades. At the Machine-Tool Factory during the 1980s only about 10 per cent of the workforce commuted, of whom more than two-thirds were daily and the rest monthly commuters (i.e. those housed at the workers' hostel).
10. The following table shows the number of VGMKs and non-state GMKs in Hungary in the mid-1980s:

	1984	1985	1986	1987
VGMK	11,183	14,516	14,069	12,484
GMK	2,021	3,201	3,383	3,590

Source: *Hungarian Statistical Pocket Books* (KSH 1984, 1985, 1986, 1987).

11. Interestingly, of the 42 VGMK units, six had a woman counsellor; only two of these VGMKs belonged to the so-called 'productive' VGMK, the rest were of the 'service' type.
12. Although it does not consider Eastern Europe *per se*, the cultural differences and specificities of informal economies are revealed in *Perspectives on the Informal Economy*, edited by Estellie Smith (1990).

## CHAPTER 6

1. For the first systematic treatment of the Soviet Komsomol, see Fisher (1959); and cf. Riordan (1989).
2. In a report published by the Central Committee of the KISZ the slogan was 'Youth for the Future', a well-known concept in the Soviet Union from the early 1920s. See 'A KISZ KB felhívása', *Heti Világgazdaság*, 31 January 1987, p. 7.
3. These were not the only newspapers published by the state and the HSWP. For the youngest age group, there were the 'Grunting Bear' (*Dörmögő Dömötör*) and 'The Little Drummer' (*Kisdobos*); for the Pioneers, 'Pal' (*Pajtás*), 'The Troop Leader' (*Órsvezető*), 'Youth Leader' (*Ifjúvezető*) and 'Pioneer Leader'. On state-run radio, there was a special Pioneers' programme called 'Horn Call' (*Harsan a kürtszó*), while 'Mike's Letter Box' (*Miska Bácsi levelesládája*) catered to all children under 14. Television, too, had its own programmes for political socialization in the bi-weekly 'Ten Times Ten' (*Tizen Téliak Társasága*). In addition there were county, city and local organizational forms of media.
4. In Hungary, the numbers of 'appointed cadres' were falling steadily throughout the 1980s. While in 1973 a total of 1,700 positions were filled by such 'appointees' by the Political Committee of the Central Committee of the HSWP, by 1989, this number had fallen to 452, including executive directors and presidents of state enterprises, and also those in charge of the mass media and education and research institutions; see *Heti Világgazdaság*, 11 March 1989, p. 58. Such political selection has, of course, continued after 1990 as various regimes continue to create their own trusted bureaucratic army.
5. For specific data on the socio-economic background of the KISZ leadership in the mid-1980s, see Schiffer and Soltész (1986).
6. As we learn from Riordan's analysis of the Soviet Komsomol, this was the single most important question during the mid-1980s (1989: 33–5).
7. This congress, like its Soviet counterpart a year later, was more important than previous ones, heralded as the congress that would solve the problems of the organization by bringing about much needed reforms and renewal. However, while Csaba Hámori, the national KISZ secretary, was re-elected to his post, it was clear from the scathing speeches that the KISZ had lost its monopoly over a large percentage of working youth of Hungary.
8. See Lane (1981) and Riordan (1989) for Soviet comparisons.
9. In an instruction booklet, for instance, the preference for an atheistic name day is underlined (Kövessi 1978: 11)
10. In 1986, one special contracted job was for another 'offering'. A middle-level KISZ organizer submitted a motion to send ten bicycles to an orphanage. The KISZ group at the Non-Ferrous Metal Works contracted work from the firm to make the bicycles. The KISZ leadership divided the job in several components and each basic organization was responsible for one day's overtime. In less than a week the money for the ten bicycles had been raised and the following week, the ten bicycles were sent.
11. While in Csepel, I never heard overt or hostile anti-state comments. This is not to say that young people were not critical. On the contrary, the leadership encouraged them to express critical ideas about politics and society in general. Open criticism and even

hostile reactions to national as well as local-level policies were heard from workers in their mid- and late twenties and not surprisingly often from the better educated KISZ leadership itself.

12. To suggest the ideological agenda of political socialization, here is the Pioneer credo:

TWELVE POINTS OF THE YOUNG PIONEERS:

1. Pioneers are faithful children of the nation, the Hungarian People's Republic.
  2. Pioneers encourage friendship among peoples, and defend the honour of the red scarf.
  3. Pioneers tirelessly educate themselves and faithfully fulfil their responsibilities.
  4. Pioneers help wherever and whenever possible.
  5. Pioneers work happily and serve the community selflessly.
  6. Pioneers always tell the truth and act with justice.
  7. Pioneers love and respect their parents, teachers and the elderly.
  8. Pioneers are true and just friends.
  9. Pioneers are courageous and orderly.
  10. Pioneers develop their bodies and care for their health.
  11. Pioneers love and defend nature.
  12. Pioneers live to be honoured members of the Hungarian Communist Youth League, the KISZ.
13. For a Russian comparison, see Richard Stites' (1989) study, especially his Chapter 4.
14. For the past 150 years the poet Sándor Petőfi (1821–1849) has been a national hero and symbol of revolutionary spirit, resistance and youthful fervour. In the periods discussed in this study, his memory served as a constant source of inspiration for intellectuals and political leaders. The fate of poets such as Taras Sevchenko, the Ukrainian national poet, and Adam Mickiewicz, Petőfi's Polish counterpart suggests they fared little better.
15. For a symbolic analysis of May Day, see Kürti (1990b) and Rotenberg (1983).

## CHAPTER 7

1. In rural communities, having a nickname is common (Fél and Hofer 1969). Often, this reflects one's occupations; several of my blue-collar male informants were given names such as 'Fiery' (*tűzes*, one who works at the furnace), 'The Machinist', 'The Trucker' and the like.
2. For more detailed analyses of gender, see the special issue of *East European Quarterly*, Winter 1989 issue; and my article 'The Wingless Eros of Socialism' (1991a).
3. As a male interviewer, I was well aware that discussing sexual matters with young women was fraught with problems. It is my sense, however, that their responses were honest and hence worthy of being considered valid data, open to interpretation, of course, in part as a function of gender issues. For studies that reflect upon the researcher's perspective on these matters, see the articles in Markowitz and Ashkenazi (1999) among others.
4. For a similar situation, but in a quite different cultural context, see Moffat's study on American college students (1989: 181–270).
5. For a comparative study on rock music in Eastern Europe, see Ramet (1994) and Ryback (1990).
6. I was surprised to learn that blue-collar workers almost always associated white-collar as well as intellectual males with homosexuality and impotence. In joking relations, they always singled out educated men or male office workers as weak, impotent and less endowed than they are.



7. Among American college students, this was not significantly different, for most in stable relationships consulted each other concerning birth control methods which then became the woman's responsibility (Moffat 1989: 242).
8. Some of the most common expressions for the sexual act were: *nyomni* (to push), *kefélni* (to brush), *toszni* (to put), *elintézni a dolgot* (to take care of things), and *lefeküdni* (to lie down, or 'lay').
9. For more on Hungarian sexist and anti-feminist behaviour, see Corrin (1994), Gal (1994) and Goven (1993).
10. Despite the transition to a more democratic system after 1989, Gypsies in Hungary are still a pariah group whose social standing and opportunities for advancement are hampered by prejudice and racism. For analyses of Gypsies' status, see the special issue of the daily *Magyar Hirlap* (28 July 1990); the Gypsy magazine, *Phralipe* (No. 5, 1991); for earlier accounts in a rural context, see Bell (1984: 283–96) and Hann (1980: 154–5); and for the state socialist period and what came right after, Stewart (1997).
11. The centrality of women in the family budget is also characteristic of 'traditional' Mediterranean family structures. This also occurred, for instance, in China (see Davis 1976: 149–50). These changes, however, were soon reversed in many East European countries; see Bystydzienski (1989); Koncz (1987); Kulcsár (1985); and Lampland (1989).
12. I rarely heard such terms for unmarried youth (such as *legény*, *hajadon*, *bakfis*, or *siheder*). These were either too outdated or were considered rural forms of delineating age-specific groups. Csepelers more often than not used the slang expressions that I describe in the section on dating and friends.
13. The participation of blue-collar youth in state-run events at these cultural institutions has been a thorn in the side of the leadership; see Andrásy and Vitányi (1979: 62–3).
14. As Andrásy and Vitányi demonstrate during the 1970s, less than 2 per cent of the youthful population belonged to artistic circles and clubs (1979: 63). Slight differences can be observed, however, among rural and urban youth depending on the nature of the clubs. For example, some literary clubs in Csepel had almost no members under the age of 25. In Tököl, almost 10 per cent of school students belonged to the local folkloric performing ensemble. Almost all, however, claimed South Slavic ethnic identity.
15. The decreasing number of visitors and Cultural Centres nationwide may be ascertained for the 1970s and 1980s:

	1970	1980	1988
Culture Centres	3,656	2,554	2,485
Number of Visitors (000s)	3,748	3,589	2,049

Source: KSH (1989: 83).

16. The problem was also noted by policy-makers, see for example, Barabás (1985: 10–11).
17. The rising popularity of films is revealed by simple statistics: in 1985, when the American film *Tootsie* was the most popular foreign film, 231,000 people went to the cinema in Budapest; in 1986, the year of *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom*, 305,000 tickets were sold; in 1987, 491,000 people saw *Crocodile Dundee*; and in 1989, the American *Rain Man* was seen by 426,000 (KSH 1987: 231; KSH 1988: 229; KSH 1989: 140).
18. The following table indicates the rising number of Hungarians travelling in the 1980s:

Crossing the Border at	Number of Tourists (000s)			
	1980	1985	1988	1988
Austria	257	490	3,017	6,318
Yugoslavia	732	803	918	2,664
Romania	570	1,212	1,048	619
Soviet Union	138	104	146	164
Czechoslovakia	3,103	2,480	5,219	4,366
Budapest International				
Air and Water Traffic	364	444	449	345
Total	5,164	5,533	10,797	14,476

Source: KSH (1989: 198).

19. In fact, some of these 'mixed drinks' were quite unusual: one was cheap red wine with coca-cola; another, beer and plum brandy (*pálinka*). Everyone stuck to the adage that 'you can go from beer to hard stuff, but you shouldn't drink in reverse'. Nevertheless, young workers mixed their drinks, knowing full well what the outcome would be.
20. Young white-collar workers, on the other hand, identified with popular rock bands or jazz bands. A few, however, said that they enjoyed the intellectual lyrics of Hungary's popular 1980s oppositional bands such as the 'Europe Publishers', URH, and AE Committee. Only a marginal group found racist and anti-Semitic lyrics of hard-core heavy metal to their taste. For more detail, see Kürti (1991b; 1994).
21. The segment is from the hit song *Kőbánya Blues* by Hungary's Hobo Blues Band. The informant changed *Kőbánya* (another working-class district in Budapest) to Csepel: see Kürti (1991b: 509).
22. This is not to say that some young males did not join gangs at some stage. In Csepel, however, there was only a marginal group known to police and, aside from some petty crimes, they were not involved with serious gangland-style activities. The few swastikas and the hammer and the sickle painted on the factory gates were isolated acts. For more on the emergent skinhead and neo-Nazi scene in the early 1990s in Hungary, see my article (Kürti 1998).
23. Drinking as well as drunken behaviour as an overemphasized ritual activity for males at weddings is described by Cowan with reference to Greece (1991: 110–15).

## CHAPTER 8

1. An earlier version of this chapter was presented at the Mediterranean Ethnological Summer School, in Piran, Slovenia in 1999, and as a written version in Kürti (1999b).
2. It is instructive to consider how European anthropologists have envisaged the transformation at the time. Of the numerous attempts, see the special issue of the *Anthropological Journal on European Cultures*, vol. 2, no. 1 (1993) and vol. 3, no. 1 (1994), 'The Post-Communist Transition' and vol. 1, nos 1–2 (1992) 'Anthropologizing Europe'. While these issues represent the views of European scholars, the reports published in the *Anthropology of East European Review* are, for the most part, those of American colleagues.
3. No other punk rockers carried this xenophobic and racist message as far as *Mos-oi*, a group whose members were banned from public performances and faced trial for their anti-state and racist propaganda. A slogan I heard in Csepel, a clear signal of anti-Gypsy sentiments as a result of the re-emerging Gypsy political organizations and parties, was the juvenile 'skinhead' proffering: '*Sárkányoknak, sárkányfű; Cigányoknak bőrfejű*' (Dragons with dragon-weed; Gypsies with skin-heads). I have described this racist skinhead popular music youth culture in more detail in Kürti (1998).

4. For an interesting comparison, see Bushnell's analysis (1990) of the various kinds of Moscow graffiti.
5. Another symbolic event undermining the ruling HSWP's ideology was the summer 1988 funeral of Béla Bartók, who died in self-imposed exile in the United States; see Gal (1991). Ildiko Vasary has studied Hungarian elections posters and similarly observed that while a poster such as the one on which Leonid Brezhnev and Erik Honecker exchanged kisses 'was admired for its wit, [it also] offended with its vulgarity' (1991: 3–4).
6. Among the short-lived, unsuccessful parties in Csepel were the Social Democratic Association, the Hungarian Health Party (*Magyar Egészségpárt*), the Tenants' Association (*Lakásbérletk Egyesülete*), the Pensioners' Party (*Magyar Nyugdíjasok Pártja* established in September 1990), Labour and Trade Union, and the Gypsy *Phralipe* (Brotherhood Party). Of the remaining eight local parties, the Independent Smallholders' Party (Fkpp), the National Smallholders' and Civic Party (NKgPP) and the two socialist parties (MSZMP, MSZP) gained a minimal number of votes, clearly an expression of popular dissatisfaction with them and their programmes.
7. This statistical compilation is based on the report printed in *Csepel*, 19 October 1991, p. 2.
8. In fact, the number of state-funded houses built during 1989 fell to a mere 308 (KSH 1989: 95). The situation of families and especially mothers after the 1989 reorganization is discussed by Haney (1999) and Szalay (1999).
9. Only after it had been removed did it become public knowledge that this highly symbolic gift was not the original one. That statue was in such a corroded state that it had been removed, and workers at the Non-Ferrous Metal Works had volunteered to make a 'double'. This secret exchange took place on 29 December 1969. Thus, at present, there are two Lenin statues resting in the Metal Works' warehouse. It may also be a sign of the times that the local newspaper dared to print this story; see the editorials in *Csepel*, 30 March 1990.
10. Other streets met a similar fate. Even historical street-names such as 'Steelworker' and 'Foundry-man' were eliminated (see the article in *Csepeli Tükör*, 9 May 1990, p. 7).
11. This scathing speech was published in *Csepeli Tükör*, 9 May 1990, p. 5. Reactions were soon to follow. Some defended all the communist symbols in the district and argued that Csepel should preserve such an illustrious past.
12. Following the revolutions of 1989, the trials of the Ceausescus of Romania, Eric Honecker of the former East Germany and the Bulgarian Todor Zhivkov inevitably come to mind as major examples of justice meted out by the people upon their communist leaders.
13. A more sympathetic account can be found in *Uj Csepel*, 3 May 1991, p. 3.
14. However, as E. P. Thompson (1991: 15) observes, the shift from 'communism' and the 'party state' to a capitalist 'market economy' and 'western-style democracy' during 1989–90 contained a large dose of wishful thinking.
15. The year-by-year figures for the establishment of joint ventures is difficult to ascertain; many, for example, were instituted in one year but only began production in the following year, etc. My calculations are based on the figures given in the economic weekly *Heti Világgazdaság*, June 1990, pp. 14–16; and the special issue of *The Hungarian Economy, A Quarterly Economic and Business Review*, 19/1 (1991).

Year of Joint Venture	Number of Ventures	Registered Capital in Million Forints	Foreign Share in Million US\$
1972–74	2	95.7	0.8
1975–81	4	2,131.0	22.4
1982	5	257.3	1.7

1983	10	349.7	2.6
1984	11	1,348.0	7.3
1985	13	1,459.6	17.0
1986	17	2,168.4	15.4
1987	61	4,299.4	32.4
1988	104	9,445.5	69.8
1989	1,105	100.4	310.5
1990	3,814	25,000	250.0
1991*	54	(n.d.)	(n.d.)
Total	5,200	147,000	730.0

\* Only the first six months of 1991.

16. The closure of these two Csepel factories is analysed in *Napi Gazdaság*, 9 November 1998, pp. 1, 4, and *Népszabadság*, 28 August 1998, p. 7.
17. The Non-Ferrous Metal Works continues to enjoy a virtual monopoly on copper and bronze finished products, and still others, such as the former Csepel Paper Mill (a part of the National Paper Company) were able to undergo reorganization with other Hungarian paper factories and an Austrian firm.
18. See, *Népszabadság*, 6 November 1995, p. 7.
19. One of the company's owners was Semyon Mogilevich, a Russian magnate and well-known figure on the international stock market. See 'Eladó a Schwinn-Csepel', *Népszabadság*, 8 September 1999, pp. 1, 8.
20. This story was also written up in the local newspaper: 'Boldog magyar munkások – kitört a kapitalizmus' (Happy Hungarian Workers – Capitalism Unleashed), *Csepel*, 19 October 1991, p. 5.
21. Similar views were printed in the local paper, see 'Szabad vélemények egy kötetlen beszélgetésen' (Free opinions during an open-ended conversation'), *Csepel*, 21 September 1990, p. 3.
22. The various failed privatizations in Csepel created the unemployed image of the district: see 'Ezer új munkanélküli Csepelen?' (Thousand new unemployed in Csepel), *Népszabadság*, 28 August 1998, p. 7.
23. See Szilvia Hámor, 'Az nyer, aki otthagyja a kaptafát' (You win if you leave shoemaking), *Népszabadság*, 10 February 2001, pp. 23–5.
24. For an interview with the mayor of Csepel describing the difficulties and the prospects ahead, see 'Csepel ennél valamivel többet remél' (Csepel is hoping for something more), *Népszabadság*, 17 December 1996, p. 29. For a rejuvenated new Manhattan-like Csepel Island, see an interview with the same mayor five years later at: [www.meh.hu](http://www.meh.hu), 26 February 2000, 'Csepel: nem várnak csodákra a XXI. Századi XXI. Kerületben'.

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