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## A POST-CAPITALIST, POST-STALINIST SOCIAL DEMOCRACY: HUNGARY 1956 and 1990

by Leslie A. Muray

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It is rather commonplace to hear that there is no tradition of democracy in Central and Eastern Europe. Focusing on resources provided by history, religion, and certain aspects of Marxist thought for the construction of a non-capitalist, post-Stalinist society in the country of the author's birth, Hungary, I hope to dispel this Western European and North American stereotype in this essay.

The first section deals with the rich, although ambiguous, resources, images, metaphors of the Hungarian national heritage in its nearly perpetual struggle for national independence and democracy. The second section explores religious developments in the post-World War II era and those of its aspects that are potentially helpful to the constructive tasks at hand. In the third section, I treat the ambiguous heritage of Marxism, seeing the legacy of George Lukacs and the radical democratic socialism of the Budapest Circle as further resources. The fourth section describes briefly the major events of the revolution of 1956. In the fifth section, I consider the revolution 1956 and the vision of Imre Nagy, sketchy as it is, as the most important and greatest resources for the present and the future in the construction of a non-capitalist, non-Stalinist democratic society. An anti-authoritarian, democratic, socialist, struggle for national independence that called into question the bipolar structure of the post-World War II world, the revolution of 1956 upheld in a unique way a vision of political and economic democracy that guaranteed minimal standards of socio-politico-cultural welfare in a pluralistic society.

### I.

The recently formed Republic of Hungary reinstated the crown of St. Stephen (removed from "the Kossuth seal" during the revolution of 1848 and preferred ever since by many

Hungarians of democratic inclinations) on the traditional seal of Hungary. Easily one of the most beloved figures in Hungarian history, St. Stephen (r. 997-1038) unified the *Magyar* (the Hungarian word for "Hungarian") tribes and converted his people to Christianity. In a manner reminiscent of Charlemagne, he was crowned on Christmas Day 1000. The crown of St. Stephen has since served as a symbol of legitimacy, the power of which is illustrated by the tremendous outpouring of emotion by people on both sides of the issue on the occasion of its return to Hungary in 1978.

Although Hungary adopted the feudal social structure of the rest of Europe during the reign of Stephen, it was not nearly as rigid and restrictive. Serfs (the "jobbagy") had the right to move and were not tied to the land or particular nobles. In his written advice to his son, Stephen urges him to seek the advice of the elders and his laws mention a "Senatus" as well as the need to consult the "*tota communitas*" on issues of national importance--the embryonic form of what later became the feudal Diet, quite powerful during various periods of the Middle Ages.<sup>1</sup> Of course, the membership of the feudal Diet was restricted to the landowning nobility. However, the seeds for greater inclusiveness and the easing of qualifications for membership were sowed by Stephen himself.

While the traditional alliance between the hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church and the political power structure began during his reign, Stephen himself appropriated another side of the tradition that is important to Hungarian religious culture, particularly in popular religious piety. Quite capable of cruelty to his opponents, his historical popularity is no small measure due to his sense of fairness and justice toward the poor and oppressed.

Among the early kings of Hungary, most notable for their dynastic feuds following the death of St. Stephen, St. László (r. 1077-1095) justly stands out for reunifying the nation and a legendary, chivalrous sense of solidarity with the defenseless, the poor and the oppressed<sup>2</sup> --much of it, once again, due to his particular appropriation and understanding of the Christian tradition.

The best example from the Middle Ages of the appropriation of that aspect of the Christian tradition which takes the side of the poor and the oppressed is St. Elizabeth of Hungary (1207-1231), with Louis of France the patron of the Third Order Franciscans.

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<sup>1</sup>Hanák, K Peter, ed., One Thousand Years: A Concise History of Hungary, (Budapest: Corvina, 1988), pp. 19-20; Macartney, C.A., Hungary: A Short History, (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, 1962), p. 14. The following historical account, corroborated by two sources of very diverse points of view, is largely the result of my internalization and interpretation of Hungarian history. Unfortunately, I no longer remember many of my sources, in Hungarian and English, read years ago. It will probably surprise most Americans to know that most Hungarian children are familiar with this history by the age of ten at least my first grade class was in 1955-56.

<sup>2</sup>Macartney, Hungary, p. 20.

Married to Louis IV, Landgrave of Thuringia, attracted to the Franciscans, she sold her jewels, established a hospital, opened the royal granaries and cared for the sick and the poor in person during a famine and epidemic in 1226. Following the death of her husband, she became the first Third Order Franciscan and spent the rest of her life tending to the poor and the sick.<sup>3</sup> In Elizabeth, we find a powerful symbol for one dimension of the religious heritage of Hungary: whatever early social services were undertaken, hospitals, schools, etc. were sponsored by the church; the impetus for social reforms had religious roots, especially among those clergy and members of religious orders who lived among the poor and the oppressed - contradicting the support of the hierarchy for the feudal power structure, and later, for the Habsburg monarchy.

The history of Hungary is replete with numerous struggles for national independence and for the extension of freedom to an increasingly larger segment of its population. One of the high points in the extension of freedom during the Middle Ages was the Golden Bull of 1222, resembling the Magna Carta and following it by a few years, restricting the power of the monarchy, mandating consultation with the feudal Diet, and reserving the right of the nobility to resist the monarchy if the provisions of the Bull were violated.<sup>4</sup> The period following the brutal Mongolian invasion by Batu's Golden Horde in 1241 saw a prolonged power struggle between the kings, and the barons, the upper or higher nobility. As a result of this power struggle, the power of the lesser nobility and the feudal Diet increased.<sup>5</sup>

The long range result was the election of Mátyás Hunyadi (r. 1458-1490), whose father János Hunyadi had been regent and decisively defeated the Ottoman Turks, as king by the lesser nobility, including some who while retaining their titles because of financial hardship had become serfs, on the ice of the frozen Danube in 1458. While, to be sure, the franchise was limited, it was considerably more inclusive than it had been in the past. In Hungarian history, the election of Mátyás is one of the most emotionally powerful images of a nascent democracy.<sup>6</sup>

Mátyás is revered as a military hero, a Renaissance king who was a patron of the arts and sciences. While dominating the Diet by the force of his personality, he did abide by its decisions and took its advice seriously. Most importantly, he is a legendary embodiment of wisdom who travelled throughout the land in disguise to find out how his subjects really

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<sup>3</sup>Lesser Feats and Fasts, Third Edition, (New York: The Church Hymnal Corporation, 1980), p. 384.

<sup>4</sup>Hanák, p. 25; Macartney, pp. 26-27.

<sup>5</sup>Hanák, pp. 28-32; Macartney, pp. 28-53.

<sup>6</sup>Hanák, pp. 34-36; Macartney, pp. 54-59.

lived, siding with the serfs in their quest for justice. He was no less legendary for his satirical humor, usually aimed at the oppressive practices of the upper nobility.<sup>7</sup>

The plight of the peasants worsened following the death of Mátyás as both the barons and the monarchy sought to reassert control. In 1514, when an army of peasants recruited for a Crusade by Franciscans who lived with the serfs and advocated a peasant kingdom was ordered to disband by the king, a bloody rebellion erupted. The peasant rebellion was brutally repressed and its leader, György Dózsa, was burned alive on a red hot iron throne. Following the rebellion, for the first time legislation perpetually binding peasants to particular lands and depriving them of the right to own it was enacted.<sup>8</sup>

Dózsa's rebellion provides another illustration of the ambiguous role of religion in Hungarian history; while the hierarchy, part of the landowning class and possessor of great wealth, supported the preservation of the feudal social structure, it was the Franciscans, sharing the life of the peasants, who sowed the seeds of rebellion. Except for the most rabid reactionaries who yearn for the "Golden Age" of feudalism, "*illum tempore*," to most Magyars Dózsa's rebellion is a symbol of the yearning for liberation from all forms of oppression.

Following the annihilation of the Magyar army by the Ottoman Turks at the battle of Mohács in 1526, Hungary was divided into three parts: Habsburg ruled Western Hungary, Turkish occupied Central Hungary, and a supposedly autonomous but in effect an Ottoman protectorate in the East, dominated by Transylvania. A number of events and several figures from this time period are significant for the development of social democracy in Hungary.

During the sixteenth century, much of Hungary converted to Protestantism, the Calvinist oriented Reformed Church in particular. This was due in no small measure to the defection of Franciscans, the most popular religious order, who saw the consonance between such principles as the priesthood of all believers and their egalitarian ideals. Although the overwhelming majority of Magyars returned to the Roman Catholic fold in the seventeenth century, largely on account of the work of Peter Pazmány, Archbishop of Esztergom, Protestantism has remained a significant factor in Hungarian life and has become a very special embodiment of the spirit of national independence.<sup>9</sup>

As the Habsburgs sought to impose a reign of terror in Transylvania in the latter part of the sixteenth century, István Bocskai, the noble who owned the most land in the east, led a rebellion with an army consisting largely of "*hajdus*," peasants who had fled either Turkish occupation or the oppression of the nobles. After driving the Habsburg armies out of

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>Hanák, p. 42; Macartney, p. 62.

<sup>9</sup>Hanák, p. 54; Macartney, pp. 76-77.

Transylvania and Upper Hungary, he concluded the Treaty of Vienna, which guaranteed the observance of the provisions of the traditional constitution, the right of the Diet to enact legislation, and, perhaps most significantly, freedom of religion, which in Transylvania had already been proclaimed in 1550. Bocskai settled 10,000 *hajdus* on his own estates, and the Hungarian aristocracy established other *hajdu* settlements whose inhabitants were free, did not have to pay taxes and were not encumbered by the typical feudal obligations of the peasants.<sup>10</sup>

The most remarkable figure during this period was Gábor Bethlen, who was Prince of Transylvania from 1613 to 1629. A brilliant military tactician during the Thirty Years War, who led his troops into battle in person, was never defeated and helped establish the international reputation of the Hungarian *hussars*, he was also a crafty diplomat. In domestic politics, while he did not abolish the institution of perpetual serfdom, in a manner reminiscent of Mátyás, he did attempt to ensure justice for the peasants. He established a university to which all Hungarian clergy and scholars were welcome. Most importantly, with lasting historical consequences, for the first time, he made it possible for peasants to acquire an education.<sup>11</sup>

Following the expulsion of the Turks in 1686, and the Treaty of Karlowitz (1699), Hungary came under the absolutist and despotic domination of the Habsburgs, who violated their prior agreements to allow a degree autonomy, observe freedom of religion, rule according to the traditional constitution, and respect the right of the Diet to enact legislation. The hierarchical feudal social order became increasingly rigid and the plight of the peasants grew increasingly worse.<sup>12</sup>

The revolution Ferenc Rákóczi led against these oppressive conditions is one of the two (three if one includes the revolution of 1956, which I shall treat later) paradigmatic struggles for national independence and democracy. For a war of national independence to be successful, the various Hungarian social classes needed to be united. Historically, these struggles were led by the nobles. One of the typical strategies of foreign rulers and their allies among the aristocracy was to undermine the loyalty of the serfs to their rebellious masters.

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<sup>10</sup> Hanák, pp. 55-57; Macartney, pp. 78-80. To avoid using a double plural form in two languages, I have added an "s" to the singular form of the word "hajdu." The plural in Hungarian is "hajduk." Hanak's translation is "heyduck," which seems very awkward to me, while Macartney uses the double plural and transliterated "hayduks."

<sup>11</sup>Hanák, pp. 57-59; Macartney, pp. 80-82.

<sup>12</sup>Hanák, pp. 58-74; Macartney, pp. 84-92.

Initially, Rákoczi's army was made of the "*kuruc*,"<sup>13</sup> peasants who had fought alternately the Habsburgs and then the Turks for national independence and the improvement of their socio-politico-economic conditions. Guaranteed their traditional privileges by Habsburg rule, the nobility was initially suspicious of what to them appeared to be a lower class rabble. Nevertheless, the nobles joined Rákoczi in 1707. The Magyars had never been so united. In spite of this unity, the *kuruc* army was finally defeated in 1711, and Rákoczi died as an exile in Turkey (1735).<sup>14</sup>

Rákoczi adopted the color white, bordered by red and green, a variation of the Hungarian red-white-green tricolor, for his flag. In the middle was the inscription, the motto of the revolution, "*Cum Deo pro patria et libertate*" ("with God for country and liberty"), most often above a likeness of the Virgin Mary. Jesus and Mary, understood by popular piety to embody God's ultimate solidarity with the oppressed, have since been seen as the patrons of the struggles for national independence and democracy - images that have energized popular uprisings.<sup>15</sup>

Before turning to the second paradigmatic struggle for national independence and democracy, the revolution of 1848, I shall allude to the previously mentioned typically contradictory and ambiguous tendencies in Hungarian religious life. On the one hand, both the Roman Catholic and Reformed Churches continued to possess great wealth and huge parcels of land. The Roman Catholic hierarchy had made a rather unholy alliance with the Roman Catholic Habsburgs. The contrary tendency is illustrated during this time period by the intriguing figure of Ignac Martinovics.

A Franciscan scholar with political ambitions, Martinovics, Abbott of Szaszvár at the time, became a spy for the reform-minded Habsburg monarch, Leopold II (r. 1790-92). When Leopold died and the archconservative Francis I succeeded him, Martinovics organized a plot to overthrow the Habsburgs and transform the socio-politico-economic structure. The conspiracy was uncovered and under interrogation, its leader revealed the details of the plot

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<sup>13</sup>The word "*kuruc*" originated from the time of Dózsa's rebellion.

<sup>14</sup>Hanák, pp. 74-81; Macartney, pp. 92-93.

<sup>15</sup>The degree to which the images of Mary and Jesus as patrons of revolutionary struggles for liberation have penetrated the Hungarian psyche cannot be minimized. Speaking personally, even though my theological education, in fact all of my education since the fifth grade, has been in the United States, my first readings of liberation theology, with its focus on the image of Jesus as Liberator, immediately struck a responsive chord--memories of Rákoczi's flag and my appropriation of a nearly selective biblical literalism concerning the teachings of Jesus about the rich and the poor and his identification with the oppressed acquired primarily from my parents and catechetical instruction in Hungary. Although I had a plurality of images of Jesus, it did not even occur to me that there were people who did not see Jesus as Liberator--unless, of course, one was a feudalist in whatever cultural, geographical, racial, ethnic, historical context!

and the names of his co-conspirators. Martinovics and six others were executed, numerous others imprisoned in the crackdown that followed.<sup>16</sup>

The second great paradigmatic struggle for national independence and democracy was the revolution of 1848. Inspired by Sándor Petöfi's poem, the "*Nemzeti Dal*" (National Song—actually a poem), urging Magyars to stand up, throw off their shackles, and grab their swords to resist tyranny,<sup>17</sup> crowds demanded and the Diet acceded to the abolishment of feudalism, serfdom, the relinquishment of the titles and privileges of the nobility, and the guarantee of democratic freedoms. To avoid the imminent financial hardship that would befall the lower nobility in particular with the abolishment serfdom, the Diet agreed to compensate the landowning aristocracy for their loss of income. Initially the government tried to reach a compromise with the Habsburg monarchy; eventually, the Magyar government declared independence, and had it not been for the intervention of Russia, requested by the young emperor Franz Joseph, the Magyar army, which was then engaged in a successful counteroffensive, might have won.<sup>18</sup>

Along with some of the generals executed in the ensuing reign of terror and other military figures, Petöfi and Lajos Kóssuth, the Regent, were the legendary heroes of the revolution. A romantic poet influenced by the ideals of the French Revolution, Petöfi, a major in the revolutionary army, in a manner reminiscent of another romantic poet, Lord Byron, was killed (his body was never found) by Russian troops at the battle of Segesvár. After the defeat of the revolution in 1849, Kóssuth went into exile, eventually settling in Italy, to his dying day uncompromising in his opposition to the Habsburgs. Between 1851 and 1853, he lived in the United States, where he was greeted with empathy and acclaim: 4,000 towns were named after him, and he was seen as the George Washington of his country. Accordingly, as a gesture of solidarity, Congress voted to give him Washington's sword, which to this day, resides in the National Museum in Budapest.

Kóssuth was very much a child of the Enlightenment. Yet, he was also a devout member of the Reformed Church; his egalitarian democratic principles, in his own estimation, were in large measure inspired by his faith. It is often said the Revolutions of 1848 that swept Europe were middle class, bourgeois revolutions. While the democratic freedoms and the anti-feudal character of the Hungarian revolution of 1848 had much in common with the ideals of the bourgeois revolutions of France and Prussia, it was hardly a middle class revolution. With virtually no middle class in an essentially feudal society, the revolutionary

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<sup>16</sup>Hanák, pp. 94-95; Macartney, pp. 127.

<sup>17</sup>I am paraphrasing my own translation from the Hungarian.

<sup>18</sup>Hanák, pp. 114-121; Macartney, pp. 155-170.

army was comprised of peasants, much like Rákóczi's *kuruc* troops, and the country led and inspired by radical nobles like Kóssuth and radical intellectuals like Petöfi.

Following the reign of terror and the passive resistance of the Magyars, Ferenc Deák, "*A Haza Bolcse*" ("the county's or homeland's wise one"), designed the Compromise of 1867, in effect creating a "dualist" state. The Austrian Empire became the Austro-Hungarian Empire, with common foreign, defense, and finance ministries, but separate, autonomous governments and parliaments. While the franchise was restricted and trade unions and socialist parties outlawed, there was a form of parliamentary democracy, representing a variety of points of view, including that of the Party of Independence, which was the largest of a bloc of minority parties that even won the election of 1905.<sup>19</sup> Nevertheless, the feudal structure was largely intact, and the economic conditions of the peasants, lower nobility, and relatively small urban working class declined. Fortunately, forms of national health care, unemployment insurance, and social security were enacted as early as the 1870's.

Hungary underwent a cultural renaissance in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The outstanding figure and symbol of this cultural renaissance was Endre Ady (1877-1919). Not only did he revitalize Hungarian poetry, Ady had a unique ability to express the joys, sorrows, aspirations of the poor and the oppressed. Educated in the West, he was a passionate, egalitarian advocate of social democracy.<sup>20</sup>

A tragically aborted attempt at democratic social reform, and as such an untapped resource for the development of social democracy, can be seen in the short lived government Mihály Károlyi at the end of World War I. With military defeat imminent, he came to power in October, 1918. When Emperor Charles IV renounced all participation in affairs of state in November, Károlyi, a noble and a leader of the Independence Party, embarked on a program of reform that sought to establish Hungary's independence, a separate peace treaty, universal suffrage with secret ballot, land reform and redistribution, and recognition of the rights of national minorities. He was a role model for the land reforms he attempted to enact. When it became evident that the Allies and the former national minorities, Czechs, Slovaks, Romanians, Croatians, and Serbs had reneged on their promises regarding Hungary's territorial integrity, compounded by problems of massive unemployment, shortages of food and heating fuel, inflation, Károlyi's government collapsed in March, 1919. It was replaced by a short lived Soviet Republic under the leadership of Béla Kun (March-August, 1919). Sometimes romanticized, particularly in later Socialist Workers' Party propaganda, Kun's Soviet Republic is remembered by most Magyars (except for emigre participants) as a brutal reign of terror. Unfortunately, eventhough the Treaty of Trianon, through which Hungary

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<sup>19</sup>Hanák, pp. 122-171; Macartney, pp. 182.

<sup>20</sup>Hanák, pp. 165-167; Macartney, pp. 182.

lost two thirds of its territory, was not signed until 1920, Károlyi has been traditionally held accountable. Unfairly and inaccurately (he had Bela Kun jailed!), he has at times been blamed for the rise of the Soviet Republic.<sup>21</sup>

The period between the World Wars was typically full of ambiguity. The "Red Terror" was followed by a period of "White Terror." Becoming regent in 1920, Admiral Horthy was the focal point of the Magyars' yearning to alleviate their felt national humiliation and aspirations to restore lost territory and prestige. Sometimes stereotyped as a fascist in Western Europe and the United State, he was in fact a moderating influence in the 1930s and 1940s. Eventhough anti-Jewish legislation had been passed in the 1930s, he personally fought the deportation of Jews until his dismissal by Hitler and the ascent to power of the Arrow Cross, the Hungarian fascist party in 1944. While the franchise was restricted and the parameters of political discourse limited, (the Communist Party was outlawed, many Communists inprisoned, some executed, usually on charges of sabotage), a limited form of parliamentary democracy was in place, and a degree of accommodation was reached with the peasants and workers, even with the Social Democrats who had united with the Communists during the days of the Soviet Republic. Reform minded parties such as the Independed Smallholders' Party, representing mostly peasants with small parcels land, exerted a considerable degree of influence.<sup>22</sup> An interesting figure early in this period is Ottokar Prohászka (1858-1927), Bishop of Székesfehérvár and a university professor. A spellbinding orator capable of outbursts of anti-Semitism, he was a leader of the Christian Socialist movement and represented the Christian Unity Party in Parliament. Three of his works were condemned for modernism.

In the aftermath of the expulsion of the Nazis and occupation by Soviet armies, a coalition government, including several members close to Horthy, came to power in 1945. In the November, 1945 elections, participation was restricted to parties that were coalition members (i.e., the Social Democrats, Smallholders, National Peasants, the "Progressive Bourgeoisie," with fascist parties outlawed). Suffrage was universal, and with 57% of the vote, the Smallholders won a clear majority. Unfortunately, they were not allowed to form a government, leaving the coalition only temporarily in power, and tragically paving the way for the advent of Rákosi's brand of Stalinism.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup>Hanák, pp. 177-189; Macartney, pp. 203-207.

<sup>22</sup>Hanák, pp. 191-231; Macartney, pp. 209-235.

<sup>23</sup>Hanák, pp. 234-235; Macartney, pp. 236-238.

## II.

The complex and ambiguous role of religion in Hungary during the post-World War II period is dealt with in general terms in this section.

The responses of the Roman Catholic and Protestant churches, primarily the Reformed and Lutheran, to Communist rule were quite different. After the Communist Party came to power in the late 1940's, church properties were confiscated, religious orders disbanded, clergy imprisoned, tortured, and even executed. József Cardinal Mindszenty, Archbishop of Esztergom and Primate of Hungary, the traditionally powerful see of the Roman Catholic church in Hungary, was tried and imprisoned.

The historical ambiguities of Hungarian religious life can be seen in the figure of Mindszenty. A taciturn, rigid anti-Communist, premodern in his theology, authoritarian, sympathetic to the traditional feudal socio-political-economic structure, he was compassionate toward the poor and the oppressed, defending them with the same vehemence he opposed Mátyás Rákosi's Stalinism. Virtually unknown is the permission he granted to pregnant Hungarian nuns, raped by Russian soldiers, to get abortions!

During the Rákosi era, anti-Communist elements in the Reformed and Lutheran churches were replaced by leaders of a more accommodationist bent. As a result, the Protestant churches, relatively speaking, gained more "privileges." Within the Protestant churches, "Peace Priests" (I am translating the expression from the Hungarian), were in positions of prominence; a small group was active in Roman Catholic circles. "Peace Priests" and the term "peace" has become synonymous with accommodation to the regime not only in Hungary but in Eastern Europe as a whole. As pointed out eloquently by various issues of Sojourners over the last few years, the term "peace activist" has vastly different connotations in the countries formerly known as the Eastern bloc than in the West. It is more than unfortunate that for many in the Hungarian and other Eastern European immigrant communities, the term "peace activist" automatically conjures images of Communist dupes and fellow travellers, a tragic hangover of the Stalinist era.

During the revolution of 1956, the leadership of the Protestant church was replaced by persons untainted by association with the Stalinist regime. Following the defeat of the revolution, the new Protestant bishops and other church leaders once again took a more accommodating stance toward the newly installed Kadar government.

During the late 1960s and early 1970s, "the theology of servanthood," of "diakonia," espoused by the Hungarian Protestant churches, was generally perceived as a rather creative response to living in a socialist society. Emphasizing a confessional stance, encouraging the privatization of religious life, these theologies did attempt to grapple with the issue of how

Christians can function appropriately as citizens of a socialist socio-politico-economic order. They also reflected the churches' concern with institutional maintenance.

Following Cardinal Mindszenty's departure from the American embassy in 1971, where he had lived since the suppression of the revolution of 1956, the Roman Catholic Church, prompted by the urging of the Vatican, sought a *modus vivendi* with the existing regime. The Kadar regime was open to the overtures. While drawing on the openness and worldly activity affirming documents of Vatican II, Roman Catholicism assumed an uncharacteristic inward looking confessional stance, concentrating on life within the circle of faith and institutional maintenance. No less than for the Protestant churches, the focus of attention was on how one could function appropriately as a Christian in a socialist society.<sup>24</sup>

In the new Hungary that is emerging, most Magyars are somewhat skeptical of the accommodationism of the Roman Catholic and Protestant Churches, seeing it as evidence of the historical proclivity of the respective hierarchies to accommodate any existing regime. Yet, the popular piety that has spurred the yearning for freedom so often in the past is largely intact, and, in fact, has taken new, creative, novel forms. For example, the late 1960s and the 1970s saw the emergence of the Hungarian version of "base communities," particularly in the Roman Catholic Church. The issue on which many of the base communities focused was that of conscientious objection to military service. Given Hungary's numerous struggles for national independence and freedom, this is an issue rather foreign to its religious and political heritage. The government and the hierarchies of the churches opposed conscientious objection. For members of the base communities, the issue became the focal point for dissent both against the government and the accommodationism of the religious hierarchies.<sup>25</sup>

In the new Hungary that is emerging, confiscated church properties are being returned and a great emphasis placed on religious instruction. Given the insoluble link between Hungarian culture and its religious heritage, religion will play a vital, if uncertain, role in the formation of social democracy.

### III

The legacies of the Soviet Republic of Béla Kun and the Stalinism of Rákosi and Gerő in the 1950s, with their reigns of terror, are not adequate resources for the development of

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<sup>24</sup>I want to inject a tone of humility to the previous discussion. After all, I have lived outside of Hungary since the age of eight and did not have to face the pressures Hungarian religious leaders have had to face!

<sup>25</sup>Klippenstein, Lawrence, "Father Bulanyi and the Pacifist Controversy in Hungary, 1976-87," Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe, Vol.IX, No.1, (February 1989), pp. 9-28.

social democracy in contemporary Hungary. The legacy of János Kádár (r.1956-1988) is far more complex.

Initially unaffectionately nicknamed "the butcher of Budapest" after the brutal suppression of the revolution of 1956, he acquired the reputation of being a reformer. Even among the most vehemently anti-Communist elements of the Hungarian immigrant community in the United States, he came to be seen as a skillful politician who managed a careful balancing act, supporting Soviet foreign policy unequivocally in return for non-interference in Hungarian domestic affairs and reforms. Since his fall from power in 1988 and death in 1989, a more critical view has resurfaced and become more public. Clearly, a large number of people were executed in the aftermath of the suppression of the revolution. In conversations with diplomats at the Hungarian Embassy in October, 1989, I was told that "Kádárist paternalism" was antiquated and that his regime had made numerous mistakes, perhaps reflecting the then latest party line. At a conference on human rights in late September and October, 1989, in Washington, D.C., the Hungarian participants, reflecting a wide variety of political positions, most of them former Marxists, maintained an overwhelmingly negative assessment of Kádár: an ill educated, inept leader, unable to harmonize the competing factions of the party and to control "the hard liners," under whom repression never stopped, just took a different form. We are probably too close to the Kádár era to formulate any kind of adequate assessment. The Hungarian people, however, seem to have reached a verdict during the recent elections, electing only the Harvard educated Miklós Németh from the former Socialist Worker's [Communist] Party, renamed Socialist--and he was elected as an independent!

One resource Marxism provides for the construction of social democracy in Hungary is the legacy of George Lukács. This is not an unambiguous legacy. Deputy Commissar of Education during the Soviet Republic of 1919, he went into exile following its demise, first in Vienna, then from 1929 in the Soviet Union during the worst days of Stalin's purges. Upon his return to Hungary, he was politically active until Rákosi's brutal purges, after which he was preoccupied with strictly literary and philosophical endeavors. During the revolution of 1956, he served as Minister of Culture, although he never went to his office, and as a member of the Central Committee voted against Hungary's departure from the Warsaw Pact for both ideological and pragmatic reasons. Arrested afterwards, his international stature prevented his execution. Although he asked for immediate reinstatement, he was expelled from the party during the years 1957-67. Forbidden from publishing in Hungary, the Kádár regime showed a marked ambivalence toward him for the

remainder of his life. Critics consider him an unrepentant Stalinist,<sup>26</sup> admirers a reform minded, democratic anti-Stalinist.<sup>27</sup> In the estimation of former pupil and Lukács disciple Agnes Keller, both are right.<sup>28</sup>

Critical of Stalinism, later in life, Lukács saw Stalinist Soviet Union as the only reliable bulwark against Nazism.<sup>29</sup> Within the framework of an absolute existential commitment to Marxism and the Communist Party, he sought what he described as a democratic form of Communism.<sup>30</sup> In his classic History and Class Consciousness, which was condemned by the party, he wrote about themes similar to those of the manuscripts of the young Marx before these were discovered, particularly evident in the parallel between Lukács' notion of reification and Marx's theory of alienation. He advocated grassroots, participatory workers' councils (one of the ideas for which his work was condemned), the spontaneous formation of which was one of the most important and unique features for the revolution of 1956. Toward the end of his life, Lukács rejected History and Class Consciousness, not as one of his nearly perpetually coerced, acts of self-criticism, but on account of what he saw as its one sided emphasis on class instead of a focus on species-life, a realistic view of nature, and the relationship between the individual and society, which under the influence of the young Marx he came to view as the authentic preoccupation of Marxism. The party's initial refusal to readmit him on the grounds that he had abandoned the class struggle in favor of the struggle for democracy may not have been too far off the mark.<sup>31</sup>

Perhaps most importantly, Lukács was the intellectual "godfather" and inspiration of the neo-Marxist intellectuals who sowed the seeds of the revolution. As with the ideas of Adam Schaff in Poland, Lukács' ideas about reification and democratic Communism, along with the young Marx's theory of alienation, were used for a devastating critique of a system that claimed to have overcome alienation. In a way, Lukács is the intellectual symbol of the revolution of 1956.

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<sup>26</sup>See for example, Kolakowski, Leszek, Main Currents of Marxism: Its Origins, Growth and Dissolution, Vol. 3: The Breakdown, (New York:Oxford University Press, 1987), pp. 253-307.

<sup>27</sup>Heller, Agnes, "Lukacs' Later Philosophy," in Heller, Agnes, Lukacs Revalued, (Oxford, England: Basil Blackwell Publishers Limited, 1983), p. 178.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid.

<sup>29</sup>Lukacs, George, Record of a Life: Autobiographical Sketch, edited by Istvan Eorsi, (London, England: Verso Editions, 1983), p. 106.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., p. 134.

<sup>31</sup>Fekete, Eva, and Karadi, Eva, Gyorgy Lukacs: His Life in Pictures and Documents, (Budapest, Hungary: Corvina Kiado, 1981), p. 229.

The legacy of Lukács was carried on by the Budapest Circle, consisting of Marxist academics some of whom were former students and others who were profoundly influenced by him. Following the repressive crackdown of 1972-73, the participants of this group were dismissed from their academic positions and exiled. Its most important members are Agnes Heller, her husband Ferenc Fehér, and György Markus (who was not one of Lukács's students, but influenced by him). Being radical democratic socialists, the Budapest Circle has been equally critical of the totalitarianism of the former Eastern bloc and exploitative capitalism of the West as betrayals of authentic democracy.<sup>32</sup>

Since they have lived outside of Hungary for so long, it is doubtful that the thought of the members of the Budapest Circle will have much of an impact outside of intellectual circles. Nevertheless, their perceptive and profoundly moving analysis of the revolution of 1956 sheds much light on the direction contemporary Hungary is heading, and reinforces my very youthful memories and later adult interpretations of these events. It is to the revolution and the vision of Imre Nagy as the greatest resources for the construction of social democracy in Hungary that I now turn.

#### IV.

To consider the legacy of the revolution of 1956, we need to recap briefly its major events. The stage was set in June, 1953, when, three months after the death of Stalin, his Hungarian pupil, Rákosi, was sacked as Prime Minister by the Soviet Party hierarchy in favor of Imre Nagy. A prisoner of war in Russia during World War I, he became a party member following the Bolshevik Revolution. He was an exile in the Soviet Union until the Soviet occupation of Hungary. A self-taught agricultural expert, he was a reformer who favored land redistribution instead of orthodox collectivization.

Rákosi was still head of the party, and the party apparatus was largely comprised of his Stalinist loyalists. Nagy was stripped of his official positions in April, 1955, accused of "rightist deviation," and later expelled from the party. The seeds of revolution were sowed by the Petöfi Circle, a group of Hungarian writers, all members of the party profoundly influenced by Lukács, who exposed crimes committed during the reign of terror and the Rákosi regime's responsibility for them. To compound the government's problem, Khushshev's speech at the 20th Party Congress condemning the crimes of Stalin were

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<sup>32</sup>For representative works of the Budapest Circle see especially the writings of Agnes Heller and Ferenc Fehér. See for example, Fehér, Ferenc, and Heller, Agnes, Hungary 1956 Revisited: The Message of a Revolution - A Quarter of a Century After, (London, England:George Allen and Union); Heller, Agnes, Beyond Justice (Cambridge, MA: Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1989); Heller, Agnes, A Radical Philosophy (New York: Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1984).

perceived as an indirect slap at Rákosi's leadership. Further aggravating the situation was the Soviet-Yugoslav rapprochement--with Tito demanding the sacking of those responsible for the Hungarian anti-Yugoslav campaign.

The Poznan riots in Poland in June, 1956, precipitated the appointment of Gomulka as First Secretary of the Polish Communist Party. When, dubious about the loyalty of the new regime, the Soviet army surrounded Warsaw, the Petöfi Circle and university students organized a solidarity rally on October 22. Demands for the reinstatement of Imre Nagy as Prime Minister and the democratization of Hungary were made. On October 23, over 300,000 people demonstrated initially for Nagy's reinstatement but rapidly started to make more radical demands for national independence and democracy.

There can be little doubt about the genuine popularity of Imre Nagy. As Prime Minister, he stopped the repression and the collectivization of the farms.<sup>33</sup> Nagy was asked to pacify the crowd, very briefly damaging his political reputation. When Erno Gerö, who had succeeded Rákosi in July (to Magyars, Rákosi and Gerö were "six of one, half a dozen of the other"), made a virulent and threatening radio speech, demonstrators descended on the station to make a rebuttal. Members of the hated and feared AVH, the secret police, who were guarding the building, fired upon the crowd, killing four people. Armed by this time, the demonstrators laid siege to the radio station and captured it. The larger group of demonstrators had gone to the gigantic statue of Stalin and tore it down--a symbol of defiance.<sup>34</sup>

Imre Nagy was reinstated as Prime Minister in the middle of the night. On October 25, after a group demonstrating against official charges of "counter-revolution" was massacred by the AVH, events in Hungary became unmanageable.<sup>35</sup> Gerö was forced to resign. During days of fierce fighting, which saw the defection of some Russian troops to the side of the freedom fighters, Nagy announced Hungary's departure from the Warsaw Pact and the country's neutral status. He invited non-communist politicians into his cabinet, and formed a coalition with the newly legalized Social Democratic, Peasant, and Smallholder parties. He promised elections in a plurastic society. On October 30, the very symbol of anti-Communist defiance, Cardinal Mindszenty, whose personal popularity matched that of Nagy, was

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<sup>33</sup>Even among the staunchest anti-Communists he was known as "Imre *Bácsi*," in Hungarian a term of endearment that translates roughly and inadequately as "Uncle Imre." I remember vividly him rubbing my hair while engrossed in conversation with a Cabinet Minister during a walk with my mother on Andrassy Street in the summer of 1956.

<sup>34</sup>I remember my father telling me the next morning of marching in the initial demonstration, coming home excitedly to tell my mother, who arrived just in time to see the statue tumble down

<sup>35</sup>I marched in my first demonstration with my mother in Heroes Square, although I do not remember the exact date.

released from prison. Perhaps the most creative and novel feature of the revolution was the spontaneous emergence of grassroots, revolutionary workers' councils, such as the ones Lukács advocated long before, that sought participatory political and economic democracy, efficacious participation by workers and peasants in making the decisions that shape their futures. As far as the American response is considered, the Voice of America, in its infinite sagacity concerning Hungarian politics, first encouraged Magyars not to support the incorrigibly Stalinist Nagy(!), then promised military support if the freedom fighters held on. <sup>36</sup>

On November 4, the final Soviet assault was launched with a vengeance. The revolution was defeated and the Kádár regime installed. Many buildings in Budapest, (some of the city still devastated from World War II), were in ruins, its little squares filled with graves. There were shortages of food and heating fuel. Not taking a chance on the loyalty of its troops, the new contingent of the Soviet army were largely illiterate Mongolians who had been told they were fighting a resurgence of Nazism in Germany.<sup>37</sup>

Imre Nagy and most of the other leaders of the revolution initially took refuge in the Yugoslav embassy. After leaving this sanctuary, they were abducted and taken to Romania. At his trial, Nagy conducted himself as the legitimate Hungarian head of state, and treated the Soviet invasion and the trial itself as illegal. On June 16, 1958, he, Pál Maleter, the military hero of the revolution and a nearly sentimental Communist to the end and Miklós Gimes, were executed. The final words of Imre Nagy were, "Long live the socialist and independent Hungary!"

## V.

The Hungarian revolution of 1956 is described by the Soviets as a reactionary, fascist, counter-evolution, by the United States as a conservative, anti-Communist, democratic capitalist, pro-Western uprising. It was neither.

In the first place, the revolution called into question the very bipolar structure of the post-World War II era. With its declaration of neutrality, Hungary stated clearly its refusal

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<sup>36</sup>The latter I remember hearing on the radio.

<sup>37</sup>My parents and I were told this by a Russian officer; the Mongolian features of the soldiers were evident. Having found out that my father would be arrested again as an "enemy of the people," my family decided not to stick around for such a great honor and escaped to Yugoslavia on January 20, 1957.

to be dominated by and play the political games of any superpower.<sup>38</sup> The revolution was a spontaneous, grassroots, mass movement, self-forming and self-propelled, manifesting a remarkable national consensus.<sup>39</sup> It was democratic in character, anti-Communist because it was anti-authoritarian.<sup>40</sup> Partly because of this anti-hierarchicalism and anti-authoritarianism, the majority did not want a return to the status quo ante 1945.

However, there is a more fundamental reason for contending that the revolution was not democratic capitalist in character. There can be little doubt that vast majority of Magyars favored a multi-party system and fundamental civil liberties, the freedom of speech, press, religion, etc., that are features of political democracy. It is equally clear that the vast majority also wanted economic democracy--not untrammelled capitalism.

We might remember that the Hungarian middle class was relatively small and the feudal structure, in spite of reforms, largely intact prior to 1945. The economic orientation of the revolution can be discerned in one of its slogans, "We do not return either land or factory," double edged in its opposition to the return of factories and lands to either private or state ownership.<sup>41</sup> Peasants typically hoped for land redistribution and like the industrial workers started their own grassroots, democratic councils.

In Hungary 1956 Revisited, Agnes Heller and Ferenc Fehér, following Hannah Arendt, see the revolution combining in a unique way features of a multi-party political democracy with new, still developing notions of the socialization of property--economic democracy.<sup>42</sup> They allude to the writings of István Bibó, an anti-ommunist, non-doctrinaire socialist, who had joined Nagy's cabinet.<sup>43</sup> Bibó believed that the foundations for the legitimacy of the government were in the events of October, not the Stalinist Constitution of 1949 nor the *status quo ante* 1945.<sup>44</sup> In his draft of a new Constitution, there were to be no limitations placed on civil liberties (with the exception of a tacit agreement to ban fascist parties--which were in effect during the elections of 1990) nor on such small properties as peasant

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<sup>38</sup>Fehér and Heller, Hungary 1956 Revisited, p. 130. For a brief overview of the major events of the revolution, see *ibid.* pp. XII-XVII. The foregoing relies on this account, numerous sources read years ago, the exact sources no longer accessible to my memory, and my own recollections. Such events are not forgotten even by seven year olds!

<sup>39</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 1-21, pp. 75-77.

<sup>40</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 79, 86-90.

<sup>41</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 90.

<sup>42</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 103.

<sup>43</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 86-90, 97-115.

<sup>44</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 12-13, 84, 85-60, 92, 94, 101, 157.

lands and small businesses. In keeping the previously mentioned slogan, there would be no restoration of large estates, factories, or large enterprises.<sup>45</sup> Bibo's document captured the spirit and embodied the spontaneous emergence of peasants' and workers' councils that sought peasants' and workers' ownership, management, and operation, in a participatory democratic way, of these enterprises.<sup>46</sup> The aborted emerging socio politico-economic system was a unique form of social democracy, combining elements, traditionally seen as antithetical by both advocates of democratic capitalism and orthodox Marxists, of multi-party political democracy and a system of participatory, grassroots workers' councils.<sup>47</sup>

An additional reason for my considering the revolution social democratic instead of a democratic capitalist one is another national consensus, which exists to this day, aspects of which, as we have seen, were enacted as early as the 1870's, concerning some of the basic features of the social welfare state. The overwhelming majority of Magyars, including royalists and former members of the nobility take for granted such measures as national health care and family income supplement for children.

Imre Nagy has at times been depicted as irresolutely riding events.<sup>48</sup> On the contrary, he was a symbolic focal point of the aspirations of the Hungarian people. Hardly the Stalinist described in the initial Voice of America broadcast, Nagy had consistently advocated land redistribution instead of collectivization, the separation of state authority from the party apparatus (foreshadowing Gorbachev), and a degree of political pluralism.<sup>49</sup> With his self-critical openness leading to rejection of a life long Bolshevism in favor of political pluralism, Heller and Fehér describe Nagy as the first Eurocommunist, in effect a radical, democratic Eurosociologist.<sup>50</sup> They further describe him as "a new radical political, militant," the first post-Machiavellian politician who rejected superpower politics and whose consistent sincerity and integrity, eventually costing him his life, endeavored him to Magyars.<sup>51</sup> In addition, he was quite adept at forging consensus.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>45</sup>Ibid., p. 101.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., pp. 101-103.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., p. 103.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid., p. 118.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., p. 124.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., pp. 118-126.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid., p. 126.

While the socio-politico-economic vision of Imre Nagy is sketchy at best and was still developing when he fell from power, what we do know of it shows us a unique combination, like the revolution itself, of political democracy, pluralism, the safeguarding of civil liberties, direct, grassroots economic democracy, the right to private ownership of small parcels of land and small business, and some of the basic features of the social welfare state. He has become a symbol of the revolution of 1956, illustrated by the massive outpour of affection by the huge crowds at his rehabilitation and public funeral on the anniversary of his death on June 16, 1989. The new Republic of Hungary was proclaimed on October 23, 1989, deliberately timed to coincide with the first public commemoration of the revolution.

## VI.

Contrary to Western stereotypes, there are numerous historical resources, in all their ambiguity, for the construction of social democracy in Hungary. Resources in the ambiguous role of religion in Hungarian life, and in the Marxist legacy of George Lukács and the radical democratic socialism of the Budapest Circle were considered. Finally, an attempt was made to show, after providing a brief overview of its main events, that the revolution of 1956 and the socio-politico-economic vision of Imre Nagy provide the most important resources for the construction of social democracy in Hungary.

The countries of Central and Eastern Europe tend to be lumped together. In similar fashion, the collapse of Communism is treated as synonymous with the failure of socialism and the triumph of democratic capitalism. True to these stereotypes, the Hungarian Democratic Forum, the winner of the recent elections with 49% of the vote, is described as right of center.

In the first place, while the countries of Central and Eastern Europe do have a shared history, they also differ in their histories, ethnic populations, and some semblance of a democratic heritage (or lack thereof). On the contemporary scene, while all of these countries are embarked on a path toward political and economic reform, their political institutions vary, and the respective pace and styles of economic reform are significantly different.

The political institutions of the newly emerging Hungary are democratic. As it enters the global economy, the mechanisms of the market are being adopted and foreign investment encouraged. The vast majority of Magyars realize the market is more efficient than centralized planning, they are critical of the nearly stereotyped indolence of workers whose jobs are guaranteed and the necessary bribery of medical professionals to get adequate health care. Nevertheless, the broad national consensus supporting the basic features of the social welfare state is intact. (The Alliance of Free Democrats, which received 34% and consists

mostly of former dissidents, with its loosely knit eighteenth century-physiocrat ideology, may be somewhat of an exception, although even they favored some minimal standards of social welfare). In some places, although it is difficult to see what impact they will have and how widespread they will become, workers councils are managing their own factories. Wanting to avoid the massive economic dislocations that are all too evident in Poland, the pace of economic reform is slower.

The Hungarian Democratic Forum, with numerous wings and factions, including the "Greens," is a broad based political party, the only one organized in every locality. It combines elements of nationalism, support of democratic institutions and civil liberties, and features of the social welfare state, following primarily the model of Sweden.

Hungary is basically pro-Western and pro-American (although there is a nationalist party, whose ideology, advocating a uniquely Hungarian "middle way," has penetrated factions of all political parties with the exception of the Alliance of Free Democrats). While Hungary was allied with Germany during the World Wars, most Magyars have traditionally been pro-American. The intellectual leaders of the Revolution of 1848 saw the United States as a beacon of hope, a ray of light, an inspiration for their aspirations. The people of the United States, in turn, expressed their solidarity for the struggles of the Hungarian people. This mutual sympathy toward each other, reinforced by the influx of a large number of Hungarian immigrants to the United States, is perhaps best symbolized by the gift of Washington's sword to Kóssuth and its presence in the National Museum of Budapest to this day.<sup>53</sup>

Within the framework of this pro-Western, pro-American orientation, Hungarians are not uncritical of the United States and its capitalist system. There is a deep seated distrust of any superpower. Memories, particularly in the villages, of unscrupulous American business ventures that make the ugly American look beautiful linger. The impact of the influx of a significant number of Hungarian-American retirees, simply on account of being able to maintain a better standard of living in their native land, is not lost upon Hungarians. Although admiring of American political institutions and anxious to learn from them, Sweden and Finland are Hungary's economic role models, not the United States. Magyars do not want to replace Soviet troops with American dollars.

In addition to political economic reforms, Hungary faces two major, pressing problems. One concerns the problem of "rationalities," ethnic minorities, a historically thorny problem that I have not addressed in this essay. One aspect of the issue today is the large number of ethnic Magyars in neighboring countries, particularly Transylvania, a part of Romania since the Treaty of Trianon, and where Ceasescu's regime practiced what amounts to cultural

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<sup>53</sup>What Hungarian child is not aware of this? What American child is?

genocide. During the last two years some Magyars have wanted to declare war against Romania. There is little prospect of resolving the issue at this point.

Another aspect of this question concerns the treatment of the large minority of gypsies in Hungary. The current government has embarked on a program of affirmative action and sponsored legislation to safeguard the unique ethnic culture of the Gypsy people.

A no less pressing problem is that of environmental degradation. Scholars and politicians have been sent to the United States to study environmental protection legislation. As mentioned previously, there is a powerful Green faction, modeled after the West German party of that name, in the Hungarian Democratic Forum. Some Hungarian philosophers are studying resources in American philosophy, the pragmatism of James and Dewey and environmental philosophy in particular, as they seek the kind of values and vision they need to deal adequately with the issues surrounding environmental degradation.<sup>54</sup>

There are resources, however, in the Hungarian national heritage that provide such values and vision. I am thinking of an aspect of popular piety, the deep roots of which cannot be underestimated, that sees the world, human and non-human, as sacramental, humans as earth creatures inextricably rooted in the land, the non-human natural world of value in, of, and for itself, with which humans were created to live in harmony - resembling what Bernard E. Meland has called "mystical naturalism."<sup>55</sup>

The vision of the new Hungary's journey toward social democracy may be best summarized by Petöfi's words in the "Nemzeti Dal," "We pledge, we pledge never again to be prisoners!"<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>54</sup>Ibid., p. 127.

<sup>55</sup>At the previously mentioned conference in Washington, several of the Hungarians, including a prominent figure in the Hungarian Democratic Forum, spent a considerable amount of time at the Environmental Protection Agency. I am indebted to Dr. Janos Kelemen, Head of the Philosophy Department, Eotvos Lorand University, Budapest, for the information pertaining to the interest in American Philosophy on the part of Hungarian Philosophers.

<sup>56</sup>Meland, Bernard E., Modern Man's Worship: A Search for Reality in Religion (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1934).