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1988 and 1989 was the dawn of Hungarian change of regime. The impact of the upcoming change is also well-documented in informers’ reports of the public mood. The lecture examines the structure and tone of the press from this particular aspect from October 1988 to January 1989. How the reports of the public mood were reflected on the free press? Membership of a state party is accustomed to the fact that the caring state determines what needs to be done. Fresh media products and their multi-faceted vision caused them serious confusion. For reports of the public mood, it is not to be overlooked that their creators have been working on orders. Some of informers recorded what readers of the reports of the public mood expected. Others wrote what they really heard. Many people were shocked to see more newspapers, magazines, and TV channels. Others demanded their banning immediately. The media activity was considered by many sources as self-directed and provocative. Some reported that many people agreed with the change. But most people wrote that conflicting news is causing serious confusion. The sudden freedom came to surprise most of the people. The following quotation summarizes this: “The majority did not know what was right, what could be done, and what could not be done. The variety of newspapers does not help clarity of vision but the difficulty of orientation”.

Keywords: change of regime, Hungary, reports of the public mood, structure and tone change of the press

About the Reports of Public Mood

“The process that has started in society in the direction of democracy disrupts thinking. This is often wrongly influenced by the written and electronic media”.¹ This quote from 1989 shows the uncertainty of the process of Hungarian political transition. Most of the members of the ruling party² used control and accepted state paternalism. Thus, the change resulted in ideological and practical confusion. True, many people considered the unexpected open debates and criticisms as a democratic factor. But others had seen that it would lead to chaos. In 1988-1989, the Hungarian Socialist Workers’ Party played a major role in the change of

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² Hungarian Socialist Worker’ Party. Hungarian original: Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt. This party was the ruling Marxist–Leninist party of the Hungarian People’s Republic between 1956 and 1989. It was organised from elements of the Hungarian Working People’s Party during the Hungarian Revolution of 1956,
regime (Romsics, 2003; Ripp, 2006; Majtényi, Mikó, & Szabó, 2010), whose membership contradicted the events. This is also reflected in the sources of time and reports of the public mood (Katona & Rácz, 2010; Rácz, 2009a; 2009b). Fortunately, these documents from the times of change of regime were largely maintained. Despite the fact that it was written to the reports of the public mood: “Please destroy it after use”. In this article, from October 1988 to February 1989, the author tries to examine shortly the structure and tone changes of the press. The author will present the subject question through the reports of the public mood made in Budapest, capital of Hungary. Focusing on the impact of these documents on the emergence of new press products and changing the voice of old people, reporters were seriously concerned about democracy. For example: “It was noticed that the views represented by new organizations could be located in national communication forums. Many people criticize the fact that existing telecommunication bodies report on these”. The change in the structure and tone of the press has thus become the focus of attention for reporters and their customers. At the same time, it is clear that the topic has been treated as part of a more complex issue. But reports of the public mood must be treated with strong criticism (Katona & Rácz, 2010, pp. 7-29). The purpose of power was to obtain information, but not just to seek information, but to exercise control first. The “transport”, the interpretation, the transmission, and the influence of the news were ensured by the agitation network from the supreme staff to the basic structures. Fact sheets invited the agitators to not only report of the public mood on difficult issues, but also on everyday matters. The means of transmitting the news were written and oral reports of the public mood and conversations. They organized a separate party school for the stakeholder training, where activists discussed political issues and learned the main rules of the system’s operation. At the end of 1988, the Budapest Agitation and Pro-paganda Department was transformed. There had been no such thing since 1978. The new name was: Social Policy Department (Katona & Rácz, 2010, p. 7).

The Tone of the New Press in the Reports of Public Mood

For reports of the public mood, it should not be ignored that their creators were always able to evaluate or deny being honest. They worked on orders. It can be assumed that there were those who described what the report of the public mood readers expected. At the same time, there was no public opinion on the issue. Who else had his/her opinion? It also depended on what and how it came to the report of the public mood and how its author relied on the changes. And we do not know what he/she described and its source being honest. These sources, however, indicate that people of the age were concerned with the serious issues that were not discussed in public forums. And it turns out what the party state was asking about the opinion and mood of the population. At the end of 1988, the opinions were more open. Reports of the public mood often reflect surprising reactionary opinions. Thus, in 1989, there were still others worried about the existing system, saying that new parties would be created,

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3 There are only a few examples of the literature about the Hungarian change of regime.
4 Some of the reports of the public mood written in 1988 in 1989 were first published by the ArchivNet, the Hungarian National Archives’ online journal between October 2008 and February 2009. Selected reports of the public mood in Budapest of the period between October 1988 and October 1989 were published in this book. This article based in the documents collected in this book. About the reports of the public mood. This article analyzes reports of the public mood too. I would like to thank my colleague Attila Rácz (Budapest City Archives) for his help in writing this present.
6 For more of this see this article in the book about the reports of the public mood.
which is unacceptable. There was also said more about the media activity in its form and content as self-serving, provocative, and sensational. Mostly, the new Reform Magazine was criticized, for example, for the use of Hungarian national colors for Cicciolina (Ilona Staller), a well-known porn star photo, which was not worthy. There were those who were disturbed by the television program: “The changed program of television is good, but we have to get used to it”. It seems difficult to accept new things. It is also thought-provoking that reports of the public mood covered a question like a change in the schedule. Another mood announcement said:

The reception of television broadcasting is favorable; according to opinions, the new program policy is good for culture and entertainment. But it is okay that the news channel of each channel and the channel of the two channels are at the same time. There is a need for discussion because more and more people are getting information from the television.

The decisive element of the reports of the public mood was the announcement by Minister Imre Pozsgay that 1956 was not a counter-revolution but a popular uprising. The Information Policy of the Social Policy Department wrote this:

It caused a restless weekend for the party members of Budapest and everywhere in Hungary, interested citizens in Imre Pozsgay’s and János Berecz’s statement. Insecurity and astonishment, confusion and indignation characterized the reactions. The Communists said that such an important question as the 1956 judgment should not be qualified in an improvised interview. Historical and political conclusions should not be re-evaluated by a member of the Political Committee. They think it is hopeless, the party is unfaithful that it was said.

It is well-perceived how astonishing was the sudden change, and it points to mentality problems. Shady thinking is incomprehensible to those who are accustomed to the fact that truth and falsehood, and good and bad are simply appreciated by the press. Among the reports of the public mood, there were also some that demonstrated the confusion and shock and the complete rejection of criticism:

The party, the government, the deprivation of socialism continues. They attack the army. They demand the withdrawal of Soviet troops. They are already attacking collectivization, because of the corruption phenomenon there is a general attack on the party. The struggle for power is increased, the enemy increases his activity, his agitation is intense.

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7 Report of the Public Mood of the Social Policy Department of the Budapest Committee of the MSZMP of 11 January 1989 on the reception of the events of 4-11 January (week 2) BFL XXXV. 1. c. 439. Ó. e.
8 The Reform Magazine was published between 1988 and 1998. One of the first press products of the period of Hungarian change of regime.
9 Ilona Staller (26 November 1951- ), widely known by her stage name Cicciolina, is a Hungarian born Italian porn star, politician, and singer.
10 At the end of 1988, the editing of the Sunday evening program The Week (Hungarian: A Hét) was taken over by the Hungarian Television News Editorial staff. The new The Week was first screened on January 8, 1989.
13 Imre András Pozsgay (26 November 1933, 25 March 2016) was a Hungarian Communist politician who played a key role in Hungary’s transition to democracy after 1988. Earlier he served as Minister of Culture (1976-1980), Minister of Education (1980–1982) and Minister of State (1988-1990). On 28 January 1989, he, as the first from ruling party, stunned the Communist establishment by labeling the 1956 Hungarian revolution not a counterrevolution but a popular uprising.
14 János Berecz (Ibrány, 18 September 1930) is a Hungarian politician in the Kádár János’system. He was a member of the MSZMP in the 1980s and was a member of the Political Committee in 1987, the state secretary of the ideology and propaganda department, one of the most influential politicians at that time.
This attack is largely contributed by the Radio, in particular the Vasárnap Újság16 and the 168 Óra17,18. Another report of the public mood also attacked the Vasárnap Újság: “There is still great indignation about the behavior of journalists. They provoke provocatively. The Vasárnap Újság attacks socialism. They often go to the limit of the taste of freedom of speech”.19 Some programs were criticized, but even criticizing the Kölyökrádió was criticized: “There was a lot of outrage at the Kölyökrádió program that questioned the need for a pioneer movement21 and praised the scouts”.22 So, there was someone who criticized the critical tone as an attack on the party state. Sometimes, it is shocking to use the formulation and the use of rating badges frequently. Reporters were expected to be censors. A report of the public mood raised it very concretely:

It is reported by the press that today only citizens are right, power never. Recently, important programs have been produced. But editorial thinking and tone are bad. Many were ignored and outraged by the anti-Communist statements. The thoughts of morality, democracy, create confusion. It’s not good that radio staff did not say anything about it.23

Confusion and Incomprehension

It was repeatedly raised by journalists: “Many people realize that some experts control the formation of opinion by the involvement of two or three journalists. Some say it is an opinion poll” (Rácz, 2008).24 There were also some who asked why the leaders of the programs asked important questions. There was someone who called for the state to stand out: “We expect the media to address the party’s policy with the weight it deserves. Many alternative organizations25 get a bigger sound than they would be legitimate”.26 Otherwise, he said: “The program of alternative organizations includes establishing the rule of law. These passwords attract the people, politically inexperienced masses. Why does not the party stand for the public?”27 There is also a complete rejection: “The unscrupulous and unprecedented attack on the Communist movement and the progress of the

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16 The Vasárnap Újság (English: Sunday News) was a popular radio show in Hungarian Radio.
17 The 168 Óra (English: 168 Hours) was the Hungarian Radio’s political show. In 1989, a magazine was founded with the same title.
18 Report of the Public Mood of Budapest XII District Committee of the MSZMP of 28 December 1988 for the Department of Agitation and Propaganda of the Budapest Committee of the MSZMP. BFL XXXV. 1. c. 404. ó. e.
19 Report of the Public Mood of the Patriotic People’s Front Budapest XII. district organization of 20 December 1988 to 20 December. 1988. BFL XVII. 1301. Hazafias Népfront Budapesti Bizottsága iratai/Documents of the Patriotic People’s Front Budapest Committee. The Patriotic People’s Front was a special social organization between 1954 and 1990. Its purpose was to unite all classes of Hungarian society, it was a mass movement, hasn’t individual membership. It united all elements of the then political system, for example MSZMP, mass organizations, social and cultural organizations.
20 The Kölyökrádió (English: Kid’s Radio) was a youth program of Hungarian Radio.
21 A pioneer movement is an organization for children operated by a communist party. The adolescents then typically join the Young Communist League. Pioneer movements exist in countries where the Communist Party is in power as well as in some countries where the Communist Party is in opposition, if the party is large enough to support a children’s organization.
22 Report of the Public Mood of the Department of Agitation and Propaganda of the Budapest Committee of the MSZMP of 8 November 1988 on the events of party life, the leaders’ meetings and the political atmosphere of the population. BFL XXXV. 1. c. 388. ó. e.
23 Report of the Public Mood of the Department of Agitation and Propaganda of the Budapest Committee of the MSZMP of 8 November 1988 on the events of party life, the leaders’ meetings and the political atmosphere of the population. BFL XXXV. 1. c. 388. ó. e.
24 Report of the Public Mood of the Department of Agitation and Propaganda of the Budapest Committee of the MSZMP of 27 October 1988 on the reception of the events of October 20-26 (week 43) BFL XXXV. 1. c. 391. ó. e.
25 For more information about alternatives.
26 Report of the Public Mood of Budapest XII District Committee of the MSZMP of 28 December 1988 for the Department of Agitation and Propaganda of the Budapest Committee of the MSZMP. BFL XXXV. 1. c. 404. ó. e.
27 Report of the Public Mood of MSZMP's Committee of Budapest University of Technology of 29 December. 1988 BFL XXXV. 1. c. 424. ó. e.
media is becoming more and more arousing". The same ideology appears elsewhere:

Alternative organizations are concerned about the discouragement of current leadership. They intend to increase their distrust of the House, to discredit and recall members of parliament. The media outlines the views of alternative organizations that judge our system and our leaders. Why do not they point to the wrong ideas?

There is also a reactionary tone:

In this country since 1945, not only bad things have happened. The results achieved must be propagated rather than criticism. They deal with industrial workers and working peasants as well as creative and not dissatisfied intellectuals. But they also have serious concerns.

The same report of the public mood also includes a comment on the Young Communist’s League: “The report on television did not help the leaders of the Alliance to clear the current turmoil. The meeting was not suited to change the confused situation”. Also, these lines reflect ultra-realistic views:

The past 40 years are spoken of as if they were mistakes. Some even question that in 1956 it was not a counter-revolution. Nobody responds to this, but it fosters the mood. The magazine Kapu mentioned martyrs and ordinary murderers.

There has been some criticism that television not only describes the views of the party state:

Many are strongly criticized for the fact that some newspapers and radio actually organize a campaign for the recall of Members. The attacking, aggressive tone is rejected. A wide public opinion expects a formal statement of the political and legal perception of such cases, with regard to the procedure to be followed.

There were some who did not criticize the critical tone, but pointed to the difficulties of selling the party-state’s cards: “It is getting harder to sell the Szovjetunió, the Lányok-Asszonyok, the Képes Sport, because the workers are concerned with the problems of livelihood”.

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28 Report of the Public Mood of MSZMP’s Committee of Budapest University of Technology of 29 December. BFL XXXV. 1. c. 424. ö. e.
29 Report of the Public Mood of Budapest XII District Committee of the MSZMP of 28 December 1988 for the Department of Agitation and Propaganda of the Budapest Committee of the MSZMP. BFL XXXV. 1. c. 404. ö. e.
30 Report of the Public Mood of Budapest XII District Committee of the MSZMP of 28 December 1988 for the Department of Agitation and Propaganda of the Budapest Committee of the MSZMP. BFL XXXV. 1. c. 404. ö. e.
31 The Young Communist’s League is the name used by the youth wing of various Communist parties around the world. The Hungarian version: Kommunisták Ifjúsági Szövetsége (KISZ).
32 Report of the Public Mood of Budapest XII District Committee of the MSZMP of 28 December 1988 for the Department of Agitation and Propaganda of the Budapest Committee of the MSZMP. BFL XXXV. 1. c. 404. ö. e.
33 The magazine Kapu (English: Gate) was founded in 1988 as an independent Hungarian cultural and public journal. The Kapu was one of the first independent organs at the period of the change of regime in Hungary.
34 Report of the Public Mood of Budapest XII District Committee of the MSZMP of 28 December 1988 for the Department of Agitation and Propaganda of the Budapest Committee of the MSZMP. BFL XXXV. 1. c. 422. ö. e.
36 The Szovjetunió (English: Soviet Union) was founded in 1958. It was an illustrated monthly magazine of.
37 The Lányok-Asszonyok (English: Girls-Women) was founded in 1959. It was a Hungarian language edition of a social, political, literary and artistic soviet journal Советская женщина. The Szovjetunió and the Lányok-Asszonyok were publications of the Hungarian-Soviet Friendship Society.
38 The Képes Sport (English: Illustrated Sport) was published between 1954 and 1992 every week by the state sports management.
39 Report of the Public Mood of Budapest XII District Committee of the MSZMP of 28 December 1988 for the Department of Agitation and Propaganda of the Budapest Committee of the MSZMP. BFL XXXV. 1. c. 404. ö. e.
Santa Claus and the Luxury

Besides the many critical comments, there were quite a few others. An example is this: “We welcome the ambition in the central press to give room to the opinion of alternative organizations”. There was a belief in reflecting on corruption in the press: “General opinion that the best defense against them is the democratization, the eradication of power monopolies, the freedom of the press”. The part quoted below is about a television broadcast, especially about the humorist program of György Sándor “humoralist”. There is also criticism here, but not against the show. In the broadcast, György Sándor, like Santa Claus (Hungarian: Mikulás), chose elegant big houses (Majtényi, 2009) and asked for donations.

The employees liked the political program of György Sándor. The Santa Claus program is typical of our current society. From the enclosed palaces, the forts like the forts the humorist did not receive the donation. How much do the inhabitants of the palaces feel about the decline in living standards and the daily worries?

Summary

In summary, what experience can be taken? Reports of the public mood say that the change in the structure and tone of the press also reflects the social and political process that we call a change of system. All of this unexpectedly reached the majority of people in Hungary. The sudden change that the press showed spectacularly made me think. At the same time, however, the situation was incomprehensible for many. Many people used to make decisions and opinions. Freedom suddenly brought uncertainty as well. They had to take responsibility for the decision. The lecture comes with a quote that proves this:

There is uncertainty in the perception of social change. The majority cannot decide what is right, what can be done, and what cannot be done. A lot of newspapers do not help clear the way. It is hard to get around.

References


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42 Sándor (Streit) György (Budapest, April 4, 1938- ) is a “humoralist”, writer, performer, Kossuth and Jászai Mari prize-winning artist.

43 See also about the luxurious lifestyle of the elite in the period of socialist era.

44 Report of the Public Mood of MSZMP Tungsram Rt. of 15 December 1988 about the workers’ mood. BFL XXXV. 1. c. 427. õ. e. The Tungsram was one of Hungary’s largest, oldest, and internationally most prestigious firms, known for light bulbs and electronics. Established in city Újpest (today part of Budapest) in 1896, it initially produced telephones, wires and switchboards.

45 Report of the Public Mood of Budapest XII District Committee of the MSZMP of 28 December 1988 for the Department of Agitation and Propaganda of the Budapest Committee of the MSZMP. BFL XXXV. 1. c. 404. õ. e.


