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## **Youth Policy behind the Iron Curtain after 1956**

After having put down the 1956 revolution and war of independence, the Kadar regime, in the shadow of a series of vengeful acts, while reconstructing and partly recreating the system of communist political institutions, simultaneously laid an increased emphasis upon youth policy. This zeal, at first sight perhaps surprising, proves to be understandable if we take account of the fact that from the very beginning the regime endeavoured to keep the free time activity of the youth under an effective control. There was still another important aspect which supported the assiduous attention of the regime: they thought it was better for the young under 30, which represented more than 50 percent of the whole population, only to amuse themselves or relax in their free time than to join initiatives of very doubtful value from the aspect of the communist party-state.

This meticulous attention is supported by the fact that whereas the highest party organization directing public life, the Provisional Executive Committee, the legal predecessor of the Political Committee of the Hungarian Socialist Labour Party (HSLP), which due to its high level political activity dealt rather rarely whether with the youth or with certain problems of pop music keenly interesting to the youngest strata of the society, however, made an important decision at the very beginning of building up its system. Namely, the Provisional Executive Committee on its session held on the 25th of January 1957 came to a decision about the foundation of the Communist Youth Organization (CYO), on which they consulted with the Komsomol, the soviet communist youth organization having a wealth of experience based on more decades. The Hungarian party leaders were realistic to see that the majority of young people were still far from standing up for Kádár's puppet government, and exactly for this, the party state needed the supporting activity of this organization, within the framework of which pop music entertainments were to be fashioned. Földes László Snr. – father of the singer and songwriter Hobo who later often got in conflict with the different organs of the party state – was the first on this meeting to speak up for the entertainment of young people, arguing that the CYO should be at its head, because that was the way to win this stratum over to the regime. This speech clearly reveals the character of the Kádár policy, which wished to increase the citizens' sense of comfort in the interest of having the regime more easily accepted. The idea of helping certain lpop music performers in their publicity is to be found within this framework. The decision was followed by actions. On the 21st of March 1957 the CYO under the leadership of a hardliner, Komócsin Zoltán was indeed founded. Between 1961 and 1964 he was followed by Pullai Árpád, another orthodox

communist from the HSLP, but neither did Méhes Lajos mean a considerable relief who filled the post of the first secretary of the Central Committee of the CYO until 1970.

The Youth Act of 1971 – which had no precedent in the Hungarian history of law - states that the CYO and the Hungarian Pioneers' Organization are the single politico-social organization of the youth, which in the monolithic political system suggested tentatively that young people would be controlled with the help of these. These two organizations were destined to represent in theory the interests of young people in front of all the social organs of the party state, beyond all these their „lofty” mission among others was to develop the education of the young and watch over their legal rights. If we consider that the Kádár party state took steps always exclusively in its own interests, this legal term seems to be rather paradoxical because, first of all, it was about keeping a tight check on the young, and not about supporting them. The Act contains also that the young have the right, among others, to education, rest and „cultured” spending of free time, which were to be referred to pop music, too. The Act says that the socialist education of the young is partly the task of the cultural institutions i.e. community centres and youth clubs from now on were responsible for young people' ideological influence. This section of the Youth Act gives explanation for the fact that the management in many cultural institutions categorically refused to present certain pop music performers. The ideological foundation of exerting political influence on these institutions can be well observed in the sixth section of the Act: „The necessary conditions for the useful spending of young people's freetime - especially education and entertainment (...) – should be brought into existence and continually developed by the united, determined activities of state organs, organizations and social bodies.” This at the same time granted authorization to state supervision to meddle constantly in the youth policy of different cultural institutions and, through this, in their policy concerning pop music, too.

The „fruit” of communist brainwashing, which practically started in 1945 and radically affected the youth, was clearly expressed in the speech made by Pullai Árpád in 1971. He tackled the quarter of century since the Soviet occupation declaring that the young had already been brought up in socialism, therefore the period before 1945 became no more than a subject at school, and they took it for granted that they had full rights to education, work, esteem, progress, culture and entertainment. He thought that „all this is a natural (...) realistic intention, because it coincides with the program of the complete construction of socialism, with the care about people, and with socialist humanity. This youth is not more problematic, and mostly not worse than the previous generations, on the contrary, these young people predominantly make an all-out effort to take the opportunity of the advantages of socialism.”

In his speech, Pullai referring to the tasks of the CYO mentioned that „The primacy of the political character of this job is an evident expectation because the CYO is a political organization of our party, a Marxist-Leninist youth organization. On the other hand, we have to take into account also another fact that the CYO at the same time is the mass organization of the Hungarian youth, or to be more precise, of young people of different age and interest (...) The youth cannot be simply considered as a plain and passive „recipient” of right educational principles and resolutions. They are the sum total of such individuals who „request to speak” in the decision making of social, political, economic problems and if they are given the chance, they cooperate in the realization of all these with pleasure and competence. ” Consequently, apart from the fact that the CYO had to carry its political and ideological education out, Pullai considered it important not to do it in that pushy way characteristic of the methods used in the Rákosi era. On the contrary, he thought that they should take the young

generation's range of interest into consideration if they want to draw their attention to the events of the CYO. It was often without success because the party apparatchiks were too rigid, but the party leadership thought that these purposes could be accomplished by creating self-motivated clubs, youth circles, special interest groups and organizing sports and cultural programmes. In the field of pop music a lot of bands were allowed to play in different events with political content – for example rock festivals of solidarity or Revolutionary Youth Days - , in order to entice young people under 30, but mostly under 20 to normally boring events thickly glazed with communist ideology.

The Youth Park of Buda, which was run between 1961 and 1984, excelled at organizing events. It was the biggest open-air stage in the Kádár era. The institution was brought into existence by the Budapest Committee of the CYO, and it was maintained by the party state municipality, the Cultural Department of Metropolitan Committee. It was founded partly because it was more comfortable for the party state, to be more precise, for the state security to observe the young driven to one single place. From spring to autumn, the Park gave a concert or organized a dance hall almost every day – once exceptionally, thanks to the band of Piramis, even a Christmas concert – always before a large audience. These events evoked not only the young's but also the informers' interest, there was not a single event where no secret agents appeared. The plainclothes policemen picked those teenagers out who copied western patterns and were very popular amongst their friends, but at the same time they tried to record all the performed songs because there could be such ones, on account of which they could initiate an inquiry into the musicians' or even the institutional directors' case.

The young people in Hungary consumed the popular culture leaking through the Iron Curtain, they copied American, Italian and French films, glanced through western pop magazines, tried to dress like their idols, the Beatles, the Rolling Stones or later the Cream, the Yardbirds, the Led Zeppelin or the Deep Purple. It is an interesting fact that a lot of young people, browsing through the caricatures of Ludas Matyi, a humorous magazine and of other daily papers, got informed for the first time about „clattering musicians” and „unkempt haired hooligans”. The official policy repeated day in day out that the rock-and-roll – and later the beat music - was a passing fashion which could not put down roots in socialist culture. They were basically not right because the frenzy of rock-and-roll and jazz, and later of beat and pop-rock could not be stopped at the Iron Curtain. The reason for this was that Hungary could not be hermetically separated from the West, which was mostly due to the fact that the majority of those 200 thousand refugees who fled from Hungary to the West in 1956 kept in touch with the circle of their relatives and friends, and sometimes they brought with themselves some pop magazines or some fashionable records. Those who were fortunate enough to have even just one copy of these gained enormous popularity among their schoolfellows or colleagues.

It goes without saying that the communist regime did not approve it and launched a counteroffence against the „cursed, imperialist culture-rubbish”: in 1965 a new radio programme was established with the title Only to the young whose mission was to counterbalance the radio stations broadcast from abroad, and in 1966 a television programme with the title Hi boys, hi girls. The latter illustrated how the young who wanted to be suitable to socialist human ideals should behave themselves, how they should amuse themselves in a decently cultured way. The Youth Park of Buda, too, joined the queue. Its management wanted to serve as a model for the other community centres, therefore it introduced a compulsory „dress-code” (sports hair style, white shirt, jacket, cloth trousers), very often even the western young, who paid with hard currency, were excluded because they were „dressed like tourists”. This, of course, was a constant source of tension, the young from the suburbs

did not want to submit themselves to the rules of behaviour and dressing, which involved the usual practice of resorting to violence: the defiant were beaten up and in addition were banned from the Park. Such restrictions were imposed not only in the capital but in the country as well, mainly in the 60s: those who wore ragged jeans and leather jackets were kept off.

The witch hunt commanded by the communists resulted in a lot of bloody situations, even the son of the ex-comrade of Kádár, László Rajk Jr. was given a sound beating because he dared to wear jeans at a concert, and all this became extremely awkward because his French scholarship friends were also present. This case, too, contributed to the fact that in 1971 the young were not obliged to wear a suit in the Youth Park or in other places of entertainment, what's more Kádár went even further when he stated in a youth meeting: „Anybody can have as long hair as he wants, but he should at least wash it.” In the youth press a series of sarcastic articles were published about the prohibition of young men's long hair, among others László Gyurkó – Kádár's biographer, a member of parliament - wrote an open letter on this problem to the Central Committee of the CYO. The writing was published in the periodical Valóság. In 1971 the dress-code disappeared forever from the places of entertainment, and from that time on everybody wearing jeans or long hair was allowed to enter.

This, however, was not the end of the gauntlet of youth subculture in the Kádár era. The daily papers wrote about hippies in a defamatory way. The most emblematic article about the so-called Nagyfa gang was published in the Magyar Hírlap in February 1970. (The gang was named after the fact that they gathered around a big tree not far from the Youth Park because they were not allowed to enter the place of entertainment.) In this case the demonization was so successful that those hippies longing for world peace were practically identified with the followers of the former Arrow Cross Party, they were presented to the public as hooligans sympathizing with Nazi ideas. This was, of course, not true but the communist press policy functioned effectively on this occasion as well: the majority of public opinion believed this lie because they were informed partially and they were not able to make sure of its contrary. On the columns of daily papers and of the county newspapers, which over-fulfilled everything, the hippie became the synonym of criminal, the readers' eyes could often catch the „Long haired hooligans raped” or „Long haired hippies broke in” sort of writings. The double standard of the so-called youth press is well characterized by the fact, for example, that an article pejoratively talked about the fans of P. Mobil, another in the same issue carried a poster of the band. The case of the transient Pick-Up magazine (a propagandistic publication of the Hungarian Record Company) was also very characteristic of the situation: the magazine published an interview with the leader of the P. Mobil and in another article beside the interview there were sarcastic remarks concerning the band.

The Pesti Műsor regularly published hit lists on which it was not allowed to put such bands that the communist regime arbitrarily disqualified. Besides, the Pesti Műsor published the programme of the Youth Park and even colourful posters about the performers as well, but those interested could find offers in the Ifjúsági Magazin, too. The latter was a kind of substitute for pop magazines in the 70s and the 80s, and if it had had less pop cultural content, simply it would not have been bought by the young. Pop culture worked as a kind of bait that could increase the probability of young people reading political articles, as well. A similar strategy was followed in the Magyar Ifjúság, another weekly. In November of 1982 a real pop magazine came out with the title Poptika, but according to the Central Committee of the CYO it was too licentiously edited, and on the pretext of the publication of a translation of David Bowie's song Heroes the magazine was immediately banned.