SUMMARIUM

1956

The 1950s, including the 1956 revolution, were a decisive decade in the history of Hungarian society. The country was taken along the path of Soviet-type communism, the failure of which was demonstrated not only by the revolution in the autumn of 1956 but also by the decision of the country's leader in the early 1960s to abandon – in part and in full – the Stalinist model.

Educational policy closely followed these major political developments. It is possible, in all areas of the educational system, to show how attempts were made to follow the official line. This applies to teaching training courses, school textbooks and educational magazines as well as in the field of religious instruction and in attempts to promote social equality. Still, many people already involved in educational policy saw opportunities to realise their goals by cooperating with the new political elite.

The conference held at Balatonfüred in October 1956 – attended by a divided educational elite – exerted an effect on the general thinking of teachers and educators for decades. The conference determined not only the fate of people during subsequent decades but also the direction of educational policy, from the forms of social consultation to the content of teaching and the judgement of religious instruction.

In this issue, Educatio marks the 50th anniversary of the Revolution of October 1956 and encourages further study of this troubled era.

In his paper, Péter Donáth uses archival sources and interviews to portray the circumstances leading to the changes in educational policy of 1955-56 that followed the dismissal of Imre Nagy's first government. It examines the effects of such changes on primary school teacher training.

Donáth shows how, from 1950 onwards, senior staff at the Ministry of Education attempted to transform Hungary's teaching training colleges into "communist educational workshops" by introducing "political and ideological requirements on teachers", "an array" of controls, and changes in the curriculum. At the same

time, they maintained the four-year teaching training courses (including one year of practice). A slower rate of development in public education meant that primary school (and kindergarten) teachers found it difficult to find jobs. For this reason, as the result of a peculiar bargaining process among a one-off coalition of those desiring a more effective system of direct political socialisation and those favouring the professional aspects of teaching training, a decision was taken at a session of the Hungarian Workers' Party, held on 26 July 1956, to create two-year kindergarten and primary school teaching training courses for high school graduates.

Iván Bajomi notes how, in the autumn of 1956, Ferenc Mérei – in harmony with other attempts at the time to establish greater autonomy – proposed the re-establishment of the National Educational Council. This body had previously given educational professionals a greater influence upon the decision-making process, but it had been shut down in 1948. Documents found by Bajomi show that senior staff at the Ministry of Education initially accepted Mérei's proposal. Indeed, even in the spring of 1957, they still regarded the re-establishment of the Council as important. Nevertheless, a record drawn up at the time indicates that, for these senior staff, the important thing was not the autonomous character of the gremium but that the body should lesson the work of decision-makers at the Ministry. After the imprisonment of the psychologist Mérei, who was suspected of having links with Imre Nagy's group, the 1956 proposal was taken off the agenda until the political changes of 1989/90.

János Géczi reviews the major educational publications published in Hungary in 1956. The function of these publications – of which there were hardly a dozen – was to provide professional information and ideological training to a diverse and heterogeneous body of teachers who exhibited differences of social background, education, culture, and professional competence. Alongside these periodicals, which were founded and sustained (directly or indirectly) by the political centre, there was no opportunity for workshops based on the interests of teacher groups or associations. The major magazines are distinguishable based on the theoretical and practical level of education, while the county publications became agit-prop organs, in line with the express demands of party politics.

Katalin Kéri and Attila Varga show, in their paper, how new textbooks were introduced at every level of Hungary's educational system, which underwent great changes in both structure and content between 1950 and 1953. The textbooks faithfully reflected the swing to the left after 1945 and the subsequent radical shift towards the Soviet ideological model after 1947. Based on the reading material and mathematical problems appearing in textbooks used in lower primary education, the paper reviews the manner in which political aims, events and phenomena were introduced into texts that were to be read by schoolchildren.

Éva Szabolcs's paper examines the historical significance of the teachers' conference held at Balatonfüred between 1-6 October 1956. After a brief description

of the historical context, Szabolcs analyses – based on the manuscript record of the conference – the self-examination process undertaken by the educational professionals attending the conference in the hope of a relaxation of the communist dictatorship. The two major topics throughout the conference were the relationship towards Soviet pedagogical theory and a re-evaluation of Hungarian public education in the past.

Erzsébet Golnhofer demonstrates how the changes of political regime in Hungary between 1945 and 1956 affected the lives of academics who were influential in the field of education. Embedded in the historical and academic context, Golfhofer examines the life stories of various academics, including those who refused to compromise with the dictatorial authorities, those who accommodated the authorities' demands out of naivety or under political duress, and Marxists who supported the authorities but who occasionally became disillusioned. Golfhofer exposes the dramatic events accompanying the private and professional lives of these academics. She also shows how individual decisions and actions should only be interpreted within the framework of a complex causal relationship.

Péter Tibor Nagy offers a detailed account of the political – rather than ideological – code nature of attendance at classes in religious instruction in the 1950s. The evaluation of religious instruction in schools was closely correlated with the communist party's policy towards the churches and the relationship between the public and the regime. In certain academic years, religious instruction in schools almost disappeared in Budapest. Although this is an indisputable political historical fact, nevertheless religious education was still present even at such times – as an activity undertaken by the churches (as church records show). Despite the pressure exerted by the authorities, the absence of religious instruction throughout a pupil's childhood applies (albeit not universally) only to those children whose fathers did not attend church themselves. Less than a third of both convinced atheists and regular churchgoers sent their children to classes in religious instruction – the latter group seeking out alternative opportunities for such instruction at church.

Géza Sáska uses data to show how, between 1948 and 1962, attempts to achieve social equality in school and higher education were dominated in Hungary by the rationale of a class war led by the proletariat. Among the selection mechanisms of the educational system, the government was in control of the rules of acceptance, the legal validity of certificates, and student/social allowances. Meanwhile, the evaluation of course content and checks on student knowledge levels remained in the hands of teachers and lecturers, most of whom had taught under the previous regime. A zero-sum game arose: as the power of the authorities gradually decreased, so the power of teachers and lecturers gradually increased. This explains the decline – despite bureaucratic efforts and political pressure to the contrary – in the ratio of college and university students whose parents were blue-collar or agricultural workers. It also accounts for the fact that such students exhibited worse

results and a higher drop-out rate than did contra-selected students whose parents were professionals or white-collar workers. In the end, teachers and lecturers of the old type proved to be more influential than party politicians seeking to establish a classless society.

Péter Tibor Nagy and Géza Sáska

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