Chapter 4

Contrasting the Memory of the Kádár and Honecker Regimes

The immediate experience of the change of regimes was different in the two countries. In East Germany mass demonstrations indicated the collapse of the legitimation of the Honecker regime, while in Hungary MSZMP agreed with the opposition about the organization of democratic elections. As we have seen in the above chapters, the East German political climate was much more repressive than Kádár's Hungary. The following citation comes from an interview that I conducted in an unusual 'terrain' in East Germany with a Zeiss worker (*Zeissianer*), who had been imprisoned in the Honecker era for his oppositionist political activity. In the summer of 1989 he left the GDR, and he found new employment in Munich as a transport worker. After suffering an injury he lost his job and he failed to find a new one. At the time of interviewing he lived in a hostel for homeless people. This is how he recalled the socialist past in the light of his experience in the new, capitalist society:

> We were fifty people in the [oppositionist] group. We did not do big things: we published some posters and a journal in which we wrote that there is political repression in the GDR. In 1982 they [the party] took the case very seriously – I was arrested and I spent six months in prison. When I was released, the organization had already been dissolved. There was no point in continuing. I did not have any problem in the factory, I earned good money. What I did not like was that I could not have my own opinion. You could not say openly what you thought because there was a constant spying on you, even in the pub or within the factory. They [the party] declared everything to be anti-state activity and subversion. 'You [the party] made a mistake' – this was impossible to say. 'The party decides everything, without the party the grass does not grow and people can't breathe' – this was the general attitude. People wanted to think for themselves, make suggestions, better things – but no one listened. 'The party is always right, you should not think, you should just do your

> work.' They wanted to deprive people of their ability to think. People should just do their work and leave the serious things to the leadership. I don't see a change in this. Those who are at the top don't want people to think. *Today I don't see a really big difference between the two systems, socialism and capitalism.*[1]

Jan's life-history is not a typical East German working-class career. The citation, however, reflects a crucial difference between the subjective evaluations of the two welfare dictatorships. In East Germany, no one, including Jan, who lost his job and his home in the new regime, wanted Honecker's state back. In the Hungarian interviews we meet a more ambiguous picture: the desire for greater social and material equality triggers a longing for a strong state, order and an autocratic government, which is expected to restore national pride, protect Hungarian industry and increase the standard of living of the working people – the latter being the most attractive 'catchword' of the Kádár regime.[2]

To explain the different evaluations of the change of regimes and the new democracies it is important to point out structural differences between the two countries, which shaped the experience of the change of regimes. While the East German average wages were still lower – 70–72 per cent of the West German average – in 2004 and 2008 the German GDP per capita was higher than the EU average by 16 per cent, while the Hungarian GDP per capita was 63 per cent of the EU average in 2004 and 64 per cent in 2008.[3] If we define the poor as people who live at a consumption level that is half of the EU average, then nearly three-quarters of the Hungarian population can be considered to be poor.[4] Although the East German unemployment rate was higher than the Hungarian at the time of interviewing (20 per cent, while in Hungary it only exceeded 10 per cent in 2009), the employment rate is very low in Hungary: in 2009 for example, 71 per cent of the population of 15–64 year-olds were employed in Germany, but this was only 55 per cent in Hungary. Ferge estimates that one million jobs were lost in Hungary as a result of economic restructuring, while according to the calculation of Mark Pittaway there were 23 per cent fewer jobs in Hungary in 2008 than in 1989.[5] According to the estimate of Ferge (2010), 45–50 per cent of the Hungarian population belongs to the losers of the change of regimes, 30–35 per cent experienced no change in their situation, and 20–25 per cent belongs to the winners. It is worth pointing out that poverty seems to be a 'durable' condition in Hungary: according to a panel survey with three thousand respondents, the majority (60 per cent) of those who were poor in 1992 were in the same situation fifteen years later, and only 7 per cent had improved their conditions.[6] These data suggest that Hungarian society is becoming more closed socially.

These differences were visible in the life-history interviews, too. On the basis of the interviews I distinguished between three dimensions of postsocialist experience: (1) the world of labour, (2) subjective evaluation of the standard of living and the level of integration into consumer society, and (3) interpersonal relations. The first dimension is divided into two different types of experience: half of the interviewees in both groups could experience transition in the factory, while the other half lost their jobs or were sent to early retirement. The transition to post-Fordism was an essentially different experience in the two countries.[7] The Rába workers unanimously constructed 'narratives of decline' about the postsocialist history of their factory: the managers decreased production, the new proprietors refused to invest in innovation or the technical development of the factory, and they made profit by selling the valuable estates of Rába and laying off workers who had worked there for the many years since the plants had been built by the legendary communist manager, Ede Horváth. Many workers argued that the proprietors intentionally destroyed production in order to make a profit from the selling of the estates. Workers' grievances were frequently translated into full-fledged conspiracy theories as we will see below.

Szalai distinguishes between the workers of the multinational sector and those of the domestic sector. The latter are described as poorly paid, badly exploited '*bricoleur*s', who are often informally employed and they live from one day to the next.[8] By using this model, the Rába workers unmistakably identified themselves with the '*bricoleur*s' of the domestic sector. They associated (post)industrial development with the multinational enterprises, which destroyed the former prides of domestic industry, enticed their best workers and forced an unfair competition upon the impoverished national companies. Here are the views of two Rába workers:

> Because you can see that in the West the state protects the national enterprises. But look at the Wagon Factory.[9] It was a profitable enterprise and now I think that there is a will to destroy it so that it can't be a competitor. I can see through these practices. Győr had famous textile factories, all of them were sold to the competitor [Western] firms, and they were all closed or destroyed otherwise. I can mention Richards, where my wife worked, Graboplast, they were all famous and serious enterprises and all of them were destroyed. This is what I don't understand in this change of regimes: how the state could allow this. I don't say that it should support an enterprise which operates at a loss, but if it sees a perspective in an enterprise … – because we should observe our own interests, and we should not entrust ourselves to the mercy of the West. Because here is this Audi, which is exempt from taxation. If the Wagon Factory could spend the same money on development, it would not be in this bad situation. There has been no innovation here since the change of regimes because the high taxes kill this factory.[10]

> My younger son works in Audi. They only exploit the Hungarians there. They make them work harder in comparison to us. But if I compare how much they pay there [in Germany] with how much he gets, then they are exploited, no doubt. They did not come here to benefit the Hungarians but to make a profit for themselves because our workforce is cheaper. It should not have been allowed that Hungarians are exploited to that extent. The politicians point to each other instead of preventing the selling of the whole country.[11]

The above citations nicely illustrate how the workers' grievances are translated into an ethnical-populist discourse, in which the 'multinational' (Western) capital identified with the 'traitor' domestic elite destroys Hungarian industry, thereby becoming responsible for the misery of the workers, who lose the secure existence which was guaranteed under the Kádár regime. To stress the decline, many workers explicitly contrasted the glorious era of Rába under Ede Horváth, when Rába exported its products to the COMECON countries and the United States, and enjoyed wide press and media coverage as a successful socialist company with the 'lean years' of the 1990s:

> In the old times it was an honour to work in the Wagon Factory. I was so proud when my father first brought me here at the age of eighteen, and that I am going to work in the famous Wagon Factory … and now here I am [sigh]. And if they give me notice, I don't know what I will do. Distributing newspapers, cleaning offices or flats … sadly, there is nothing else. And this is so frightening! In addition, I married late, my daughter has just started secondary school and my son will go to university next year. If we were only the two of us, my husband and me, it would not be so bad. But I have to support them, and both of them are excellent students, which is my biggest problem because both will go to university because I cannot let them go to work after secondary school. … Back then there was no such insecurity as we have today. I did not have to worry about whether they need me for work today or not. The Wagon Factory was an elite company, the neighbours were envious of us: 'it was easy for you, you were well off, you got very good money in the Wagon Factory'. The value of the wages was much higher back then. There were no such differences between workers and managers. The chief manager earned six times as much as a skilled worker. But today the differences are much, much greater. If only we could see the signs of progress. But unfortunately, there are none.[12]

The Hungarian workers unanimously argued that the history of their factory was one of decline after 1989, which they blamed on the management at the local level, and on the multinational companies and the state's failure to protect successful enterprises at the national level. Post-Fordist innovation and development was represented by Audi, which they expe-

rienced as the humiliation of their company: Audi, in fact, bought the giant hall, which Ede Horváth had built with the purpose of bringing the production of motor cars back to Győr. Rába workers recalled bitterly that under Ede Horváth Rába was the main sponsor of the town: it built a stadium, and it could boast about a football team, a house of culture, a well-equipped library, an orchestra, a choir and a dance group. After the change of regimes Audi became the main sponsor of Győr, which Rába workers held to be the unjust consequence of tax exemption (which they blamed on the government).

The Zeiss experience differed from the 'narratives of decline' characteristic of the Rába workers. The company implemented massive lay-offs: the chairman of the enterprise council (*Betriebsrat*) estimated that around sixteen thousand people lost their jobs in the first few years after the *Wende*. The company mainly lost the young workforce because young skilled workers were expected to find new jobs in West Germany more easily than middle-aged family men. In 1995 a further six hundred workers had to be given notice.[13] The Zeiss picture was, however, more ambiguous than the Hungarian experience. Workers in fact had positive experiences with the post-Fordist model of production because the new proprietor, the West German Zeiss, modernized the plants, bought new machines and technology and made significant investments in the town of Jena. Workers reported improving working conditions (competitive salaries, the installation of air conditioning, new bathrooms and canteens, and flexible working hours). They noted, however, that they had to work under greater stress and tension than in the old production regime:

> Requirements are persistently increasing: you have to be flexible and serve more jobs at the same time. In the GDR it was different. We had work but we had to do the same job every day, so you had a certain routine. Today everything is faster, tenser and more hectic. It is difficult to compete with young people even if you have thirty years of work experience. In the GDR we received enormous orders and we produced for stock. Today we work for orders, and if the customers order something, they want to get it today or yesterday. Today you get more tired than in the GDR albeit we also worked hard back then.[14]

The 'narratives of decline' are essentially missing from the East German interviews. The workers, including a former party secretary who told me that he continued to hold himself to be a communist, did not mention such cases of corruption or the deception of the people in relation to privatization as the Hungarians. Instead, the East Germans explained the massive lay-offs through the collapse of the COMECON market and the rise in the price of production:

> Our boss told us to beware: 'now everybody is celebrating, we are opening the borders and we will have the Western currency because everyone wants to go to Western shops, but I warn you: once we have the Western currency, you will all lose your jobs.' No one believed him although we should have done – just a simple calculation. We all produced for the Eastern markets and when we started to calculate in Western currency, no one could afford to buy our products. But the boss was right: we could not sell our products; there were lots of losses and we had to stop production. In these times people lose their jobs.[15]

Unemployment was unmistakably the most negative experience that the East German interviewees had to face after the change of regimes. In contrast, this was a far less palpable fear and experience in Győr.[16] The Hungarian interviewees thought that whoever wants to work can find 'something' in Győr; indeed, anti-Roma attitudes were often justified with the reasoning that Roma people, who live from social security and child-care allowance, could find employment if they really wanted to work. For the East German workers privatization was not associated with corruption, the decline of the company or the rise of a Western rival firm such as Audi in Győr. Unemployment was, however, a constant source of tension and fear which all interviewees had to face either personally or through the fate of their relatives/partners/children. Long-term unemployment meant not only exclusion from the respected world of labour but also social isolation, which often led to severe psychological problems. Some interviewees even spoke of the clinical treatment and eventual suicide of their male partners, who were long-term unemployed.

> I could tell you many examples … there is a very close one, unfortunately, in my family. I got divorced and I had a new partner. We had a good life but then the problems started. He ran his own business, he was his own master. The company went bankrupt and I understand somewhere what it meant for him – he lost everything that he had built and worked for. He could not cope with the *Wende*. He had three suicide attempts, and even today … he has to attend a clinic [sigh] … I am slowly learning to what extent a man is able to just give up … I don't know how to say this … he just sits at home the whole day and he stares into space, he does not do anything, he has no motivation. I know that it is very hard to sit at home but somehow I feel that he does not really try … Of course, it must be harder for a man.[17]

> After the *Wende*, my husband became self-employed. We moved to Hamburg but his business was not successful and he had to declare bankruptcy. My husband could not cope with the change of regimes. He became completely passive – depression. I tried everything but I could not help him. I don't blame myself. I wanted to return to Jena, I had all my friends here. He stayed in Hamburg, we met a couple of times and he said that he would move back

> to Jena but he died one-and-a-half years ago. No, it was not depression [later: he committed suicide]. It was not his fault … he could not find his place after the bankruptcy.[18]

As the above two citations show, the worst aspect of unemployment was not the material decline (although this was, too, mentioned) but the loss of face in front of people, which had very negative psychological consequences. The interviewees, who were affected by long-term unemployment, would often mention that their working relatives/friends/acquaintances refused to believe that they could not find work, and some even held them to be lazy people, who live on social benefits. Many voluntarily chose to lock themselves away in order to spare the regretful comments. Those who agreed to give me an interview all said that they made a conscious effort not to fall into this trap: they used existing networks that were formed in the GDR or joined other communities (e.g. one female production worker did voluntary work for the trade union) and self-help groups (the son of one of the interviewees, who found no regular employment for many years, joined a group of unemployed people who exchanged services).

In the second dimension (subjective evaluation of the standard of living) we can also observe striking differences between the two groups. The overwhelming majority of the German interviewees reported improvement in their material conditions: those who had work spoke of material prosperity, which allowed them to build family houses, buy new cars and spend their vacations in exotic foreign countries, while the unemployed positively mentioned the improvement of services and the supply of consumer goods. The Hungarian interviewees, on the contrary, held their material situation to be the continuation of the 'narratives of decline': they all reported stagnation or the decline of their standard of living, which they considered to be the most painful experience of the change of regimes. The Kádár regime was calculable: even though the urban skilled workers admitted that the regime held no great perspectives, there were realistic goals for them: an urban flat or a family house in the country, a car, a weekend plot and regular holidays. The new regime offered them no such perspectives; even those who said that they could maintain their former standard of living claimed that they no longer have to support their children, but that if they had to they would have to content themselves with a poorer quality of life. Those who had school-age children spoke bitterly of the rise of the new material inequalities:

> I don't want the Kádár regime back even though I did have a much better life back then. I could spend my holidays abroad, at the beaches of Yugoslavia and

> Bulgaria. I had a very active social life. I could go everywhere, to concerts, cinema and theatre … I think that [the change of regimes] benefited only a narrow group of people: managers, economists and lawyers. My sister works as an accountant and she makes a lot of money. I am not envious but I don't think that such differences in the wages are justified. Perhaps people were not very rich in the Kádár regime, but real misery was also rare. … And I am really afraid that this will affect my children … Both are clever [and] I am so proud when their names are listed among the excellent students. My son studies in an elite high school and the parents of his classmates are all managers, lawyers and bankers. My children are not demanding and they fully understand that we can't afford as much as others. But I really feel guilty because they are left out of so many things … When there is a school excursion and we pick up my son, I always tell my husband: leave the car at the back of the car park so that the other children won't see that we have such an old car.[19]

In the mirror of the Hungarian interviews, the loss of material security was a dominant experience of the change of regimes. In the research the overwhelming majority of the workers reported that they lived worse now than they had in the past. In order to make ends meet, many interviewees had to renounce such 'luxuries' as travelling, eating out in restaurants (let alone expensive ones) and maintaining a car. People who lived in single income households, were in a particularly bad financial situation. They reported to have experienced the most radical decline:

> My husband is an alcoholic. Our problems started when he lost his job because the state farm was closed and he could find no other job because he has no education. He felt very desperate; he started going to the pub, and then he went more and more frequently … the only reason for this was that he lost his job because before that he was a very good man, he did everything for his family, he worked overtime and he built this house with his own hands. And he never drank before. We never had any serious arguments, he loved his children, and … I can only tell you that he was a very, very good man [she cries]. I am different, I am a fighter but now I am so much scared of what will happen to us. What will happen if I lose my job? I told my daughter-in-law yesterday that I am so much afraid of the future. If I can't buy my medicine, I can't work. If I can't pay the bills, we will accumulate debts. If we are indebted, they [the creditors] will sell our house. Why did I work then so hard in all my life? So that this damned government should make us homeless? They have no right to dispossess me and chase me out of my own house! Why can't I pay my bills? Because our wages are so low that it is impossible to make ends meet! Medgyessy[20] should try to make a living from 52,000 HUF![21]

The above story cannot be considered as an exceptional case. I interviewed a female skilled worker who got divorced, and she provided for

her three children from one wage in the Kádár regime until she met her second husband. At the time of interviewing she lived on disability pension. Her second husband was a technician in Rába and they raised one common child. After her illness, the family sold their urban flat and they moved to a nearby village, in the hope that life would be cheaper there:

> In Győr we lived in a condominium; heating was very expensive, and we thought that it would be cheaper to live in the country. We spent all our savings, and now we literally live from one wage to the next, believe it or not. We support only one child, we spend only on the basic necessities and here we are, because the wage is so low. My husband earns 100,000 HUF but after taxation he brings 70,000 home including the child-care allowance. And he is a leading technician. In the 1980s we lived much better and we had to support four children back then. We fed them, they went to school, and we could still maintain a car, buy a TV, video, other things. But now we can buy nothing. *I think that the Kádár regime was much better for us than this system*.[22] Because it gave something also to the poor. There were not such great differences between people. Today, one to one-and-a-half million people live in real misery in Hungary.[23]

While the Hungarian interviewees unanimously held the working class to be the main loser of the change of regimes, the East Germans would rather criticize the crystallization of social hierarchies in the new regime. The unemployed mentioned that they were 'second-class' consumers in the German society because they could afford considerably less than their acquaintances with a job. However, while in Hungary many workers continued to measure the success of the government against the standard of living, the East Germans expressed no wish for a return of the Honecker regime. Not even Jan, who lost his job and his home in the new regime, considered 'the workers' state' a viable alternative. In the East German case we can observe a gradual shift towards post-materialistic values: the unemployed Dora could have found a job in Hamburg but she decided to live in Jena because of the proximity of her friends; many workers called attention to the new, environment-friendly technologies which cleared the air of the town; many explicitly criticized consumption for consumption's sake and some participated in self-help groups or did some other forms of voluntary work. In Hungary, the workers explicitly complained of the loss of existing networks; no one mentioned voluntary work; and many Hungarian rural female workers expressed an explicit wish for the return of the Kádár regime, when their families had a safer and often better life. In the Hungarian case material values continued to dominate political thinking. Since they saw no alternative value system to consumerism, the feeling of deprivation and frustration was prevalent among the interviewees.

The perceived lack of social integration takes us to the third dimension (interpersonal relations). Here we can find a common criticism of a capitalist society, which can be explained through the shared experience in a system, which advocated more egalitarianism. Interviewees in both groups reported negative changes in interpersonal relations: working-class communities are destroyed as a result of lay-offs and a fierce competition for jobs, people at the workplace are individualized and atomized, solidarity declines and everybody is focused only on himself/herself. People consciously reduce private contacts because they are afraid to open themselves up and display their weaknesses, which others can use against them. German interviews used military terms to express the intensification of competition: they spoke of lonely fighters (*Einzelkämpfer*), two-third society (*Zwei-Drittel Gesellschaft*)[24] and racing society (*Ellbogengesellschaft*). Interviewees in both groups recalled the collegiality and intensive community life under socialism with a sense of loss:

> In the past we regularly held festive occasions in the housing estates when neighbours sat together and had a chat. Today no one wants something like that. They don't want to sit together and discuss their things because they might reveal something that benefits the others. Today everybody is scared of *sharing his ideas, things or troubles with the others* because it might put him in a disadvantageous position.[25] In my opinion today the regime does not want real communities at the workplace or anywhere else. Below a certain level they don't even want really close contacts between people.[26]

While the Hungarians typically argued that their deteriorating material situation forced them to reduce social contacts (they could no longer afford restaurants, parties and common holidays),[27] the East Germans explained the disintegration of the old communities through the fierce competition characteristic of the new regime. They argued that technological development renders part of society redundant, which creates a sharper competition for jobs than they experienced in the old regime. This results in an extensive individualization in society, the loss of the old collegial, communitarian spirit and more intensive fighting against the rivals at the workplace, the reduction of private contacts among colleagues, secrecy (to prevent others benefiting from individual knowledge) and atomization. Workers in both groups stressed that under the socialist regime people related differently to each other: communities were stronger and interpersonal relations were less directed towards profit-making, social advancement or material interest. More people were willing to work voluntarily and freely for the community than under the new regime. The disintegration of workplace communities was thus an equally negative ex-

perience for both groups – it is not accidental that this was the dimension which triggered the most similar criticism of the new regime.

The Hungarians would typically speak of the material decline of the middle class (in which they counted themselves) while the East Germans criticized the growing social gap between the privileged part of the middle class (professors, doctors, lawyers and managers) and the production workers. Many explicitly recalled the more egalitarian climate of the GDR with a sense of loss:

> Today the [occupational] hierarchy is a lot more visible than in the GDR but this is clear. In the past the regime promoted egalitarianism that people should stick together, they should always be in a community and a blue-collar worker should be respected as much as an engineer. Today they advocate exactly the opposite: that there should be greater and greater differences among people, sharing is wrong and the only thing that matters is how much you have – my horse, my house, my wine cellar and so on. Now, what do you think will happen? Of course, there will be great differences! In the past a young engineer made as much money as we did. We did more if we had black work. We worked for doctors and professors, and they were happy that we did the job because there were no service companies. Today these people constitute a separate caste and I have to tell you: you can meet more and more young engineers and managers who look down on production workers. Some even don't greet me when they see my dress although they are much younger than my age. I can't stand this arrogance. In the GDR there were no such differences. I don't care about whatever career he makes but it is very annoying if someone treats you like that.[28]

It should be noted, however, that the East German workers had no objection to a working-class career for their children. They were only concerned about the requirement that it should be a profession or a trade, which gives them work. The Hungarians, on the contrary, considered working-class life to be utterly hopeless; those who wanted to secure the future of their children all intended to send them to college. They unanimously agreed that a worker cannot make a normal living in Hungary. They bitterly recalled that they could all save enough money to buy their own homes under the Kádár regime; they saw no chance for their children to acquire a flat without parental or grandparental help in the new regime.

As the above comparison shows, the structural differences between the two countries essentially shaped the everyday experience of postsocialist change. The peripheral experience of post-Fordism in Hungary was reflected in the workers' construction of the 'narratives of decline', which blame the failure of catching-up development on external factors, and frequently follow the logic of conspiracy theories. The essentially similar

critique of the new regime developed in the third dimension, however, suggests that the workers had a shared human experience under socialism, which they recalled with a sense of loss. This experience was voiced similarly by the workers of the two groups, albeit their fears differed: Hungarians were mainly afraid of the material decline while the East Germans' greatest fear was unemployment. This experience, however, did not discredit the new regime in the eyes of the East German workers as much as was the case in Hungary. Hungarian interviewees had no direct experience of the change of the political regime: none participated in demonstrations, and many maintained a distance from 1989:

> It was not important for me to have a say in politics. I don't want to embellish the truth but for me these [free elections] were not so important. If I want to be honest, I had my secure existence, I lived my life and we raised our children. I achieved everything, which was possible *at my level*.[29] For me it was not the most important in what kind of issues I should have a say. I worked twelve hours a day. I also worked during the weekends. This is my honest answer to you.[30]

While the East Germans identified themselves with the *Wende* (either because they did not like Honecker's dictatorship or because they supported German unification or both) the Hungarians did not feel that it was *their* change of regimes. For the majority, it was the 'business' of the elite, and as disappointment grew with the worsening of their material situation, so did people lose trust in the democratic institutions, which were believed to breed corruption, the rule of the rich over the poor, and dishonest and deceitful practices with which everybody associated privatization:

> I don't know what people profited from 1989. I had a more relaxed life under socialism, and I think that the majority of Hungarian people lived better under the Kádár regime [than they live today]. When this democracy came in, they sold everything that was movable in this country. I think that it is a horrible sin to privatize hospitals, the electronic and gas industries, the ambulance because the new proprietors will rob the working people of all their savings and property. We learnt this in the Party school and it is true. Today's Hungary is ruled by plundering capitalism. There are no regulations, no law and no respect for morality. Everybody steals as much as he can.[31]
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> Whatever is privatized becomes more expensive. And I don't think that they [private companies] will pay high taxes. State funds disappear somewhere … For instance in Rába. When they privatized the company, they gave some shares to the workers. What can a poor man do? He will sell his shares to the managers at a low price. This is how it worked. In this country everybody stole only for himself. Take the limited companies. Everyone earns only the minimal

> wage – on paper. And they laugh at those who are registered normally because they earn a lot more money, which is not taxed. They are young and they don't mind how this [practice] will affect their pension.[32]

Those who harboured left-wing sympathies were strongly opposed to privatization. However, those, who declared themselves to be 'committed' anti-communists had an equally negative opinion of privatization and the working of capitalism – the only exception being that they blamed the malfunctioning of Hungarian capitalism on the communist functionaries, who in their opinion continued to govern the country:

> It was the dream of my youth to be self-employed, in today's term: entrepreneur. But I hate this new term because it can be applied to practically anything today. No one respects individual skills or good craftsmanship. If I have money, I can open a restaurant, a beauty salon or a pharmacy. But it does not mean that I know something of the trade or the profession. If you have money, you don't need to know anything and you just employ people who know the business. But I would never equate this with the entrepreneurs of the past, who mastered their profession. I think that entrepreneurship underwent a huge dilution. Those who work hard are downgraded in this system. The only thing that matters is how you can sell things – no one is interested in the quality. It is a very superficial system, with very superficial values, this is my opinion.[33]

Hungarian nationalism was also evoked in this respect:[34]

> I have a firm trust in Hungarian youth because they study, they go abroad and sooner or later they will also found their own companies. They [the communists] were in a favourable situation after 1989 but they lack the moral standing and education and I am sure that our young men will take over their places.[35]

Ost develops the argument that in Poland the liberal intellectuals betrayed the alliance with the working class, which had been formed in the Solidarity movement, and in response the disappointed workers chose to vote for the right or the extreme right, which promised them the restoration of national pride and the protection of the interests of the 'little man'.[36] In the Hungarian case we cannot speak of an alliance between the workers and the intellectuals after 1956; my research concludes that workers were not familiar with concepts of self-governance or self-management developed by left-wing intellectuals, who were critical of state socialism, and many interviewees did not consider free parliamentary elections as something that were very important for their life or their identity.[37] The corruption, which they directly experienced with privati-

zation, greatly undermined the credibility of democratic institutions and market economy, which instead of the promised and expected prosperity only gave them a stagnating or outright declining standard of living and the experience of a sharpening material inequality between the workers and the new, bourgeois classes (managers, bankers, lawyers, doctors and businessmen – in other words, those who can be seen as the winners of the change of regimes). Like their Polish counterparts, many Hungarian workers were susceptible to nationalistic-populist 'catchwords', which operate with a concrete enemy picture: 'foreign', exploiting capital, multinational enterprises, which take the profit out of the country, etc. The feeling of *ressentiment* was intensified by the 'conspicuous consumption' of the new elite, which rendered their own impoverishment all the more visible. The reason this was possible was because the weakness of the state found many receptive ears: workers argued that a strong government was needed which would take a firm stance against global capital.

Thus, Hungarian workers expressed strong doubts about the change of regimes and the newly established democracy that many did not feel to be theirs. These doubts, however, failed to translate into a criticism of capitalism. Instead, workers spoke of a special, Hungarian model of capitalism, where the government acts as a mediator between the interests of multinational and domestic companies, and between the interests of the workers and capitalists. There are a number of reasons why the Hungarian political left failed to profit from the workers' disillusionment with 'actually existing' capitalism. Apart from the aforementioned differences between the German and Hungarian working-class mentalities, it is worth pointing out the absence of an anti-capitalist, left-wing public in Hungary; even committed left-wing voters argued that none of the political parties represented labour interests. The spectacular exclusion of the working class from the Hungarian political arena and the weakness of the trade union movement strengthened the faith in a strong state and government: workers thought that the state stands above classes, and that therefore it would do something for the 'little man'.

It cannot be said that the East Germans were not critical of the new democracy. They, however, made no difference (as did the Hungarians) between Western capitalism, globalization and 'national' capitalism. Neither did they hold the uniformly rejected Honecker regime to be a special East German path towards modernity. They counted such institutions and social practices to be the positive heritage of the GDR, which can be easily incorporated into the new left-wing ideologies: socially responsible thinking, the strengthening of communities, more social solidarity and the increase of reciprocity in social life. This East German 'identity' – if we understand it as open towards communitarian values and less consump-

tion-oriented than the more materialistic West – can be easily reconciled with a post-materialistic value system, which stands in direct opposition to the materialistic Honecker regime. Therefore many interviewees declared themselves to 'be in agreement' (*einverstanden*) with such political 'catchwords' as environmental consciousness, sustainable development and greater social responsibility. The East Germans did not criticize globalization; on the contrary, many workers thought that the multinational companies established new jobs, and they brought capital and innovation to Jena. They had a positive attitude towards the multiculturalism of university life and they spoke positively of the appearance of foreign students in Jena;[38] some criticized only the *Deutschrussen* (ethnic Germans, who lived in the ex-Soviet Union, and were given German citizenship).[39] Anti-Fascist education played an important role in the political and social thinking of this age group: they all argued that war is the most horrible experience, one that humankind should avoid at any price (the overwhelming majority were born after the Second World War), and even the committed anti-communists refused to compare the Nazi dictatorship with the Honecker regime because the former was held to be a lot more monstrous. There was one man among the interviewees, who recalled memories of the Nazi period:

> Contemporary propaganda glorified heroes and it exploited that the Germans were so stupid that they believed in the cult of heroes. The most beautiful death, they said, is that of the soldier's death. I remember [similar] news, which the newspapers reported: 'we regret to say that our son, Michael or Helmuth died for the people and for the *Führer*'. Sure, he died in the war but not for the people or for the *Führer* – but because of the war. And there was the uniform – I don't say that the women were proud that their husbands died but many Germans were infatuated with the uniform. If he [the man] was an officer, he could have any woman he wanted because they were so much infatuated with his decorations. Privates counted for nothing; but an officer – he was already somebody in Germany … Women stayed alone, they worked and they raised their children without a man. But the same happened in Russia. At the very end, none was proud that their husband or their father died for the people and the *Führer*. It was a horrible and unjust war, which Germany started and she was punished for it. We started the war – Hitler – but many Germans also wanted this war because they wanted to rob and they wanted to govern the whole world in a German fashion. We were the first to bomb England and then the English aeroplanes returned and destroyed our cities. This was the punishment. But Germany started the war.[40]

Opinions of West Germany varied across the interviewed group, but in general the East Germans were more conscious of the nature of peripher-

al capitalism than the Hungarians. Many admitted that before the *Wende* they felt inferior to West Germans because they were strongly influenced by the stereotypical representation of capitalism (Western workers are more educated, more creative, more diligent and more motivated than the Eastern workers of the state-owned enterprises, who were held to be less disciplined and 'brainwashed' in the West).[41] The postsocialist years modified these stereotypes as East Germans grew more critical of capitalism: they said that albeit their technology was not as advanced as the West German, their skills were comparable, and in fact they had to be more creative than the West Germans because of the technological deficiencies (one example that they mentioned: if a machine went wrong, they had to be able to fix it while the West Germans called a maintenance man). The majority were sceptical of the prospects of catching up with West Germany: they estimated that levelling would take at least twenty to thirty years. While they were familiar with the terms *Wessi/Ossi*,[42] they argued that this distinction would disappear in their children's generation:

> There are some typical East German products, which many people miss – certain food brands and the like – but it has got nothing to do with quality, people are just used to them. And they are in demand only in the new provinces (*neue Bundesländer* – the former GDR) … In the EU every country becomes a market and all member states seek to sell their own products. This does not mean that people have to live worse but they have to find other means of living if they can't sell a given product. We will have no more such [planned] economy as the GDR was, where some giant enterprises supply the whole domestic market, and I fully agree with this. I don't feel any constraint to buy only domestic products.[43]

> In the GDR the worker was at the same [social] level as his boss. I can't imagine that a *Wessi* [boss] can be the same. I had an aunt who immigrated to West Germany at a young age, and she married a West German man. She saw everything differently, she looked down on us. She was not interested in our things, if something was *Ossi*, for her it was not good enough. She sent us a package, which she filled with pudding powder and secondhand clothes because they are good enough for the poor *Ossis*. So I did not even want to hear of this aunt. After the *Wende* we also went to the West, and we met simple people similar to us – it was totally different, they were friendly and they did not look down on us. We exchanged presents, and we slept at their place – in short, it was a totally different relationship than with this aunt.[44]

As the above story shows, the feeling of inferiority was often nourished by humiliating experiences with West Germans. The interview partners, however, all argued that German unification benefited the 'nation' and that their children would not know of the intensive propaganda campaign

that the two German states led against the social order of the 'other' Germany. Women workers recalled stories when the West Germans thought that the East German children only learnt communist rallying songs in the kindergarten and that they were indoctrinated at a very young age. One reason why many East Germans identified with post-materialistic values was rooted in this feeling of inferiority: they sought to show to the 'West' that there were things which the East Germans did better than the West Germans, albeit their achievements went unrecognized. Women's policy, education and the health-care system ranked high in the list of the institutions which were mentioned positively. Mothers unanimously argued that their children received more attention in the East German school system than after the *Wende*. They also mentioned that the teachers in the GDR system paid attention to the individual needs of the children, and they invested more time and energy in the education of those whose school grades were lower than the average. Many of my female interview partners participated in a special form of education: *Frauensonderklasse* (women's school). They positively recalled that they met women who were in a similar situation: working mothers with small children. The networks that were established in the *Frauensonderklasse* continued to be important for the women, although most of them lost their jobs in Zeiss.

The last issue that I would like to examine is the subjective evaluation of labour interest representation after the change of regimes. The Hungarians were unanimously pessimistic in this respect: in Rába several trade unions operated, which fragmented the membership, and were considered to be incompetent and powerless even by the interviewed shop stewards. In Zeiss the chairperson of the enterprise council was of the opinion that labour interest representation works effectively in large companies such as Zeiss, but small and medium-sized firms often (informally) ban trade union membership, and workers will not protest because they want to keep their jobs. This is how he evaluated the Honecker regime in retrospect:

> The GDR was a worker and peasant state. Workers got certain things and they were free to study. They got more opportunities to study than the children of engineers and officers. And there was a certain community culture in the factories. They sought to show that people are equal so the enterprise hierarchy was less visible. There were no differences in the social interactions between people: you could talk to everybody in the same way regardless of whether someone was a worker, a foreman or a manager. People who were socialized in this system find it harder to accept that the managers get detached from the production workers … For me the decisive question is what chance a man has in his life, how he can influence his own personal development. And in my opinion in this new regime a man has more chance.[45]

The above citation reflects a crucial difference between the East German and Hungarian evaluations of the change of regime. Even the homeless Jan would have agreed with the chairperson of the enterprise council of Zeiss in that a man has more chance in the new system than in the old one. The Hungarians, on the contrary, felt that even the limited goals that they could attain under the Kádár regime (a flat, a house, a weekend plot and regular holidays) were taken away from them by the new regime.

The results help us to explain the ambiguous evaluation of the Kádár regime. The vision of greater social and material equality is confused with a longing for a strong state, order and an autocratic government, which we can observe in many interviews. While the German interviewees identified with the *Wende* and not even the unemployed wanted Honecker' state back, only few Hungarians thought that they profited from the change of regimes and the newly established democracy. Thanks to their negative experiences, which triggered the above described 'narratives of decline', the majority were opposed to 'Western' capitalism, and they thought that a stronger state and a distinctive Hungarian path towards modernity would offer a panacea for the sores of peripheral development. While East Germany's greater success of integration into the capitalist world economy was accompanied with a change of mentality and the appearance of post-materialistic values, in Hungary nationalism seemed to be the only alternative to a capitalism, which disappointed and effectively impoverished many people.

Notes

1. Citation from an interview conducted with Jan (52), an East German male production worker in a hostel for homeless people in Jena in 2004. He had been a skilled worker in Zeiss until 1989; at the time of interviewing he was unemployed.
2. For an early discussion of my Hungarian case study see: E. Bartha. 2003. 'Munkások a munkásállam után. A változás etnográfiája egy volt szocialista "mintagyárban"', in D. Némedi (ed.), *Kötőjelek*. Az Eötvös Loránd Tudományegyetem Szociológiai Doktori Iskolájának Évkönyve, Budapest: ELTE Szociológiai és Szociálpolitikai Intézet.
3. http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&plugin=1&language=en&pcode=tsieb010
4. Zs. Ferge. 2011. 'A magyarországi szegénységről', *Info-Társadalom-Tudomány*, 54.
5. M. Pittaway. 2011. 'A magyar munkásság és a rendszerváltás', *Múltunk* 1.
6. Ferge, *Társadalmi áramlatok*, 165–67.
7. For an influential left-wing criticism of post-Fordism see: L. Boltanski and E. Chiapello. 2005. *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, London: Verso Books. From the Hungarian literature see: Somlai, *Társas és társadalmi*.
8. Szalai, 'Tulajdonviszonyok'.
9. The local name of Rába.

10. Citation from an interview conducted with Péter (49), a Hungarian male production worker in Rába in 2002. He was a skilled worker and a shop steward.
11. Citation from an interview conducted with Brigitta (51), a Hungarian female production worker in Rába in 2002. She was a skilled worker.
12. Citation from an interview conducted with Judit (50), a Hungarian female production worker in Rába in 2002. She was a skilled worker, who had finished secondary school.
13. Information from an interview conducted with Thorsten (52), the chairperson of the enterprise council in Zeiss in 2003. He was a production worker before 1989, and a member of the Church opposition. He received a religious education, for which he was negatively discriminated at school, and was rejected admission to an art school which he wanted to attend. One of his sisters emigrated to West Germany, which rendered him even more suspicious in the eyes of the authorities. After the *Wende* he became actively involved in the reorganization of the trade union.
14. Citation from an interview conducted with Gisela (48), an East German female production worker in Zeiss in 2003. She was a skilled worker.
15. Citation from an interview conducted with Vera (53), an East German female production worker in Zeiss in 2003. She was a skilled worker.
16. Official unemployment was less than 5 per cent in Győr at the time of interviewing, while it was twice as high in Jena.
17. Citation from an interview conducted with Gisela (48), an East German female production worker in Zeiss in 2003. She was a skilled worker.
18. Citation from an interview conducted with Dora (56), an unemployed mother in her flat in 2004. She started her career as a skilled production worker in Zeiss; she got a university place as an economist-engineer, which she could do in parallel to her work. Zeiss supported adult education by offering free learning days for the workers. Dora's husband was also engaged in adult learning, and both became engineers in the company. In West Germany, however, the degrees of the 'Marxist schools' were not always good references; in addition, those, who finished these schools were often held to be 'indoctrinated' communists.
19. Citation from an interview conducted with Judit (50), a Hungarian female production worker in Rába in 2002.
20. Péter Medgyessy, Hungarian Prime Minister between 2002 and 2004.
21. Citation from an interview conducted with Flóra (53), a Hungarian unskilled female production worker, in her house in 2004. She started working in Rába as an unskilled worker; later, on the urge of her husband, she joined the cooperative farm and she raised pigs and cows for extra income. At the time of interviewing she worked as an unskilled production worker in a packing factory.
22. Stress is mine.
23. Citation from an interview conducted with Éva (54), a Hungarian skilled female production worker, in her house in 2004.
24. The two-third society refers to a society where two thirds of the population belongs to the middle or upper classes. In Germany it was argued that the two thirds would mean the employed while one third is condemned to live from social and unemployment benefits and/or black work. In Hungary the interviewees did not use this term; however, the citations suggest that they would have agreed with the concept of the reverse two-third society developed for post-socialist Eastern Europe: that two thirds of society fell out of the middle class.
25. Stress is mine.
26. Citation from an interview conducted with Karl (51).
27. Utasi conducted a nationwide survey in Hungary, from which she concluded that the poorer classes can only count on their immediate families and that

the social trust is very low in Hungary. See: Á. Utasi. 2008. *Éltető kapcsolatok: A kapcsolatok hatása a szubjektív életminőségre*, Budapest, Új Mandátum.

28. Citation from an interview conducted with Jörg (57), an East German male production worker in Zeiss in 2003. He was a skilled worker.
29. Stress is mine.
30. Citation from an interview conducted with Péter (49), a Hungarian male production worker in Rába in 2002.
31. Citation from an interview conducted with Tibor (67), a retired male manager, in his house in 2004. He started his career as a skilled worker in Rába and he obtained his degree in adult education.
32. Citation from an interview conducted with Éva (54), a Hungarian skilled female production worker, in her house in 2004.
33. Citation from an interview conducted with Miklós (51), a male self-employed plumber, in his house in 2004. He started his career as a skilled worker in Rába, and he also spent two years in the Soviet Union as a guest worker, which was a good 'business' because the workers earned very well. As he proudly said, he could thank this only to his good work because he was never a member of the party, and he disliked communists (his father was a peasant, whose land was nationalized and he never forgave the communists for this). Miklós became self-employed in 1981; in the 1990s he expanded his business but he could not bear the stress, and after an operation he gave up his business and accepted a job as a maintenance man. He also worked black to secure a 'normal' income.
34. For a collection of studies which discuss the increasing appeal of right-wing, neo-nationalistic ideologies see: D. Kalb and G. Halmai (eds). 2011. *Headlines of Nationalism, Subtexts of Class*, Oxford and New York: Berghahn Books.
35. Citation from an interview conducted with István (56), a male caretaker, in his house in 2004. István started his career as a skilled worker in Rába, and he was offered a college place but then they found out that he attended a Church school and he had to interrupt his studies. He added that 'he was lucky' because at that time 'they' (the communists) could change his world-view. After 1989, the Church helped him to find a job.
36. D. Ost. 2005. *The Defeat of Solidarity: Anger and Politics in Postcommunist Europe*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
37. These findings are in line with Haraszti's study of the Red Star Tractor Factory (*Vörös Csillag Traktorgyár*). Workers would explicitly tell him that he will not be long in the factory because he is educated, which reveals a perceived social distance between the workers and the intellectuals. The Red Star Tractor Factory belonged to Rába for a while; Ede Horváth recalled his fight with the 'Budapest people', whom he wanted to discipline, but the workers self-consciously resisted: the district party secretary was invited to attend a meeting where the workers told the manager their grievances and they demanded remedies. Horváth recalled the case as evidence that the interests of economic efficiency, which he advocated, were sacrificed to political interests, which the district party secretary represented, who wanted to pacify the angry workers. Horváth, *Én volnék a Vörös Báró?*
38. Jena has a famous university, Friedrich-Schiller-Universität, which accepted many ERASMUS exchange students and other students from all over the world.
39. The East German interview partners all knew prior to the interview that they would talk to a Hungarian citizen. Therefore, those, who held strongly nationalistic views were unlikely to have participated in the research.
40. Citation from an interview conducted with Ernst (75), a retired male skilled production worker, in the club of Zeiss pensioners in 2003. He held himself to be a social democrat, and was strongly anti-communist (he called them social

Fascists). The only reason he did not leave Jena after the Second World War was his attachment to his mother and his birthplace. Ernst was satisfied with his pension, and he proudly recalled that after the *Wende* he could travel to Las Vegas.

41. Concerning this topic, some interview partners explicitly told me that they would not give an interview to a West German researcher because of the mutual stereotypes. In this respect, it was an advantage that I also came from a socialist country; furthermore, Hungary was held to be a 'friendly' and politically 'liberal' country, where East Germans could meet their West German relatives. The 'liberalism' of the Hungarian Communist Party was observed by the SED functionaries as well.
42. Pejorative distinction between the West and East Germans.
43. Citation from an interview conducted with Peter (58), a male skilled production worker in Zeiss in 2003. Peter was strongly opposed to communists; he said that he was given a college place after he started working in Zeiss but he interrupted his studies because he was pressurized to join the party.
44. Citation from an interview conducted with Martha (52), a female accountant, in her house in 2003. Martha started her career as a skilled production worker in Zeiss, then she finished a training course and she continued working in Zeiss as an accountant. She lost her job in 1991, and she tried several small jobs (call centres, selling books, raising fish, selling *Tupperware* and packing). She said that her main motivation was not money – her husband earned well but she wanted to be in company. Eventually, she got a job as an accountant in the firm where her husband worked.
45. Information from an interview conducted with Thorsten (52), the chairperson of the enterprise council in Zeiss in 2003.