Socialist Democracy or Revolutionary Consciousness? The Prospects and Limits of ‘Revised’ Marxism in Central Europe in the 1950s and 1960s

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The Communist discourse of legitimacy in central Europe

First of all, let me touch briefly on a problem that is increasingly attracting historians and political scientists dealing with the Communist past in Central Europe – namely, the question of how the Communist regimes legitimized themselves and how people perceived such legitimation. (Needless to say, my reflection will be more an outline than an extensive analysis of the topic.)

Surely almost nobody would disagree that the most important part of the legitimation was Marxist doctrine in its Marxist-Leninist variation. This doctrine claimed to be a comprehensive system of philosophical, economic and political theories based on the teaching of Marx, Engels, Lenin and, during a certain period, Stalin too. The most important part of the system – the theoretical basis of the doctrine – was dialectic and historic materialism, in other words Marxist and Marxist-Leninist philosophy per se. The core of ‘histmat’ and ‘diamat’ was materialist dialectics, whose subject of interest comprised the general laws of the motion and evolution of Nature and society as well as of cognitive and conceptual thinking. In other words, this philosophy claimed to reflect on both the reality and the representation of reality in human thinking. In its Hegelian universalizing conceptual scheme it was by no means silly or even simple-minded. At the epistemological level it claimed its absolute validity and exceptional pretension to truth. As the prolific and also dangerous tool of dialectics necessitated, the doctrine should have been the dialectic unity of theory and practice. On the practical side of the doctrine there were therefore special sciences such as political economy and the theory and tactics of the proletarian movement, which were later transformed into ‘scientific Communism.’

By no means, however, did the legitimacy of the Communist regimes in Central Europe rely solely on doctrine. The ways of legitimising the holding of power had been changing over time. Nonetheless, as the growing literature on the subject shows, even in the most ‘revolutionary’ Stalinist period, when all the great and detrimental socio-economic and politic transformations were initiated, the leaders of the regimes in Central Europe were seeking alternative ways of
gaining the support of some parts of society. Among these attempts the most important were invocations to certain national or cultural traditions or both. ¹

Hence, there was, from the very beginning, a basic schism in the way of legitimacy of Communist regimes, a schism between the aim of a radical cultural revolution and a tendency to act on behalf of the whole ‘nation’. A schism resembling the clash between the ‘universalistic claim’ of world revolution promoted by Trotsky, for example, and the ‘particularistic’ theory of building Communism in one state, developed by Stalin in the 1920s, the result of which had determined the way the Communist regimes in post-war Central Europe were built. The native Communist regimes claimed they were going to re-construct society as a whole, which included basic human values and moral convictions (that was at the top of the leftist, radical Communist agenda); on the other hand, with the exception of the East Germans, they also insisted that Czech, Hungarian, Polish, Slovak and other histories naturally resulted in Communism (that was at the top of the ‘conservative’ or ‘national’ Communist agenda). The phrase ‘the Communists as the heirs of the great traditions of the Czech nation’, for example, is typical of this position. ²

The enigma of civil society

This paradoxical way of trying to legitimize the new political order had its obvious social and economic reasons. Roughly speaking, the original Marxist theory of the proletarian revolution counted on a fully developed bourgeois society that was supposed to break down owing to its own insuperable internal contradictions. In Lenin’s theories of the Communist Party as the vanguard of the proletariat and of imperialism as the ultimate stage of capitalism, developed bourgeois society was no longer the condition *sine qua non* for revolution. To put it metaphorically, the historical-materialist analysis of Marx had been replaced here by practical political and tactical considerations, whatever theoretically supported the carrying out of a revolution in a backward agrarian country. Later, as these basic Leninist (though called ‘Marxist-Leninist’) principles were applied

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² This phrase, which gained great currency in Czechoslovakia, was coined by Zdenek Nejedlý, a biographer of Thomas Masaryk, Smetana and Lenin, who became one of the most powerful ideologists of Czechoslovak arts and culture in the late 1940s and 1950s. It was the title of a paper he gave in 1946 and a book of his published in 1953: *Komunisté, dedici velikých tradic ceského národa.*
also in Central Europe after World War II, serious theoretical problems arose. All the states here were fairly well-developed industrial or semi-industrial countries, especially in comparison to Russia. Whatever we may think about its level and quality, it is quiet clear that in terms of social and economic structure, and to a certain extent political culture, the basic foundations of civil society were laid in first half of the twentieth century.\(^3\) 

The Communist regimes made a great effort to destroy the basic elements that provided these civil societies with autonomous character, and to subordinate them to state and party control, and largely succeeded. Yet, they failed in other respects. First, they were not able to destroy the whole social basis of civil society, that is to say, the new middle class, though they did considerably impair its natural development and internal stratification. Second, they were not able to change the truly modern way of political legitimation, which had since the French revolution aimed from below upwards. It is the people, *demos*, who give or, better said, invest the ruling elite with legitimacy. In the Marxist and Marxist-Leninist doctrine too, after the revolutionary dictatorship of proletariat, and after the removal of class contradictions, a peaceful period of general reconciliation and unconstrained support of the Communist project was expected. As this prediction was obviously not fulfilled, the problem of legitimacy and the endeavour to get support from majority society, whose consciousness was everything but revolutionary Communist, represented a crucial theoretical and practical question for the Communist regimes in general.\(^4\) In Central Europe the period from 1953 to 1968/69 represents probably the greatest effort to find a solution to this problem within Marxist doctrine and the socialist state.

**Revisionism**

During the de-Stalinisation that half-heartedly began throughout the East bloc in 1953, a number of Party intellectuals in the ‘people’s democracies’ of Central Europe began to criticize the failures in political, economic, cultural and social life. The orthodox branch of the Party called these attempts ‘Revisionism’, with the negative connotations of the term.\(^5\) These Revisionists criticized the system

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\(^3\) Here I use the term ‘civil society’ in its contemporary meaning of social and economic arrangement that provides institutions and norms autonomous and independent of state.


\(^5\) Most of them adamantly refused to be classified as ‘Revisionist’. First, to be Revisionist meant being out of the mainstream of the workers’ movement and politically ‘reactionary’. Second, they did not see any links between their own mostly leftist and radical Marxist convictions and the original Revisionist doctrine of Eduard Bernstein and other liberal Social Democrats in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. I use this ambiguous term today; I talk about it as an historical phenomenon. There were many
of police oppression and called for the democratization of the Party itself. Their criticism was also aimed at the inefficiencies of the planned economy, the privileges and decision-making monopoly of the bureaucracy, censorship and oppression in the arts and culture.

The ‘movement’ was especially strong in Poland, where there were established groups of philosophers, sociologists, journalists and economists who could accurately be called Revisionist. The journals *Po prostu* [Forwards], *Nowa Kultura* [New culture] were the main tribunes for philosophers and sociologists such as Leszek Kolakowski, Bronislaw Baczko, Krzysztof Pomian, Zygmund Bauman, Jerzy Szacki, Julian Hochfeld, and a number of economists such as Michal Kalecki, Oscar Lange, Wlodzimierz Brus, Edward Lipinski. Their ideas had a direct impact on the events of 1956 in Poland, and the fact that the ‘Polish October’ was overcome without a bloody aftermath or foreign intervention allowed the movement to live on for a relatively long time, though its influence and scope were diminishing.

In Hungary, there were the Revisionist thinkers around the Petöfi Circle, many of whom – such as Ferenc Fehér, Ágnes Heller, György Markus, Mihály Vajda – were followers of György Lukács. After the Revolution of 1956 was crushed by the Russian invasion, the Revisionists lost their direct influence on politics. Despite this outcome Revisionism remained quite strong in philosophy and aesthetics (the Lukácsian Budapest School), sociology (András Hegedüs and Mária Markus) and economics (János Kornai, György Péter, István Friss and Péter Erdös) from the mid-1950s through the ‘60s. Later, some of the Revisionists emigrated, or, faced with administrative obstacles, were not permitted to publish their writing or do their jobs.

Although initially weaker in number, Revisionists appeared in Czechoslovakia as well. Among the prominent representatives were the philosophers Karel Kosík and Ivan Sviták, who had begun their critical writing in 1956, but there were also others (Ladislav Tondl, Robert Kalivoda, Ivan Dubský, Milan Machovec etc.) who came into a conflict with the Party as a result of their critical and non-conformist views. Later, some thinkers in economics, jurisprudence, political science and history (Ota Šík, Otakar Turek, Cestmír Kožušník, Zdenek Mlynár, Michal Lakatoš, Zdenek Jicínský, František Šimalík, Jan Kren, Michal Reiman, Milan Hübl, Ján Mlynárik etc.) and writers were occasionally called Revisionist. Their impact on politics, which appeared only in the first half of 1960s, provided an impetus to the Prague Spring.

In East Germany, due to the more rigid regime as well as the different situation in the arts and culture and, last but not least, the possibility of emigration to West Germany, Revisionism was not widely accepted in intellectual circles. It

other terms, such as ‘Critical’ or ‘Humanist Marxism’, for example, which, however, suit the purposes of historical analysis no better.
remained confined to a few individuals, most significantly Ernst Bloch, Wolfgang Harich and ‘his group’ in 1956, and Robert Havemann in the 1960s.\(^6\)

Regardless of their proposing many modifications, at least at the beginning, the Revisionists based their positions strictly in Marxism, and did not put the leading role of the Communist Party in doubt. The reason their ideas met with such wide acceptance amongst the public and occasionally with fierce attacks from the ruling elite is to be sought in the character of political discourse in Soviet-type societies.

We may fruitfully use as a model a discourse analysis that works with three levels of political discourse according to communication practices. They comprise the philosophical, which is confined to a small minority of intellectuals; the public political level on which the standard political struggle takes place; and, lastly, symbolic discourse that involves all members of a given society and employs a vast number of symbols and modes of symbolic behaviour, ranging from the spectacular to the relatively mundane, contributing towards shared beliefs.\(^7\)

Yet, whereas in a democratic political order all kinds of ideas, or at least the bulk of them, have a chance of winning support in public political discourse, in Soviet-type societies this area was extremely restricted. All the more important, then, were philosophical and symbolic discourses. Philosophical discourse was naturally just as restricted as the public political one; yet divergences emerged immediately after the overt Stalinist violence diminished. This was precisely the case of Revisionism. Moreover, as official doctrine strove to play the role of philosophical discourse in general, the inter-textual game of interpretation was of far greater importance than in standard democratic societies. From this point of view, one of the regime’s central pillars of power, ideology, seems to be of a brittle nature. In this case though, it was not only because reality did not respond to theory, which was obvious, but because of the inter-textual character of the ideology itself.

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Philosophy, ideology, alienation and praxis

Although much has been written on Revisionism as a sort of movement, it was, in fact, never constituted as such, either in terms of political or institutionalized activity or of intellectual grouping. In the respective countries, however, some groups of critical authors were established such as the Budapest School, the Warsaw School of intellectual historians, and circles around certain non-conformist journals.\(^8\)

It is extremely difficult to sort out what branch of Revisionism had the greater impact on politics. In certain periods, for example in Poland and Hungary around 1956, or in Czechoslovakia from 1963 to 1968, economic Revisionism was an important element of the political discourse. Nonetheless, I would rather call economists such as Michal Kalecki, Wlodzimierz Brus and Ota Šik merely Reformist, rather than Revisionist, as they did not propose any basic revision of the whole system.

From the point of view of the theoretical challenge they made to official Marxist-Leninist doctrine and the existing regimes, the Revisionists in philosophy and sociology, whom it would be fair to call anthropological-humanist, were of great importance. These Revisionists belonged to two generations. The older one, represented by distinguished thinkers such as György Lukács and Ernst Bloch, laid the theoretical foundations for revision, and, in the discourse of the time, they often symbolized Revisionism as a whole. They (particularly Lukács and Arnošt Kolman) were, however, very much connected with the history of the Communist movement and the revolutions in Russia and at home, so that their relationship to Stalinism and orthodox Marxism-Leninism was rather ambiguous. The younger generation was much more radical – for example, Kolakowski, Bauman, Heller, Fehér, Márkus, Kosík and Sviták, many of whom had in the previous period been among the young hard-line Stalinists, who were in many ways instrumental in implementing Stalinism in Central Europe.

I should now like to outline the basic conceptual issues that were at the centre of the theoretical activities of the philosophical Revisionists, and shall mention the practical consequences of this. I shall then finish by discussing some of the solutions they had suggested.

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\(^8\) Official propaganda distinguished Revisionisms in philosophy and the other human sciences according to intellectual background (anthropological-Existentialist, scientistic-positivistic, petty-bourgeois-romantic, economic and so on). It is, of course, true that the respective intellectual traditions had a slightly different impact in each country. In Czechoslovakia in the late 1950s, for example, the official fight against the so-called ‘scientific-positivist aberration’ of the once important Ladislav Tondl was at the top of the propaganda agenda, whereas in Poland or East Germany the Communists had no problem with this branch of thought.
What they all had in common was the fact that, unlike other critics of the ‘cult of personality’ and so-called ‘dogmatism’, they saw the problem as being in the system itself, rather than just in some sort of ideological or political aberration. They strove to postulate the original ‘ideal project’ of Marx, which was, according to them, to be seen in contrast to its appalling implementation in Soviet-type societies. They also believed: ‘the ideal project contains all the necessary elements of an uncompromising critique of that “reality” as well as adequate criteria for such a criticism’. Moreover, they were convinced of the superiority of the original Marxist project over Western liberal democracy. Yet, in contrast to the dominant ideology, Marxism-Leninism, which stressed economic determinism and the role of ‘objective forces’ in the historical process, they devoted themselves to what could usefully be called ‘Marxist anthropology’.

At the epistemological level, contemporary Marxism-Leninism was based firmly on Lenin’s theory of ‘reflection’ (otrazheniye). Reality here is reality ‘in itself’, absolutely external to human beings. Knowledge is, then, a mere reflection of this ‘objective’ reality, the closer to this reality the more truthful. Revisionist philosophers, by contrast, took up what was originally Marx’s concept of knowledge as a product of human activity creating ‘meaning’ in the world. From this vantage point the first major debate began about the role of philosophy in ‘socialism’ and about the relation and difference between science and ideology. Generally, Bauman, Kosík, Kolakowski, Sviták and others insisted on the theoretical separation of ideology and science (that is to say, theory, philosophy), though they admitted that a partial blurring of both always happened in practice. Marxism was understood more as a method than as a set of tenets, though that did not imply that ideology, ‘giving sense to human actions’, was completely needless or negative. The orthodox position refused the separation of ideology and theory, claiming that Marxism-Leninism alone was the highest stage of scientific knowledge and hence served as the truth-revealing Weltanschaung (that is to say, ideology in a positive sense) of the proletariat. Consequently, as the vanguard of the proletariat, the Party should possess the right to evaluate the right dialectical balance between ‘theory’ and ‘practice’.

Apart from the concept of ideology, another theoretical concept of the ‘young Marx’ (from the Paris Manuscripts) proved to have a highly critical potential in the countries of ‘real-existing socialism’ – namely, the concept of alienation. According to the Revisionists, the ‘socialist revolutions’ in Central and Eastern Europe did not lead to the universal ‘end of alienation’ that had been predicted in

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10 In the following parts of the paper I will refer only to few, generally accessible texts. See, for example, Leszek Kolakowski: ’Aktuelle und nichtaktuelle Begriffe des Marxismus’, in his Der Mensch ohne Alternative, Munich: Piper Verlag, 1976, pp. 13-62
the grand Marxian narrative. Instead, the Soviet-type countries simply represented more ‘alienated’ societies, and that alone seemed to offer evidence of their non-Marxist character. The conclusions respective authors drew from this premise were highly divergent. Whereas for Lukács or Havemann, for instance, ‘the worst socialism was still better than the best capitalism’, many of their younger colleagues refused ever to use the word ‘socialist’ when describing the Central and Eastern European regimes, and instead applied Milovan Djilas’s concept of the ‘new class’.  

The third ‘symbolic centre’ from which the critical potential for ‘revision’ of the Marxism-Leninism of the time evolved was the concept of ‘praxis’. In contrast to the reified concept of practice in Marxism-Leninism, where it meant simply the counterpart of theory, that is to say, practical politics, Revisionists, again adhering closely to the ‘young’ Marx’s writings, renewed the understanding of praxis as ‘man’s creative mode of living’. According to Kosík, there existed a world of ‘pseudo-concreteness’ (the world of appearances, the world of everyday phenomena), which had been accepted by most people as the real world. However, this first-instance cognition, Kosík claimed, must be transcended in order to come to know the true nature of reality. This happens only through praxis, which enables one to see reality as our own product. As such, it might be changed in a revolutionary way, which amounts to destruction of the ‘pseudo-concreteness’, that is to say, the end of alienation, and to the humanization of man’s world. For Kosík, the main tools in this revolutionary praxis were philosophy (a philosophy, however, that was worthy of the name) and free artistic expression, both of which provided us with the opportunity to grasp the ‘concrete totality’ of a ‘structured, developing and self-creating whole’.  

While the concepts of cognitive freedom, alienation and praxis were more or less present in the bulk of their writings, Revisionists also elaborated many special theories and many subjects with far reaching consequences. I should now like to enumerate just few of them, such as Agnes Heller’s peculiar theory of Marxist ethics, András Hegedüs’s and Maria Márkus’s ‘class theory of socialism’, Zygmunt Bauman’s ‘sociology of the one Party system’, or special

11 The most advanced accounts on that are to be found in late writings of the Budapest school. See Ference Fehér, Agnes Heller and György Márkus, Dictatorship Over Needs, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1981; Mihály Vajda, The State and Socialism, London: Allison and Busby, 1983; and their younger colleagues, for example, Marc Rakovski (J. Kis and G. Bence), Towards East European Marxism, New York: St Martin’s, 1978.

12 Here we can see a philosophical foundation for ‘cultural renewal’ in the ‘people’s democracies’ in the 1960s. The most important book on the concept of praxis is Karel Kosík, Dialectics of the Concrete, Dordrecht and Boston: D. Reidel, 1976; other thinkers, however, elaborated on the subject, for example, Bronislaw Baczko in his writing on Rousseau.
works concerning basic Marxist terms (‘value’, ‘need’) by Kolakowski and Heller. (Another interesting topic, if there were time, would be the ‘historical narrative’ that some Revisionists offered.) With the exception of East Germany, the Revisionists generally contributed grand narratives of the process of democratization and modernization in modern history, where the national histories were merely a part of the European whole. This contrasted both with attempts to nationalize Communism and to explain the local Communist regimes primarily by using national histories and, on the other hand, a primitively universalizing narrative referring exclusively to ‘progressive revolutionary’ traditions, on the one hand, and Bolshevik revolution on the other.  

**Socialist democracy between ‘radical needs’ and ‘democratisation’?**

However prolific the Revisionist thinkers were at the level of theory and critiques of contemporary society, they did not offer many concrete political solutions for what they criticized. As Ferenc Fehér once stated: ‘political theory was decidedly not the strong suit of [East European] critical Marxism’. The reasons for that were obvious. First, intellectual practice generally tends much more to critical assessments than to positive projects; Marxism is a splendid example of that. Second, it was practically impossible under Communist rule to provide concrete instructions for change in political and social life.

What was again common to all the Revisionists was the call for the renewal of democratic procedures. They insisted on the democratization of the Party itself; some of them even demanded the possibility of Party factions, which opposed the spirit of Leninist democratic centralism. The chief riddle, however, was how to achieve democracy throughout society, which all of them demanded, but for which none of them really had an answer. Some of these thinkers, in particular Bauman, Hochfeld and Kolakowski, had demonstrated in their analyses that the one-party system always leads to deformation and despotic rule. Nobody, however, was really suggesting the renewal of a pluralist political order. (Formally, there was, of course, the multi-party system of the ‘National Front’.)

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13 Here, more than anywhere else, the differences among respective countries are noticeable. Whereas in Poland Revisionists were opposed intellectually to both national and partly antisemitic Communism and strong national and Roman Catholic opposition, in Czechoslovakia they were much less anti-nationalist and fought more against the ‘Sovietized’ universalising narrative. A special issue here was the Czech-Slovak relationship in the 1960s. In Hungary the Revisionists faced, on the one hand, the ambiguous ideology of Kádárism and, on the other, the populist anti-Communist intelligentsia, which, however, never formed a genuine opposition to Communism. In the GDR the Revisionists again had two adversaries, Ulbricht’s Stalinist regime and, on the other hand, the ‘bourgeois’ ideology of West Germany significantly influencing the East Germans’ discourse.
From our point of view, however, it matters little whether it was the result of their convictions or of the impossibility of overstepping the bounds of the discourse. In any event, most Revisionists were sure, as long as they stuck to their Marxist convictions, that there would be no return to ‘bourgeois’ democracy with its plurality of parties, let alone the restoration of private ownership. Instead, they used to talk about a ‘socialist democracy’ that was supposed to surpass the ‘bourgeois’ one.

They differed, however, on how such a genuine socialist democracy should be reached. One way was proposed by the relatively less known group of Polish journalists and economists inspired by Lenin and Yugoslav Communism. They were centred on the journal *Po prostu* in 1956 (S. Chlestowski, J. Waclawek, W. Godek, M. Bobrowska, J. Balcerak and L. Gilejko), and suggested the old model of economic self-management. In terms of political systems they saw the ideal in direct democracy, which would keep the people permanently vigilant. The main institution was supposed to be workers’ councils with checks and balances of the administrative and political state apparatus. This model, after many modifications, was later promoted by Jacek Kuron and Karol Modzelewski in the mid-1960s, as well as by Robert Kalivoda during the Prague Spring.  

A politically more significant approach was represented by some of the aforementioned ‘top’ Revisionists, from which the philosophically most profound and eloquent concepts were developed by members of the Budapest School and leading figures of the Prague Spring. For Kosík the historical meaning of Socialism lies in the liberation of man, and Socialism is historically justified only when it provides such a revolutionary and liberating alternative. ‘Socialist democracy is an integral democracy or it is no democracy at all. Among its basic features are the self-management of socialist producers and the political democracy of socialist citizens. The first degenerates without the second.’ Socialism that amounts only to a change in the means of production is, for Kosík, a mere farce. Nevertheless, in 1968, he did not really see a way to change the world of human values. The Gramscian revolution of man’s essence, Kosík wrote, always threatens to change from man’s liberation to man’s total manipulation. Instead, Kosík, in his writings, came close to the *Zivilisationskritik* of Critical Theory. The representatives of the Budapest School, were certain, however, that the alternative of profound revolution in society did exist. ‘The new way consists in revolutionizing (*Revolutionisierung*) the way of life, that is to say, in creating new forms of living and new structures of needs, that would penetrate and change the whole sphere of human activity – from everyday life to the most complicated kinds of activities.’ Every Marxist movement that strives to

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promote a true revolution must offer, apart from its political programme, a new ethics, a new way of living, which comprises mainly the radical re-structuring of the bourgeois family form. These concepts of the Budapest School in many respects resembled those of the Western New-Left.

Yet, regardless of the reception these radical cultural concepts of Kosík, Heller and others met with among intellectuals in the 1960s, at the practical, political level they had no chance of gaining support. For one thing, with a strong utopian element they were totally unrealistic, however deeply they were rooted in genuine Marxist tradition (or perhaps precisely for that reason). For another thing, the Party leadership, even at the height of the Czechoslovak reforms of 1968, never allowed anybody to go beyond the bounds of what they called ‘democratization’. This magic word represented an utterly vague Krushchevian concept that meant the permission to democratize society and the arts and culture, unless that impinged on Party privilege. It was also within these bounds that Dubcek’s ‘socialism with human face’ had been elaborated, and everything that went beyond it, ‘reform Communists’ argued, was an act of counter-revolution. Some of the Revisionists were aware of these narrow limits. Sviták had warned, even before the promulgation of the Dubcek leadership’s ‘Action Programme’, in April 1968, ‘democratization’ did not necessarily ensure that democracy would be put into practice.

One of the most eloquent characterizations of how the Party elite conceived of the theory of ‘democratization’ it that of György Aczél, an adviser to Kádár and a Secretary of the Central Committee: ‘We are going to decide when, what and to what degree we will democratize.’

Our assessment of Revisionist concepts, however, similar to assessments of other intellectual achievements, does not necessarily have to be based on the likelihood of their being put into practice. For here we have two basic alternatives. We can analyze the actual intellectual content of Revisionists theories. Then we shall probably come to the conclusion that they produced many interesting and intellectually sophisticated analyses and critiques of their societies, but were generally unable to suggest any reasonable solution. Their


17 quoted in Fehér: ‘The Language’, p. 45
own theoretical concepts now seem rather distant from what political philosophy was about, unless one is concerned with an esoteric Marxist ontology of society. (The late reception of some Revisionist writings in the West, particularly in the USA, in the 1990s, is surprising in this respect.) But there is also another point of view, which I, as an historian, prefer – namely, the view of the historicizing Revisionist achievement, a view that seeks to place this achievement in the context of the political and cultural discourse that encompassed it. From this point of view, it formed a highly important element of the discourse, a kind of ‘counterculture’ to the official, all-embracing Marxist-Leninist doctrine. As such, Revisionists were leading actors in every reform movement that took place in central Europe in the 1950s and 1960s, though their radical ideas could scarcely have ever been realized. Some of them took part in the democratic dissent of the 1970s and 1980s. With their personal influence and their writings they had a great impact on the political philosophy of dissent, particularly on concepts such as ‘anti-politics’, ‘authenticity’, ‘legality’ and ‘legitimacy’. But that is another paper.