

ABSTRACTS

Péter Alabán: From Shifts to the Street. Industrial Workers at the Fault Lines of the Ózd Micro-Region

The demographics and social composition of the district (later, micro-region) of Ózd in Northern Hungary was shaped by various historical factors. Industrialisation, which began in the mid-nineteenth century, followed by world wars, annexation, land reforms, forced industrialisation and reorganisation of agriculture, and finally the crisis and liquidation of heavy industries, were determinative for the lives of the people living in the region in the past hundred years. In the twentieth century, intensive immigration to the region caused a major population increase, which eventually gave way to a dramatic decrease due to the regression of the iron industry after 1985.

During the 1970s shortage of steel in Hungary, the steel industry continued to use obsolete technologies and the product structure was never reorganised to satisfy the demands of international markets. By the 1990s, mining ceased altogether, heavy industry plants stopped operation, and the Ózd Metal Works was divided into parts, and even their successors are long gone by now. Besides Ózd itself, the agglomeration and nearby settlements were in the same position: their development ground to a halt, new opportunities were hard to find. Contrary to the national tendencies at the time, the job market entered an unfavourable phase. While the number of pensioners was above national average, the majority of the unemployed were young (under 35) with no education and technical skills. With the disappearance of the formerly prevalent metal and mining industries, the re-employment of people over 40 became very difficult. Although the number of registered unemployed dropped between 1995 and 2005, the figures were still very high in January 2005 (nearly 5000 people), and the situation has not improved since then.

Analysing the realignment of the layers of local society, the study explores the predominance of industrial workers, the distribution of employment by economical branches in three settlements, and the most important elements of the crisis that evolved after the change of regime in Hungary.

Eszter Bartha: "This Workers' Hostel Lost Almost Every Bit of Added Value it had". Workers' Hostels, Social Rights, and Legitimation in Welfare Dictatorships

The study presents everyday life in East German and Hungarian workers' hostels in the age of Socialism and aims to contextualise this micro-historical examination in the wider socio-political context of the work politics of the two countries. Because the bitter experience of forced modernisation in both countries resulted in bringing improving living standards and consumer politics to the forefront, these regimes are referred to as 'welfare dictatorships' in this paper. Although in the short term the paternalistic state was popular, in the long term it became obvious that the Socialist industry could not come near the consumer standards of developed capitalist countries, in fact, it cannot even maintain the steady development of standards achieved in the 1970s.

Workers' hostels reflected the two faces of the paternalistic state precisely. On one hand the state attempted to provide shelter for everyone, on the other hand, for a significant portion of workers, this shelter was provided in the form of workers' hostels, which lacked minimal comforts. The latter was also noted by lower-level party officials during the period of the regime's disintegration. Their reports began to contain increasingly sharp criticism, which not only shows the regime's legitimisation crisis, but also that the loss of its social support.

István Murányi: The Characteristics of the Local Identity of Borsodnádásd Workers

The main question addressed in this study is why the people of Borsodnádásd, formerly described as the 'worker bourgeoisie', failed to adapt to the changing circumstances in the settlement, which finally achieved city status in 2001. Along with the discussion of the structural and economic responses that lead to this failure to adapt (for example, the 1992 closure of the Sheet Metal Foundry, Borsodnádásd's main employer, the subsequent mass unemployment, as well as the region's economic and social depression), the paper also examines socio-psychological factors: the disintegration (confusion, cessation and lack) of the worker identity encouraged by the socialist regime, and that of the closely associated local identity. All this requires the interpretive framework and methodology of social representation, in addition to the traditional sociological paradigms and methodology. The fieldwork conducted for this research is connected to three university summer projects in 2006, 2007 and 2008. This entailed two surveys (in 2006 N=396, in 2007 N=201 probability sample of adults) and 38 narrative life story interviews. The present study examines the transformation of local and worker identity through the analysis this material.

Péter Nagy: “Where Company Management Rules...”
The Structure of Social and Welfare Institutions
at Rimamurány–Salgótarján Iron Works Co., Ózd

This study presents the social and cultural institutions of the Ózd iron works in the first half of the twentieth century. In this period, the Rimamurány–Salgótarján Iron Works Co. (‘Rima’), founded in 1881, was one of Hungary’s most important industrial companies. High-quality welfare and cultural institutions were created for the benefit of the employees, which made the lives of both officers and workers easier. The study is an analysis of the Ózd institutions from the turn of the century to the nationalisation of the company, because, in the author’s opinion, their services were eminent both within the company and nationwide.

The opening of the iron works in a village formerly inhabited by just a few hundred people, set off a dramatic wave of development, which fundamentally transformed the life in the settlement by the 1900s. Besides the early adoption of social security, the increasing population of both blue and white collar employees were provided with newly-built residential buildings, grocery stores, indoors swimming pool, officers’ clubs, reading clubs, and schools. This suggests that the company was keen to provide a relatively high quality of life for its workers. Several charity organisations were also founded in the factory environment, which often co-operated with churches to support the poor and needy.

In reality, however, life in Ózd was far less idyllic. Working conditions in the factory were poor, so employers were exposed to accidents and health risks. According to contemporary witnesses, the sum of insurance was rather low. Those living in workers’ colonies had better access to welfare services and quality entertainment for their free time than the rest of the villagers. Contemporaries, especially left-wing media, argued that the social politics of the company aimed to artificially segregate different layers of society and prevent organising advocacy. The analysis of archival documents, press and recollections makes the examination of the main theme of the study from several aspects. Naturally, the conditions in Ózd can only be sufficiently described in a larger spatial context. Thus, in this comparative analysis, local conditions are presented against the backdrop of the social politics of the ‘Rima’ and the whole country in general. The aim of the study is to draw attention to an eminent example for corporate welfare policies, while revealing the negative aspects of the system as well.

Tibor Valuch: *Workers – Society – History.* Approaches and Concepts

Although the weight and position of the Hungarian working class often underwent radical transformation in the course of the twentieth century, its determinant role in changes of modern society in this period is unquestionable. The main aim of this study is to give a comprehensive review of how Hungarian historiography and socio-historical scholarship presented this social group in the decades before and after the end of the Socialist regime. In addition to the literature review and historiography of the question, the study also undertakes the summary of ‘workers’ concepts in present-day social sciences.

Zsuzsanna Varga: *What is a Worker Worth, if he’s a Peasant (too)?* Rural Workers and Power in the Kádár-era

It is a widely known fact that the influx of various groups of rural population into industry was accelerated significantly by the repeated collectivisation campaigns. In many cases, however, those leaving agriculture behind changed their occupation, but not their place of residence. This was one of the survival strategies employed by peasant families. By ‘standing on more than one leg’, a large number of rural families adopted a mixed occupation structure. The contribution of the family member working in industry made the family income higher and more evenly distributed, and their social security and pensions were more favourable than those employed in agriculture too. In return, the Establishment expected them to adapt a ‘conscious worker’ identity. At the same time, on the turn of 1960s and 1970s, it became clear that large numbers of industrial workers who were formerly employed in agriculture were far from the norm that the Establishment prescribed for industrial workers.

The study examines how the party-state handled the paradoxical situation, in which over half of all Hungary’s industrial workers lived in rural settlements. In addition, it aims to describe the interpretive frameworks that built up around the double lives of this unique social group. Documents of the increasingly bitter debate over income policies in the late 1960s provide an excellent resource for this analysis.