

Chapter 7

Applied Science in Stalin's Time

Hungary, 1945–1953

György Péteri



In its East Central European mutation of the immediate postwar years, as in several later phases of the region's history, the distinction between pure and applied science manifested itself as a conflict-ridden relationship between, on the one hand, the autonomy and freedom of science (*a tudomány autonómiája és szabadsága*), and, on the other hand, the central planning of the scientific endeavor (*a tudomány tervezése*), revealing invariably the relationship between politics and academia as the underlying issue of the debates.¹ Even though the bipolarity “autonomous versus planned science” is admittedly not coextensive with the bipolarity “basic versus applied science,” the two distinctions overlap to a significant extent. From an early point of time in the debates dividing the academic elite and in the actual reforms carried through before 1947 with regard to the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (HAS), the tendency that asserted itself most forcefully was to promote the positions of applied and technological sciences, to curb the old-time predominance of arts and humanities, and to accept not merely the public accountability of science and scientists (and not merely the idea of planning *for* science), but eventually also to yield to the Communist design to extend central planning over the domain of academic endeavor.² Concurrently, principles such as the freedom of scientific inquiry, the autonomy of scientists and scientific institutions, a viable balance between basic and applied research, the unity of research and teaching (in higher education), etc., were ridiculed as illusory or even demonized as reactionary agendas. Indeed, by the early 1950s, universities, research insti-

tutes, and the various sections of the Academy had to give regular reports on “the use of the achievements of Soviet Science” and on “the struggle against foreign and domestic hostile ideologies.”³ In a draft note qualified as “strictly secret” from 16 March 1953, Chief Group Leader of Organization István Juhász pointed to the following examples of troubling “idealistic tendencies”:

- a. The unwillingness to address theoretical issues, practicism.
- b. Adherence to the [idea of] “pure science” [*tiszta tudomány*].
- c. [skeptical] Attitude towards the possibility of planning science.⁴

Between 1945 and 1948, in the so-called coalition era preceding the open Communist takeover, there were reasons to hope that the new emphasis placed on applied science could be beneficial, both in terms of an improved social status (and better funding) of science and scientists, and in terms of promoting the production of more useful knowledge. By the 1950s, however, the regime’s apparent preoccupation with applied knowledge revealed its full destructive potential, particularly in the field of social sciences. In what follows, I will first discuss how the autonomy (or freedom) of science became “the enemy of social progress” in the discourses of the political left of the coalition era (1945–1948). Thereafter I will have a look at the period of high Stalinism (1948–1953) and show the consequences of the cult of applied (“practice-oriented”) knowledge in the field of economics by discussing the contemporary (Marxist-Leninist) meanings of the concept of “practice.”

Applied Science, Planning, and Social Progress, 1945–1948

The January 1947 inaugural lecture of political scientist István Bibó could hardly have treated a topic more timely than the separation of powers. Bibó, newly elected into a corresponding membership by the HAS and a centrist member of the National Peasant Party’s leadership, was a scholar deeply involved in the political debates of the coalition period. The lecture on the separation of powers was neither the first nor the only one of Bibó’s works from this period that reflected his increasing apprehensions as to the fate of basic norms and institutions of democratic politics and society. He urged the preservation of and adherence to the old European tradition of separation of powers, for he regarded it as a principle of great relevance for the present as well as for the times to come. Of the rich content of this principle, Bibó (1982: 555) gave special emphasis to its central idea that “technically, power can most effectively be subjected to the need of acquiring moral legitimacy by the disruption of power concentration, by the separation of functions from one another, and by the establishment of power centers opposing one another

and generating particular identities.” One field of social activity where, in his view, “the demoralizing impact of power concentration” was most dangerous was that of “intellectual life, culture.” He reiterated the increasing practical and ideological significance of science for the state. This, in combination with the technological revolution that had created the mass media, with their enormous efficiency and power in shaping public opinion, and had created mass culture, providing a major arena for political propaganda, exerted a mighty push toward a concentration of power beyond all previously known proportions. From the viewpoint of democracy, this trend implied grave dangers by “bringing mass culture into a relation of dependence to the objectives of state power and, on the other hand, [by] making state power a prisoner of its own propaganda” (Bibó 1982: 557). As a “classic example” and a signal warning of a universal tendency, Bibó (1982: 557) referred to German national socialism “which, if it did not want to lose all its momentum, had to follow its own propaganda and, exactly by following its own propaganda, ran directly into its own great historical catastrophe.” Bibó therefore urged for an improved defense of democracy by measures taken to “make the scientific, artistic, and educational professions, similarly to the position of the judiciary, autonomous.” He believed “state power and science have to be separated from one another lest their fusion leads necessarily to the complete corruption of intellectual life and cultural production” (Bibó 1982: 557).

It is at this point that Bibó’s actual agenda with the essay emerges—namely, to engage in the ongoing debate on university and academic autonomy in Hungary and to argue against suggestions to destroy institutional autonomy with reference to the authoritarian (eventually fascist) rule in the country preceding 1945:

In connection with this question, quite a few people mention the universities and the Academy which more or less defend their historical autonomy. These [institutions] are exposed to assaults on grounds that their autonomies are merely crystallization points of certain personal and social power relations. However, this only means that the Academy or the universities provide too narrow frameworks. The recognition of that justifies not the destruction of autonomy but, on the contrary, the organization of it on an even larger scale. It confirms that the whole intellectual life, the whole cultural production and the consumption of mass culture necessitates the establishment of some apparatus of autonomy. . . . The contours, again, of some kind of a scientific or cultural “state power” are taking shape, which, just like the judiciary, will have to gain by struggle its independence, its autonomy, and its constitutionally guaranteed separation from the concentration of power. (Bibó 1982: 557–558)

In fact, Bibó’s attention to the problem was prompted by the serious threats that the country’s academic life was exposed to, rather than by any distinct

trend of emerging or increasing autonomy in the various fields of intellectual endeavor—and the challenge came from the Communists' side. Neither home Communists nor those returning from Moscow can be said to have resumed their political activity in the possession of a coherent set of objectives and policy proposals concerning science in late 1944. Matters pertaining to cultural policy, and especially to the organizations and practitioners of science, seem to have been, at least until 1948, of interest for them strictly from a political point of view. The fear that “reactionary” (anti-Communist) politics may find shelter under the roofs of the country's academic institutions appears to have been the main underlying motive of their utterances. This is reflected in their preoccupation with the ideological affinities and political affiliations prevalent in the academic community.

This, of course, is not to say that before 1948, there had been no indications whatsoever of how Communists envisaged the role of science in society and its mode of operation at a future “phase of development.” The demands they formulated with an increasing clarity and resolution concerned the position of Marxism-Leninism in the country's intellectual-academic life, and, more specifically, the closely related issues of academic autonomy and planning. I will discuss the latter point in greater detail in what follows.

For Communists, academic autonomy was, from an early point of time, a thorn in the flesh. As we have seen, the fact that certain personalities of the Horthy era's conservative establishment could find (for a rather short time) shelter in university autonomy was regarded by István Bibó as an argument *for* broadening and further consolidating the constitutionally guaranteed autonomy of intellectual life. The Communists had a diametrically opposite view. A strengthening and consolidation of institutional autonomy with regard to the HAS and the universities was the hope of many other conservative reformers in the country's academic life, such as historian István Hajnal, professor of law Gyula Moór, or the musicologist and composer Zoltán Kodály. In the coalition government formed after the November 1945 elections, literary historian Dezső Keresztury, of the National Peasant Party, became the minister of religion and education. His policies may rightly be characterized as “democratic and well-balanced” (Borbándi 1983: 409). The point of departure, and, at the same time, one of the major objectives of his policies was the vision of a democratic Hungarian society, in which the political-cultural life was arranged along and according to the community of interests of peasantry, workers, and intelligentsia. Being a true democrat, he wanted to promote the freeing of society from feudalistic barriers to social mobility; he wished to contribute to the development of a societal organization and stratification, shaped not by the distribution of status by birth but by the division of labor, the very basis of human-social life. He wished to contrib-

ute to the education system reforms so as to sustain a healthier distribution of social positions according to competence and expertise. He welcomed the land reform and its effects upon the Church—namely, that the latter ceased to function as one of the mightiest landlords—because he thought this was a precondition for their return to their true mission of taking care of people's souls and working for a Christian socialism. He supported the democratization of culture, which for him meant “the freedom of thought, inquiry, and opinion, and the freedom of conscience as well as free access to education, [and] the right to share the products, weapons and tools of human intellect” (Mai magyar művelődéspolitiká 1946: 7–35). Keresztury, similarly to other conservative reformers, was aware of the need for modernizing reforms in the organization of academic activity. He wished to transform the HAS into a nodal center for coordinating the nation's scientific enterprise. But he was also deeply cautious of the dangers implied in the abandonment of the principle of autonomy. Therefore, in 1946, he played a crucial role in restoring the consensus and unity within the HAS⁵ and did his best to secure funding for it so as to preserve its integrity (Mai magyar művelődéspolitiká 1946: 109–110). His policies were soon fiercely criticized by the Communist and the Social Democratic parties and, eventually, in late 1946, he was forced to resign. In March 1947, Gyula Ortutay of the Smallholders' Party took over Keresztury's chair.

Ortutay proved to be an easy match for the Communists. Despite his seeming resistance, he was not more than a supernumerary in the historical drama of the *Gleichschaltung* of Hungarian cultural life staged and directed by Mátyás Rákosi and his party. Ortutay yielded to Communist pressures toward the introduction of centralized administration of academic life, while at the same time he tried to avoid the use of coercion in openly violating the principle of autonomy. He pointed, therefore, to the “excellent example of the Soviet Union for good academic organization,” where central administration and coordination was combined with “the possibility of completely free research.” This example could be followed by little Hungary only if the Academy voluntarily undertook to renew itself and was prepared to assume the role of centrally administering the nation's intellectual endeavor (Ortutay 1949: 81–82). As Communist political dominance became increasingly obvious and self-asserting, however, Ortutay, too, started using a sterner voice. On 23 February 1948, he warned the HAS in a presumptuous speech delivered in the Parliament that he would proceed with his (!) plan to establish a “highest council for sciences” even without the Academy's cooperation, if the latter could not find their way to cooperate with his ministry.⁶ He also declared “with the greatest resolution”—as if he had run any risk of resistance on the part of the universities—that in his view the only acceptable reason to

preserve university autonomy was to guarantee a satisfactory standard in the nominations to professorships and senior fellowships submitted by the universities to the ministry of education.⁷ Half a year later he asserted that “the interest of the Republic” was superior to all autonomies in the cultural sphere and demanded that the universities secure “ideological purity” not only at the departments of social sciences but in other faculties too.

Until 1948, György Lukács had been one of the highest Communist authorities on issues of cultural and science policy. His views are worthy of careful consideration also because they were representative of the “right wing” (as distinct from the “hardliners”) of postwar Hungarian communism. According to his article published in the Communist party daily, the *Szabad Nép*, culture was the sector where the ancien régime had the strongest positions (Lukács 1946). Part of the explanation was, in Lukács’s opinion, to be found in the fact that “for quite a long time, until after the national elections, the ministry of education had been one of the main strongholds of the reaction organizing its counter-attack.” Another factor he named was the “excessive loyalty” on the part of the democratic parties toward the major institutions of Hungarian culture, including the universities and the HAS. This “excessive loyalty” manifested itself, Lukács wrote, in that “the democratic parties left completely intact the autonomy of the universities and the Academy, leaving to a generous extent to their discretion to decide upon their own transformation, on the renewal of the content, organization, and personnel aspects of their work.” Right after the country’s liberation in 1945, Lukács contended, radical reforms in both of the institutions would have met little resistance. Notwithstanding, a whole year had gone during which, so Lukács echoed his party’s judgment, democratic reforms in the cultural field had made no progress. This they regarded only the more disappointing as “the new tasks would be enormous.” Among the latter, as listed by Lukács, “national organization and planning of the natural and social sciences” figured first, a task that in his view the Academy was incapable of solving “on account of its organization and the composition of its membership.”

Another active spokesman of the Communist Party in matters of science policy was the young historian Károly Vigh, member of the Teleki Institute and secretary of the Communist Party Organization of Scientific Institutions, established in October 1946.⁸ Vigh was actually the first to spell out the Communist views on matters pertaining to the HAS and to science policy in general. On 7 September 1945, he delivered an opening speech on “University, Science and Academy,” arranged by the Free Union of Hungarian Pedagogues. In a sweeping attack on the universities and the HAS, he described the whole edifice of Hungarian learning as thoroughly reactionary in outlook and ideology, and alarmingly backward compared to the science of the “great

democracies”—meaning the Soviet Union, Great Britain, and the United States.⁹ As the least tolerable feature of the state of Hungarian science, he named the lack of organization and leadership in the country's academic life. In this respect, he suggested following the Soviet example, since “the question of the management of science was first solved there.” That meant that the Academy was, in his view, to play the role of the central policymaking and planning authority over science. In order to be able to fulfill that role, however, the HAS, Vigh contended, had to go through a purification whereby the “democratic forces” would take over the leadership in it. He warned the Academy that although the democratic government respected their autonomy, they would not be able to wait too long for the renewal (Vigh 1945: 130–133).

During the later years of the coalition period, Vigh was a regular contributor to the communist weekly *Tovább*, where he specialized in matters pertaining to science. His two-part article, “The Organic Disorders of Our Academic Life” (Vigh 1947a, b), published more than a year after Lukács's unfavorable diagnosis, bears witness to increasing Communist discontent with the slow adjustment of academic institutions to the demands of “new democracy.” Vigh found that “the Horthy era's counter-revolutionary superstructure” was hardly affected by the changes after 1945. He urged, therefore, the launching of a “concentrated ideological crusade by the progressive forces of Hungarian intellectual life.” He approvingly recalled a lecture delivered by Béla Fogarasi that highlighted the danger that a gap might emerge between academic life and democratic development in other areas, and warned that “the reaction, under such guises as the demands of competence, freedom from political influence, autonomy, etc., would undermine democracy” (Vigh 1947a: 8). Vigh demanded that in the higher education of social sciences, especially at the faculties of arts, economics, and law, a greater number of the professors should be from among “the progressive representatives of science.” By demanding this, he meant to make the presence of Marxism—meaning, of course, the Stalinist variant of Marxism-Leninism—in higher education correspond “to the avant-garde role undertaken by the workers' class in Hungarian democratic development” (Vigh 1947b: 8). Among other things, he also demanded that the curriculum at the universities and high schools should be centrally prescribed and obligatory, “as it is a wrong interpretation of academic freedom when the professor teaches and the student takes whatever they prefer instead of what really is *needed*.” In this article too, “lack of planning” was pinpointed as one of the main “organic disorders” of academic activity, and Vigh suggested the establishment of “a planning committee for culture, universities and science to coordinate the three-year plans of the individual research institutions.”

A fairly detailed presentation of the Communist view on major issues of cultural (science) policy was published by István Király in July 1946 in *Társadalmi Szemle*, the theoretical journal of the Communist Party. Király alleged that Keresztury's ministry had been involved in a consistent sabotage against "democratic cultural policies." In the field of science policy, he contended, the ministry refused "to go to the root of the problem and solve the issue of the Academy of Sciences, the scientific institutes and the universities according to uniform standards" (Király 1946: 520). These "uniform standards," he suggested, should be modeled on the "academic industries of great democracies." Király, like many of his party comrades involved in the siege on the "reactionary academy," did not fail to seize an opportunity in the ongoing debate within the academic community at that time. He maintained that what professor Szent-Györgyi, in the lead of "our excellent, progressive scientists," recognized was "that the development of modern sciences, their complexity, [and] the great tasks they are facing necessitate the planning of scientific activity by concentrating the individual parts into a big totality" (Király 1946: 526).

Király implied that the ministry's failure to address the problems of science policy in a proper and effective manner was mostly dependent on the defeatism they exhibited in relation to academic autonomy. He argued that academic autonomy had two main aspects. One was its concrete, historical form. The prevailing historical form of autonomy was, he reminded, "born in the struggle of bourgeoisie against feudalism." Capitalism wanted to set science free from the Church's guardianship "in order to pave the way for a rapid and free development of the forces of production." But there was a universal aspect of academic autonomy too, not subject to historical determination, Király continued. This universal meaning of autonomy was that "scientific activity is only possible in complete freedom." In Király's understanding the relation between the two aspects of academic autonomy was a dialectical relationship between form and content.

The historical and universal meanings of autonomy come in the course of societal development into conflict with one another. . . . The contradiction between historically determined and universal autonomies manifests itself under reactionary [regimes] Ruling reactionary regimes, surviving their own historical time, often wish to impede the development of society and the forces of production. Under such circumstances, sciences that find themselves inside the autonomy would become "official sciences" in the negative sense of the word, trying to resist life, while the science that genuinely serves development, together with its representatives, would be forced to stay outside the walls of official institutions. This false academic autonomy tends to undermine its own fundamental principles: it is sustained by brute force and, following the col-

lapse of the regime, it will, sooner or later, necessarily also fall to give its place for a new harmony emerging between the two meanings of autonomy. (Király 1946: 525)

Király (1946: 526) made no secret about his and the party's opinion that in Hungary, "even today, it is mostly the 'official scholars and scientists' of the past who hide themselves behind the academic autonomy; with the help of autonomy they wish not to promote but to impede development." He insisted it was the duty of Keresztury's ministry to help the purging of academic life and to support within the autonomy "the progressive forces in their struggle against reaction." Being, however, itself dominated by a "reactionary personnel," the ministry had, in Király's view, "built a common front with . . . the religious and academic reaction against progress and democratization."

György Lukács too, as we have already shown, viewed the universities and the HAS as "the citadels of reaction." An unmistakable proof for this was, he suggested, the fact that "the leading ideologues of democracy have not yet been able to take their due positions" (Szent-Györgyi et al. 1946: 9). Like Király and Vigh, Lukács saw a direct relationship between the "academic reaction's" ability to persist and the misuse of academic freedom with the support of the ministry of education. This view was shared by yet another Communist personality of significance in matters of cultural policy, Géza Losonczy (Szent-Györgyi et al. 1946, 15–16).

A similar opinion was held by Béla Fogarasi (1948: 202–203), who said, "The incorrect interpretation and use of autonomy is one of the organic diseases of our universities."¹⁰ He saw it as a continuation of a bad tradition from the pre-1945 era that the received understanding of autonomy "gives, from a professional-scientific point of view, no guarantee for the [proper] selection of professors . . . as it is not the objective professional criteria that are decisive." Similarly to other Communists who made public their view on the issue, Fogarasi asserted that "autonomy, as practiced in our country" had "become a barrier to development." Whereas, he added, the people's democracy actually supports "a genuine academic self-government," it "must not permit such abuses as are being done with autonomy" (Fogarasi 1948: 202–203). The same ungenerous attitude was applied to "academic freedom for the professors," meaning, "that they are free to publish and teach the results of their research, but it does not mean that they should even today have the right to teach law and economics in the spirit of the Horthy era [*Horthy-szellemenben*] as it is being done in certain faculties. This would mean freedom to be unscientific and not freedom of science" (Fogarasi 1948: 208–209).

Fogarasi was also a leading propagandist of the idea of academic planning. He envisaged the transition of Hungarian science into modernity through

“uniting our atomistic academic life.”¹¹ In an article from early 1947, he hailed the three-year economic plan as the necessary basis for a “truly democratic” culture. Fogarasi, in the footsteps of Lukács, distinguished between “formal” and “genuine or true democracy.” He found that while in the field of economy “true democracy” was developing due to the introduction of central planning, in cultural life “formal democracy” prevailed. This explained, said Fogarasi (1948: 192–193), why “there is hardly any other field of our public life where the reactionary forces fighting against progress have managed to persist in their positions acquired during the Horthy era to such an extent as they have in culture.” Fogarasi’s argument built on a distinction between a democratic and an aristocratic notion of culture, the former meaning “the introduction of the idea of planning into cultural construction,” while the latter was associated with “a chaotic, unorganized, and atomistic state of culture.” This was mainly a replica of another simplistic train of thought contrasting the ideal types of planned and market economies. In both cases, of course, it is central planning that comes out of the comparison triumphant. Moreover, economic and cultural planning, within the frameworks of the totalitarian design, necessitate and legitimate one another:

The economic plan is the basis for the planned management of culture. Without [planning the economy] cultural planning would remain empty words. However, the realization of economic plans makes the planned management of culture necessary too. It is obvious, that a precondition of the realization of economic plans is the provision of the necessary intellectual labor which, in turn, demands the planned management of the whole education. From the viewpoint of the realization of economic plans the planned development of sciences is of enormous importance too. (Fogarasi 1948: 194)

Understandably enough, Communists paid little attention to the risks central planning might entail from the points of view of academic autonomy and freedom and, thus, for the development of intellectual endeavor. In their vision of the world, there did not, and should not, exist small “intermundia” where intellectuals could hide and devote themselves to an uncompromising search for truth. They started out from the firm belief, inherent in their class-relativist epistemology, that “the ‘autonomy’ of science is an illusion *Science has never been independent of society*, nor has it been independent of the ruling class in the society. . . . The autonomy of research institutes and university departments has also been but an appearance” (Kornai 1948: 4). Instead of chasing the “illusion of autonomy,” the academic communities were advised to accommodate themselves to “the needs of society”; after all, “it is the needs of the development of the forces of production which determine the directions and subjects of research and not the other way around!” (Fogarasi

1948: 188). Applying Engels's concept of freedom, Fogarasi even managed to make the goods he offered look like "freedom":

Only when science becomes aware of those societal relationships that determine its development, only then it will be free in the truly scientific sense of the concept. . . . The planned management of sciences is the organizational expression of this awareness. . . . We know also from the practice of the Soviet Union that the government does not in any way impede individual initiative either in academic life or in the whole of social life. Rather, they support it in every respect. (Fogarasi 1948: 188)¹²

After 1948, Communist writings on the "necessity" of planning scientific research on a national scale ceased to contain the early, vague references to the experience of "great democracies." What remained was, on the one hand, the imperialist West characterized by decadent art and bourgeois science incapable of development, and, on the other hand, the Soviet Union with intellectual achievements "impossible to surpass." Given the two-camp structure of the world as seen by the Cominform, the Soviet-type academy became the model to be followed by Hungary too. Soviet academic life was regarded as the case proving the advantages of central planning and organization. The Soviet example was cited against those who attached excessive importance to the role of coincidence, intuition, and to the genius of individuals—other than Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Stalin—in scientific progress. The Soviet example was declared to have proven that science developed best if determined, through central planning, "by the needs of the time." When the Hungarian Council of Sciences (HCS)¹³ was just about to start its activities to introduce "planning and organization" into Hungary's academic life, the conflict between central planning and academic autonomy was dealt with in an orthodox Stalinist manner: "We do not promise some nonexistent 'autonomy' to the sciences. We would like to develop Hungarian scholarship to something like the Soviet one, which—as was stated by Stalin—'does not isolate itself from the people, does not keep itself away from the people, but [is] ready to serve the people, ready to give the people all the results of sciences and serves the people not under compulsion but voluntarily and happily'" (Kornai 1949: 11).¹⁴

The Meanings of "Practice"— Hungarian Economics under Stalin

Studying the research programs of the early period of the new Marxist-Leninist economics, one cannot help being profoundly impressed by two features: first, the excessive role of ideology and propaganda, including the boom in the production of stenciled coursebooks; and, second, a particular

kind of utilitarianism—namely, the urge to be of use for what was defined as “practice” (*gyakorlat* or *gyakorlati élet*). Indeed, it seems that in this second phase of academic life under Stalin (1949–1953), we can observe yet another discursive mutation of the basic versus applied science controversy—one that may be best articulated as some kind of bipolarity between *l’art pour l’art* theorizing on the one hand and practice-oriented knowledge on the other.

The first “scientific plan” defining the program of economic research for five years consisted of a total of twenty-one projects.¹⁵ These projects were as follows:

1. studying political economy, Soviet works, translation of university books (Institute of Economics)
2. translation and publishing of classical works of Marxism-Leninism (*Szikra* Publishing House)
3. writing a book in political economy for secondary schools (Institute of Economics)
4. writing a textbook in political economy for universities
5. writing a university textbook in economic history
6. studying the theoretical and methodological literature of planning in the Soviet Union and in the people’s democracies, and the translation of appropriate works in this field (Institute of Economics together with the Hungarian-Soviet Economic Review, and the Centre of Economic Documentation)
7. studying the cooperative forms in the Soviet Union and the people’s democracies (Institute of Agricultural Organization and Institute of Economics)
8. developing a Hungarian terminology for the socialist planned economy (for this purpose a separate “interdisciplinary” Committee of Economic Terminology was established)
9. studying the system of national balances (compilation of balances of national income and gross social product, *társadalmi termék*) (Institute of Economics)
10. studying the Marxist theory and methods of calculating national income (translation of relevant soviet works) (Institute of Economics)
11. developing methods for the planning of wage funds (*munkabérelapok*) (Institute of Economics)
12. developing the best methods for performance-bound wage policies (various ministerial organs under the leadership of the National Office of Labor and Wages, with the cooperation of the Institute of Economics)
13. assessment of productive fixed capital (*termelés állóalapjainak felmérése*) and of the necessary extent of writing down its value

14. problems of monetary planning (Ministry of Finance, Institute of Economics)
15. development of methods for assessing and planning the productivity of labor (Planning Office, Statistical Office, Office of Innovations)
16. development of methods for assessing, planning, and reducing costs (economic ministries and Planning Office)
17. studying the problems of working capital on macro, branch, and micro levels (Ministry of Finance)
18. translation of the Soviet university book in General Statistics
19. studying the systems of accountancy and the experience of the Soviet Union and the people's democracies in planning, organizing, and controlling industrial units (University of Economics, University of Technology)
20. developing methods for industrial planning, organization, and control (University of Economics, University of Technology)
21. providing information about, studying, and assessing the economic life of the Soviet Union and the people's democracies, with a special view to economic cooperation (Institute of Economics)

The program shows quite clearly the unsatisfactory direction into which economic research was forced by the new regime: the alternatives were either to engage in ideological propaganda, most safely and effectively done by translating the output in political economy of the Soviet Union and the people's democracies, or to support the operative, day-to-day nitty-gritty of central economic management in the various authorities—for example, by helping to develop methods and instruments to assess and control economic processes. Several items of the program may have necessitated the work of trained professionals, but none of the enlisted projects, nor any combination of them, belonged to the proper domain of economic research. Indeed, the early programs of 1950–1953 indicate a conspicuous absence of explicit theoretical assumptions waiting to be confirmed or refuted and, especially, of serious questions addressed to economic “reality” at all. This latter feature appears to be all the more perplexing in the light of the claim that new Marxist-Leninist science would be—to a hitherto unprecedented extent—dedicated to “practice.” This seeming contradiction cannot be solved unless we consider the various meanings of the concept of “practice” within the academic culture of the early 1950s.

Practice as a criterion steering research activity was a concept of great complexity in the contemporary usage. Communists had little sympathy for the idea of “pure science.” They believed that, for science, there was only one source of inspiration and only one legitimate objective: the needs of practical

life. What was termed “applied science” in other political and academic cultures appears, therefore, to have been closer to their ideal—in the sense of a scientific ethos evoking high responsiveness to the call and needs of society. The concept of practice was often used even to denote “objective reality,” one that is “reflected” in scientific propositions. Yet another shade of the concept can be identified in its use as the ultimate and only reliable test of all scientific propositions. When “practice” was used in this sense, the contemporary masters of academic life would have readily quoted what they claimed was Engels’ favorite phrase: “The test of the pudding is eating it.” In this latter role, the meaning of “practice” appears to be quite close to what normally is called the predictive strength of a proposition or theory in the process of validation.

In the reality of the Stalinist academic regime, however, “practice” would have been first of all an epitome of the goals and projections adhered to by the central political power. The latter regarded itself as the only depository of information concerning “the needs of society,” and claimed to possess exclusive mandates to interpret and act upon those needs. Only in this meaning of the concept—that is, as the conversion by the party into worldly reality of the utopian project for mankind’s state socialist salvation—would “practice” have indeed functioned as a selection criterion identifying “true science.”

The adjustment to this latter meaning of practice is in evidence in the various versions of “scientific plans” produced in the early 1950s. The fundamental principle governing the designers of the five-year plan of economics was stated as follows: “The decisive task of economics is to promote the solution of economic problems to which the building of socialism gives rise in our country.”¹⁶ But just as the task of “building socialism” was a business to be decided upon by the party leadership, so was the definition of economic problems arising out of it—as well as the solutions applied to them, of course. Thus, the concept of practice, as employed in science-policy discourses, meant “reality” (the subject of scientific inquiry) only as far as it was identical with “reality” as defined by the political power. In 1950, the Second Section of the HAS was preparing an exhibition to demonstrate the socialist renewal of social sciences and to popularize, among others, the activities of the Institute of Economics. What was required from the Institute, therefore, was a suggestion of what should figure as their “exhibition material.” Péter Erdős, although skeptical of the whole idea of popularizing economics in this manner, returned to the Second Section with the proposition, first, to produce a poster showing the growth of the number of “scientific topics” in which the Institute was engaged, and, second, to create yet another poster that would list all the organizations with which the Institute was in touch (government departments, national authorities, state companies, party organizations, etc.).

This poster had the caption “Practice is the vital essence of science” (*A tudomány életető eleme a gyakorlat*). Finally, the slogan suggested by Erdős as a heading for the Institute’s exhibition board was a revealingly twisted version of a well-known Leninian bit of wisdom: “Politics is concentrated economics. The work of the Institute of Economics too supports our peace policy.”¹⁷

The conflation of the two “realities”—neither of which remotely brought to mind the reality of everyday life as experienced by mortal members of the society—was the very basis for that central ingredient of the official academic culture of our period: the regular exaltations so generously devoted to “works” of top Communist leaders. The imposition of the political definition of reality upon science also provides the explanation for an apparently bizarre episode that took place around 1954 or 1955: the head of the science policy section of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, Erzsébet Andics, instructed economists pleading for access to classified statistical materials to instead study and satisfy themselves with the party’s daily, the *Szabad Nép*.¹⁸ In fact, within the frameworks of the Stalinist academic regime, Andics’s reaction was normal, and the plea from the economists an anomaly. Politics was the exclusive domain of the party. If politics was “concentrated economics,” then the supreme competence to take care of economics was to be invested with the leadership of the party. Another side of the same coin was that, in the period between 1948 and 1956, all previously regular publications of statistical data ceased to exist. The Central Office of Statistics (COS) produced a series of reports as “Strictly Secret!” manuscripts, covering major socioeconomic developments. There existed, however, only ten to sixty copies of these reports, accessible exclusively for the highest echelons of the party-state. Between 1949 and 1954, more than 70 percent of all the copies of such reports went to members of the Political Bureau, secretaries of the Central Committee, and to members of the so-called Organization Bureau of the Central Committee—a couple dozen people at most, constituting the very core of the highest party leadership. In the distribution lists of the COS from the period, I found the name of only one person who could be classified as a researcher in economics at the time, with even this occurring only a few times (Péteri 1993b: 152–153).

After Stalin’s death and in the wake of the general crisis that left no aspect of social life unaffected, quite a few high-level leaders of the domain of economic policy¹⁹ reacted to the crisis in a scientific manner, claiming that the main error had been to strangle unbiased empirical economic research, which left economic policy makers blindly improvising and seldom finding the right course (Péteri 1993b, 1997). Thus, as a contemporary party document claimed, the publications in economics of the years of high Stalinism

would not, in general, go beyond the confines of . . . propagandistic arguments on some theoretical questions. . . . The great distance from practical life [*gyakorlati élet*] is indicated also by the fact that the discussions on problems of economics, arranged either by the various departments of the university of economics and of the high party school, or by the editorial boards of periodicals, tend to assume a scholastic direction and to end up in [debates on] how to interpret and explain certain definitions and concepts.²⁰

Significantly, as is indicated in this document, the reform era following Stalin's death and its empiricist turn in economics came to assert itself by way of reconstructing the discourse of "practice," nudging it toward the meaning of a social economic reality that defied the projections of political power, and that needed to be studied and understood before it could be affected in accordance with political intentions.

But while Stalin and, in Hungary, Mátyás Rákosi, were in unchallenged power, economists had to make do with studying *Szabad Nép* as the major source of information about economic reality, and with regarding party congresses, Central Committee meetings, and the publication of works of party leaders as the most important "epoch-making" events of academic life. Even the authors of the very first printed book to appear in political economy in the Soviet Bloc unequivocally regarded the resolutions of the Communist parties and the works of the leaders of these parties as major sources and embodiments of new knowledge in economics (Ostrovit'anov et al. 1956: 17). There was, furthermore, no reason to doubt, in accordance with the meaning of "practice" and "reality" specific to the official Stalinist academic culture, that top Communist leaders were by definition the best scientists too. Moreover, as their activities covered a wide range of fields, there seemed to be reasons at hand to believe that Renaissance ideals had come true in them. This is the impression one could get reading, for example, János Kornai's (1950: 921) review on Ernő Gerő's volume of speeches, *In Struggle for the Socialist People's Economy*:

Besides comrade Rákosi, even the writings of comrade Gerő demonstrate for Hungarian Communists how the doctrines of the classics should be courageously applied (and thereby further developed) to the given situation, to the conditions of people's democracy, of Hungary. This example of the leaders of our Party ought to be emphasized especially because . . . many of our theoretical cadres with an excessive "precaution" and theoretical cowardice shrink from the task of dealing with the elaboration of the theoretical issues of people's democracy. . . . Marxism-Leninism gives the Bolshevik leader a key to the solution of all sorts of questions. But merely by relying on the general doctrines of Marxism-Leninism, without having the concrete special knowledge of the

various fields of work, one cannot solve the tasks successfully. Comrade Gerő provides in his book a grandiose example of the Communist leader being always a true *specialist*. He is a specialist—if so demanded by the Party—of the railways, of communication, he is a specialist of finance, agriculture, or of some other field of work. The inseparable unity of theory and practice emanates from these writings.

The academic culture of Stalinism recognized no borderlines between politics, propaganda, and science. One of the first official (although not public) histories on the development of social sciences following the Communist takeover describes this phenomenon as follows: in the period between 1949 and 1953,

the highest priority for the practitioners of social sciences was to get to know and propagate the doctrines of the classics of Marxism. . . . Besides a certain neglect shown toward research, the importance of propaganda work became paramount. . . . This went hand in hand with the view that blurred the border between research work and scientific propaganda and which undervalued scientific research work. . . . to a great extent, creative scientific work in the fields of Marxist social sciences was replaced by dogmatism, the repetition of classical theses, and vulgarization [of these classical theses]. . . . All in all, it can be stated, that there was hardly any fruitful research work carried on in the social sciences during this period of our development.²¹

Economic research, that is, economics as an intellectual-academic endeavor, could not be restored as long as the “inseparable unity of theory and practice” referred to by young János Kornai prevailed. The possibility to distinguish between ideology and practice, between policy objectives and reality, and between normative and positive statements was a necessary precondition of breathing life into the sleeping beauty of social science. But if such distinctions were to be meaningful at all, practitioners of economics had to have access to the very raw material of their knowledge production: to statistical data and other information embodying “factual observations” of the economy. To achieve that, Stalin’s version of state socialism had to undergo a major crisis and some far-reaching reforms in the long decade after the death of Joseph V. Stalin himself.²²

In Lieu of a Conclusion

In Stalin’s shadow, the concepts of “basic science” (*alaptudomány*) and “applied science” (*alkalmazott tudomány*) may have been absent from science policy discourses of the early years of Communist rule in Hungary. The ten-

sion characterizing the career of this distinction elsewhere, however, was no doubt present, although the bipolarity assumed varying shapes and shades both in form and contents in accordance with the changing political and (what I had no room here to discuss) academic-cultural contexts.

Seizing on the opportunity offered by the turn of tide in 1944/1945 and, just as importantly, by the overwhelming presence of the Soviet occupation forces, the political left of the coalition era used notions of “autonomous” or “pure” science as an accusation to debunk its political opponents in academia and science policy. In contrast, applied science—that is, knowledge geared to and therefore “useful” for, the grand task of economic and social progress—provided the discursive platform from where relevant and irrelevant, good and bad revealed themselves. The mobilization of scientific knowledge toward the objectives of a social reconstruction that was to bring with it an entire new social order constituted the context in which the binary opposition assumed the shape of “free or pure” versus “planned science.” When firmly in power, “planned science” assumed new verbal garments, and the Stalinist order of state-socialism brought social research and thought under its control by imposing the cult of “practice” with meanings all tied to what appeared to be expedient (politically and ideologically correct) for those in power who demanded to be served, not critically studied and understood. This was the very reason Hungary’s reform Communism had its origins in the New Course era (1953–1956), when high *apparatschiki* with a scientific understanding of the crisis of the state-socialist social order and young Communist intellectuals frustrated with, humiliated by, and disillusioned with the Stalinist regime joined forces in promoting the breakthrough of an empiricist research program. At the same time, this was the very reason why the reformist science policy discourse could only make a breakthrough happen by way of (re)conquering the concept of “practice” and thus restoring its objectivistic meaning.

György Péteri is professor of contemporary European history at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology, Trondheim. He has done extensive research on the relationship of academia and state socialism in Hungary. Relevant publications include *Academia and State Socialism: Essays on the Political History of Academic Life in Post-1945 Hungary and Eastern Europe* (1998), *Academia in Upheaval: Origins, Transfers, and Transformations of the Communist Academic Regime in Russia and East Central Europe* (coedited with Michael David-Fox, 2000), and an essay on “The Communist Idea of the University” in *Universities Under Dictatorship*, edited by John Connelly and Michael Grüttner (2005).

Notes

1. In this respect, the authoritarian regime holding sway in Hungary these days, under Viktor Orbán, is no exception. Since 2010 they have displayed in a number of ways their eagerness to impose on cultural and academic life a disciplinary regime organized around *magyar* ethnonationalism and loyalty to conservative values (and to the party of Viktor Orbán) as selective criteria. Government policies propelling the Hungarian Academy of Arts (Magyar Művészeti Akadémia) into a ruling position over the country's artistic life, the ever-increasing governmental-political control over the universities, and more particularly, the ongoing *Gleichschaltung* of historical research and scholarship are clear indications of this tendency.
2. For the history of the rift, the reform, and the Communist takeover in the HAS in the years 1945–1949, see Péteri 1998: ch. 1–4. By 1949/1950, science and higher education in Hungary had shown many characteristics of a Soviet-type academic regime: a large part of the country's research endeavor (its resources and personnel) had been reorganized in the newly established institutes of the HAS, and the Academy assumed a role similar to that of a government department, performing the central planning and management of the national research effort.
3. See, e.g., the report of the Second Section of the HAS on the year 1952: *Jelentés a szovjet tudomány eredményeinek felhasználásáról az 1952. évben* [Report on the utilization of the achievements of Soviet science in the year of 1952], n.d., Archives of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, II. Social Sciences Division (hereafter MTA LT, II. oszt.), 18/8. Throughout this chapter, all quotes from sources originally in Hungarian have been translated by the author. No punctuation, emphases, etc. are added by the author without explicitly noting it. Original Hungarian wording as well as complementary words sometimes required to enable comprehension, as and when deemed necessary, are given within square brackets: [].
4. MTA LT, II. oszt., 16/4. According to an intern letter of the Chief Group Leader, by 18 March 1953 the reports on the struggle against hostile ideologies had no longer been needed, but the questions enlisted in the note “could still be used in compiling the annual reports.”
5. In 1945, under the leadership of Albert Szent-Györgyi, a group of scientists left the HAS and established a rival institution, the Academy of Natural Sciences. They then reunited with the HAS in 1946 (Péteri 1991, 1993a).
6. *Országgyűlési Napló*, 51. ülés [Journal of Parliament, 51st session], 23 February 1948: 583. See also his address to the Council of Public Education, 5 February 1948 (Ortutay 1949: 97–98).
7. *Országgyűlési Napló*, 51. ülés, 23 February 1948: 582–583.
8. Cf. “Megalakult a Tudományos Intézmények Kommunista Pártszervezete,” *Szabad Nép*, 26 October 1946: 2.
9. From early 1946 and on, references to the “great democracies” were abandoned, and the Soviet academic regime was singled out as the example to be followed.

There was also a significant silence about Western authors (politically often Left-oriented) proposing, since the first half of the 1930s, reforms in the organization of science toward more planning at the macro level (at least, planning *for* science). For the history of Soviet-type academic regimes in Russia and in post-1945 East Central Europe, and for a discussion of possible influences in postwar Hungary of the British “social relations of science” movement, see David-Fox and Péteri 2000.

10. The text, included in Fogarasi’s 1948 book, was a lecture delivered on 4 March 1948 as part of a series of lectures on questions of sciences and arts arranged by the Hungarian Communist party. It may be of importance to note that Fogarasi’s bitter accusations as to the misuse of autonomy by the “academic-cultural reaction” date from the time before he himself was appointed to a professorship at the Budapest University. For a list of professors, most of whom were Communists or sympathizers of the party, appointed from 1945 onward to the Faculty of Arts in Budapest, see Sinkovics 1970: 390.
11. Fogarasi’s speech on a meeting arranged by the Communist Party in December 1946 is referred to in *Köznevelés* 3, No. 1–2 (15 January 1947): 16.
12. To provide greater credibility to his argument, Fogarasi described in a footnote his own twelve-year experience in the Institute of Philosophy of the Soviet Academy of Sciences where, he assured his anxious readers, he elaborated his individual plans always according to his own intentions. This proves to be an unqualified lie in the light of some of his own letters from Moscow to his wife from that time: “What I would like to write, I cannot write,” he complained in one of them. In an autobiographical note from 1957, he looks back on his years in emigration and writes this: “My career as a philosopher’ between 1920 and 1945: 25 years practically lost” (cited in Karádi 1983: 42–43, 46).
13. Following the merger of the Hungarian Communist Party and the Social-Democratic Party on 12 June 1948, in the process of establishing an open Communist dictatorship, the HCS was established as the top governmental organization to perform the central planning of research activities in the country, with far-reaching mandates as to the use of resources provided in the national economic plans and as to hiring (and firing) all the key personnel, including university professors and the senior scientists and scholars at various research institutes. Even though the HCS’s design seemingly followed the academy model in the sense that it had a collegium of thirty members—leading scholars and scientists, most of whom were Communists—the HCS could have proved a Hungarian idiosyncrasy in that it arose out of the determination of the Communist leadership (especially Ernő Gerő, the number one power in matters pertinent to economic and related policies) to *sideline* the HAS, allowing it to sink into oblivion, instead of Sovietizing it and assigning it the role that the HCS was to perform. A Soviet intervention in 1949 put an end to this Hungarian *Sonderweg* and, after a thorough purge in December 1949, even in Hungary, the HAS took over the role of the top organization of science (Péteri 1989).

14. See also Kornai's (1948: 4) open letter to a chemist, starting with the statement, "The 'independence' of science is an illusion."
15. MTA LT, II. oszt., 182/3, "Terv munkái" (this was probably the first draft of the five-year plan of economic research), dated 23 March 1950. For later, more elaborated and extended versions of the plan, see MTA LT, II. oszt., 182/2, "A közgazdaságtudomány ötéves terve" [The five-year plan of economics], by Tamás Nagy, Árpád Haász, Péter Erdős, and Margit Siklós; and "A közgazdaságtudomány 1950-es részletterve" [Detailed plan for 1950 of economics], typescript, 9 May 1950.
16. MTA LT, II. oszt., 182/6, "A közgazdaságtudomány ötéves terve" [The five-year plan of economics], first draft made by Tamás Nagy, Árpád Haász, Péter Erdős, and Margit Siklós, 1950.
17. MTA LT, II. oszt., 182/3, Péter Erdős to Klára Fejér, 2 November 1950.
18. This story was confirmed and retold, although with varying timing, by several of my informants whom I interviewed in the course of my work. For a detailed discussion on the politics of statistical information in the period covered here, see Péteri 1993b.
19. Such as Béla Szalai and István Friss, to mention only the two most significant names in this regard.
20. MTA LT, Papers of the President, Registered files, 58/6. The document, classified "Confidential," is dated 20 September 1954, and is an attachment to Deputy Section Chief Albert Kónya's letter to the president of the Academy, István Ruzsnyák, dated 20 September 1954. It belonged to a group of documents preparing the establishment of the new Institute of Economics within the Academy of Sciences, with an empiricist research program, under the directorship of István Friss (Péteri 1997).
21. MTA LT, II. oszt., 26/1, "Tervezet, a MTA Társadalmi-Történeti Tudományok Osztálya vezetésének beszámolója" [Draft report by the managing board of the Social-Historical Sciences Section of the Academy on the ten-year period 1949–1959], 1959: 2–3.
22. For a detailed discussion of the reforms and changes in the New Course era and the 1960s in Hungarian economic research, see Péteri 1996, 1997.

References

- Bibó, István. 1982. "Az államhatalmak elválasztása egykor és most" [The separation of state powers in the past and now]. In *Összegyűjtött munkái* [Collected works], vol. 2. Bern: EPMSZ.
- Borbándi, Gyula. 1983. *A magyar népi mozgalom. A harmadik reformnemzedék* [The Hungarian populist movement]. New York: Püski.
- David-Fox, Michael, and György Péteri, eds. 2000. *Academia in Upheaval: Origins, Transfers, and Transformations of the Communist Academic Regime in Russia and East Central Europe*. Westport, CT: Bergin & Garvey.

- Fogarasi, Béla. 1948. *Tudomány és demokrácia*. Budapest: Szikra.
- Karádi, Éva. 1983. "Fogarasi Béla – egy értelmiségi életpálya a XX. Században" [Béla Fogarasi: The life of an intellectual in the 20th century]. *Medvetánc*, 1983/4–1984/1.
- Király, István. 1946. "A kulturpolitika aktuális kérdései" [The current issues of cultural policy]. *Társadalmi Szemle*, July.
- Kornai, János. 1948. "Szabad lesz-e a tudomány a demokráciában? Levél egy vegyészhez" [Will science be free in the (people's) democracy? Letter to a chemist]. *Szabad Nép*, 27 May.
- . 1949. "Építő munkánk és a tudományok" [Our constructive work and the sciences]. *Szabad Nép*, 6 February.
- . 1950. Review on Ernő Gerő, Harcban a szocialista népgazdaságért. Budapest: Szikra. *Társadalmi Szemle*, November.
- Lukács, György. 1946. "A magyar demokrácia kulturproblémáiról." *Szabad Nép*, 2 April.
- Mai magyar művelődéspolitiká. 1946. *Elvek, tervek, eredmények* [Today's Hungarian cultural policy]. Budapest: Magyar Vallás- és Közoktatásügyi Minisztérium.
- Ortutay, Gyula. 1949. *Művelődés és politika. Tanulmányok, beszédek, jegyzetek* [Culture and politics. Essays, speeches, comments]. Budapest: Hungária Könyvkiadó.
- Ostrovit'anov, K.V., et al. 1956. *Politikai Gazdaságtan* [Political economy], 3rd Hungarian edition based on the 2nd enlarged Russian edition published in Moscow, 1955. Budapest: Szikra.
- Péteri, György. 1989. "Születésnap ajándék Sztálinnak: Vázlat a Magyar Tudományos Akadémia államosításának történetéhez 1945–1949" [Birthday present to Stalin: Outline to the history of Sovietization of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences]. *Századvég* (Budapest) 1–2: 18–35.
- . 1991. "Academic Elite into Scientific Cadres: A Statistical Contribution to the History of Hungary's Academy of Sciences, 1945–1949." *Soviet Studies* 43 (2): 281–299.
- . 1993a. "Scientists versus Scholars: The Prelude to Communist Takeover in Hungarian Science, 1945–1947." *Minerva* 31 (3): 291–325.
- . 1993b. "The Politics of Statistical Information and Economic Research in Communist Hungary, 1949–56." *Contemporary European History* 2 (2): 149–167.
- . 1996. "Controlling the Field of Academic Economics: Hungary, 1953–1976." *Minerva* 34 (4): 367–380.
- . 1997. "New Course Economics: The Field of Economic Research in Hungary after Stalin, 1953–6." *Contemporary European History* 6 (3): 295–327.
- . 1998. *Academia and State Socialism: Essays on the Political History of Academic Life in Post-1945 Hungary and Eastern Europe*. Boulder, CO: Social Science Monographs; Highland Lakes, NJ: Atlantic Research and Publications Inc.
- Sinkovics, István, ed. 1970. *Az Eötvös Loránd Tudományegyetem története 1945–1970* [The History of the Loránd Eötvös University]. Budapest: ELTE.
- Szent-Györgyi, Albert, et al. 1946. *Értelmiség és népi demokrácia: Szent-Györgyi Albert, Lukács György, stb. felszólalásai a MKP 3. kongresszusán* [Intellectuals and

-
- people's democracy. Albert Szent-Györgyi, György Lukács and others' speeches at the 3rd Congress of the Hungarian Communist Party]. Budapest: Szikra.
- Vigh, Károly. 1945. "Egyetem, tudomány és akadémia" [University, sciences and academy]. *Embernevelés* 1 (3–4).
- . 1947a. "Tudományos életünk szervi bajai" [The organic disorders of our scientific life]. *Tovább*, 11 July.
- . 1947b. "Tudományos életünk szervi bajai" [The organic disorders of our scientific life]. *Tovább*, 18 July.