

DEMAND AND OPPORTUNITY. THE HUNGARIAN ENGINEERS IN INDUSTRIAL POLICY AFTER WORLD WAR TWO (1945–1948)

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Abstract

Engineers played a key role in the reconstruction of Hungary after the Second World War. To unite the different groups of the technical intelligentsia, the Trade Union of Engineers was formed for the first time in the history of this stratum. The paper presents the work done in different fields of reconstruction, the rare results of the safeguarding of interests and it also highlights the unfortunate political decision that finally led to the dissolution of the interest safeguarding the Hungarian engineers.

Keywords: technical intelligentsia, safeguarding of interests, reconstruction, three-year plan, engineering education.

Engineers played an important role in the economic and industrial policy of the 19th and 20th Century Hungary. It was observable not only in the competitiveness and marketability of the products of the time, but also in shaping and drawing industrial policy concepts – both at the macro and micro level. The milestones of Hungarian industrial development, which meant and still mean important turning points in the history of the country also support this statement.

The paper in ‘A fejlett gazdaság vonzásában (In Attraction of the Developed Economy)’ (edited by József Veress) was written in a similar spirit: it [1] studied the impact of the 1867 Compromise and that of industrial policy on the industrial development of Hungary as well as the industrial policy and the technical achievements between the world wars.

This paper continues the study above as it is devoted to the position and the role of Hungarian engineers in the industrial policy of the after World War Two period.

1. Safeguarding of Interests of Engineers – Harmony of Inclusion and Exclusion 1945–1948

The above mentioned paper also stated that ‘*Almost the whole country had to unite to launch for reconstruction and production and the technical intelligentsia was also making efforts. The Free Trade Union of Hungarian Engineers and Technicians (MMTSzSz) was formed on the 18th of January 1945, and this organ played*

an important role in activating the technical intelligentsia. It was not merely an interest-safeguarding organisation as its sections and sub-branches (both in the capital and the countryside) were discussing the most important tasks of reconstruction and members were active in implementation.' [2].

The idea to establish an organisation that embraces all professional groups of the technical intelligentsia was born in November 1944 in Szeged. Subsequently, the Free Trade Union of Engineers, Chemists and Technicians was formed on the 29th of November, 1944 and the Committee of Engineers for the Reconstruction of Hungary also came to existence. The next location was the largest city of the Southern Transdanubia: Pécs, where the Trade Union of Engineers was formed at the beginning of December.¹

Budapest was still under siege when the Free Trade Union of Hungarian Engineers and Technicians (MMTSzSz) was formed on the 18th of January, 1945 in the IXth district of Budapest (Ferenc krt. 41.).

József FISCHER (1901–1980), government commissioner for reconstruction, president of the Budapest Council for Public Work became the president of the trade union. József Kővágó (1913–1996), vice-mayor became the vice president and Béla Zentai (1914–1980), mechanical engineer did the secretary general tasks. The *Műszaki Értelmiség* (Technical Intelligentsia), journal of the MMTSzSz was soon launched [3]. Besides building the organisation, its most important objective was to join the technical intelligentsia into the reconstruction projects of the destroyed Hungary and to cater for the efficient safeguarding of interests of the technical intelligentsia. The trade union emphasised '*professionalism shall gain ground in production and government*' [4]. Unfortunately the Chamber of Engineers could not assist the MMTSzSz, because the National Committee of Budapest declared its cessation [5].

Upon request by the MMTSzSz a number of different sections formed. The minutes taken on the first session of the Textile Industry Section (beginning of February, 1945) describe well the situation of the time: '*Windows broken in blast, books and documents scattered all over in the different rooms unheated. In coat and hat, and standing as there were no chairs, 12 of us started the first session... Certainly, in accordance with the situation, everyone was under the influence of the ongoing war and we were telling our subjective observations, first of all. Nevertheless, the people there also called the attention to the re-started life and – although with minds rumbled by war noise – thoughts were slowly targeted towards the start of life and production, and in the interest of starting the reconstruction of the country*' [6].

Due to the halted transportation and the bombed bridges, it was not possible to keep permanent and fast contact with the centre situated on the Pest side of the Danube. Therefore, the board of MMTSzSz established the Buda Division led by Rezső TRAUTMANN (1907-1988), architect.

Without telling its whole story, it can also be mentioned that the Textile

¹The author's dissertation for the candidate degree, titled 'The Free Trade Union of Hungarian Engineers and Technicians' (Hungarian Academy of Sciences, 1976) goes into the details of this subject.

Industry Section elaborated plans for re-starting the Hungarian textile industry.

Hungary's contribution to the war damage compensation² had to be performed mostly with textile and wearing apparel: this fact also urged the reconstruction of textile industry facilities. Subsequently, the indigent country faced growing problems. The start of production and transportation was monitored by the Red Army. In the hard times, the occasional expanding production enabled trade with the salary: the inflating money could be exchanged for 'contributions in kind' (i.e. clothes and apparel). The Confederation of Hungarian Employers and Industrialists (Gyáriparosok Országos Szövetsége, GyOSz)³ also supported the mentioned exchange.

In many factories – mostly where the products (e.g. textile) could be changed for other goods – the Works Committees did not stand the engineers and abused their power: the technical intelligentsia was often omitted from the system of in-kind contributions. The leaders of MMTSzSz used every forum to stop these excesses.

The first session of the Chemical Industry Section tried to overview the state, stocks, opportunities and tasks of the chemical industry. The reform of the chemical engineer education in the Technical University of Budapest was discussed in detail. The pharmaceutical industry team of the Section expedited the nomination of government commissioners in the factories and tried to take measures against the black-market sale of drugs and medicines [8].

The Electric Section of MMTSzSz discussed the electricity supply of Budapest on its 12nd April 1945 session. As it stated, *'there are 6-8 weeks needed before electricity distribution can start in the area of Budapest'* [9]. The organisation of the countryside formed during the Summer of 1945. Their tasks focused mostly on the technical problems of the given region.

A substantive co-operation evolved with most of the Works Committees, although there were also conflicts (and not only in regard to the mentioned issues of safeguarding of interests). E.g. the Győr group wrote the following to the MMTSzSz secretariat: *'It was concluded that in the factories the Works Committees do not act for the engineers and technicians and they adopt quite often resolutions that deeply hurt the moral or material interest and sensitivity of our trade union members'* [10]. In Tatabánya, engineers and technicians were obliged to join the Trade Union of Mine Workers, because *'without trade union membership, no one is entitled to food items'* [11]. When György Osztrovszki (1914–1988) became the president of the local group in Summer 1945, this insupportable situation ceased to exist, as a result of his decisive actions. As a result of a National Assembly decision adopted on the 6th of December 1945, mining – as the energy base of the Hungarian economy – was put under state control and nationalised by the 25th of May 1946. The Hungarian State Coal Mines Co. (Magyar Állami Szénbányák Rt. – MÁSz) was established and the five most important heavy industry plants were also nationalised as of the 1st of December 1946 (the nationalisation of the Hungarian industry

²There are many studies that deal with this topic, [7].

³The Confederation of Hungarian Employers and Industrialists was formed in 1902. It took an active part in drafting the laws on industrial development and in co-ordinating – mostly the industrial aspects of – foreign trade and customs policy.

was completed by the resolution adopted in the Council of Ministers on the 25th of May 1948: it ordered the nationalisation of factories that employed more than one hundred people).

As we have seen before, the efficient safeguarding of interests was an important task of the MMTSzSz. Inflation galloped: for instance, by the 1st of May 1945 the price of manufactured goods increased 23 times, whereas wages only doubled [12]. Neither in Budapest, nor in the countryside could the wage policy measures of the Provisional Government be enforced [13]. In Spring 1945 the government tried to provide the minimum conditions of subsistence by introducing different allowances. This measure included the technical intelligentsia as well and the decree no. 3040/1945. ME. Sz. regulated also the allowances for engineers and technicians employed by the state [14].

For the standardisation of wages and allowances the minister of industry established the National Committee for Wage Determination on the 7th of May 1945⁴. Subsequently, the first collective agreement of engineers and technicians, which stipulates also the allowances beside the base salaries, came into force on the 1st of August 1945. As far as the implementation of the decree that regulated the allowances of the technical personnel, some abuses could be observed. For instance, the professors of the Technical University, who were not engineers, were not provided allowances. The Council of the Technical University asked to minister of finance to resolve this problem [15]. The request was met and the right to allowance extended: *‘in my communiqué no. 17525/1945. II. to the minister of religion and education I have assent – wrote the minister of finance in his 16 November 1945 letter to the Free Trade Union of Civil Servants – that the professors of the JózsefNádor University of Technology and Economics, who are not engineers but have the same level of qualifications and who lecture in engineering sciences are entitled to technical allowances by extending the application of paragraph 1. of the decree no. 3040/1945.ME. At the same time I have also assent that the professors of the faculty of humanities [16] of the universities of sciences, who lecture in physics, chemistry or geology and who have no engineering degree should also be entitled to the technical allowance [17].*

Although there were ministerial decrees about paying the allowances and increasing the wages in accordance with the collective agreements, the pace of the galloping inflation could not be followed. Most factories and institutions could not even follow the large number of resolutions on the allowances. Suppressing and stabilising inflation and consolidating the economy were urgent tasks demanded by everyday life.

The *debut of the new currency of stable value*, the Forint, on the 1st of August 1946 had favourable direct and indirect effects. As regards the technical intelligentsia, a *stabilisation collective agreement* was concluded: beginner technicians

⁴The decree of the Ministry of Industry (no. 52-700/1945) formed the Committees for Wage Negotiations. Between 7 May 1945 and 5 August 1949 it operated as the Central Committee for Wage Determination then as the National Committee for Wage Determination until its cessation on the 24th of March 1953.

were entitled to 188–253 forints, those with 5–10 years of experience 269–408 forints, beginner engineers 217–282 forints, and those 5–10 years of experience 313–505 forints. Principal engineers could receive 696–870 forint salary [18]. Soon there was another wage settlement at the *end of 1946: average engineer wages should be two times higher than that of skilled workers*. Although this is below the 1:3 ratio of the interwar period, the consequent policy of the Trade Union of Engineers was decisive in this actual achievement. It should also be stressed that the labour unions were often fighting with the engineers and they frequently raised the issue that the wage of engineers should be similar or even less than that of skilled workers. As long as the Free Trade Union of Hungarian Engineers existed (until 1948), these plans could not be realised. *Then the ratio went to 1:1.54 and 1:1.18 in the eighties. Further, the technical intelligentsia under 30 earned less than skilled workers of the same age.*

We must also note – as a positive example – that *even the highest level officials of the Trade Union of Engineers received the average engineer wage.*

Earlier we have mentioned that one of the important tasks of MMTSzSz was the safeguarding of interests, which was not the only one: in parallel with the safeguarding of interests, the engineering work needed for the country's reconstruction after the war enjoyed similar attention through the sections and countryside groups of the trade union.

What were these engineering works at the turn of 1946/1947? The General Engineering Section dealt with the reconstruction of bridges in a series of sessions with 140–150 participants. For instance, on the 21st of February 1946, Károly Széchy (1903–1972), then ministerial counsellor, analysed in detail the difficulties of building the *Kossuth Bridge* (between the Batthyány and Kossuth squares), namely, the difficulties the architects of the bridge faced. Why were these problems important? Because reconstruction of the Francis Joseph Bridge (Liberty Bridge) and Margaret Bridge has started. (The Kossuth Bridge was handed over to transportation on the 18th of January 1946. In Spring 1956 it was closed and the demolition work had finished on the 2nd of January 1963).

The Geodesy Section had been working on the technical issues of the land reform. 500 engineer groups were engaged with drawing the maps in accordance with the new land ownerships. The letter of the MMTSzSz, sent to the Textile Industry Office of the Ministry of Industry, shows the austerity of this era: *'Please allocate as soon as possible 1 suit of clothes to the 300 engineers on the list compiled by the National Land Reform Council from the batch destined for dressing the people'* [19]. Béla Zentai, the secretary general of MMTSzSz also underlined: *'I told Péter Veress, the then leader of the National Land Reform Council to take steps, because the engineers who work and get low calory food will freeze'*⁵.

Probably, the Soviet-Hungarian commission work induced debates as well, because the Textile Industry Section asked the leaders of MMTSzSz to delegate an expert engineer member to the committee [20].

At the end of 1946, the Energy and Heavy Current Section – jointly with

⁵Reminiscences by Béla Zentai, 16 June 1976. (N.J.)

the Hungarian Electrotechnical Association – organised a series of workshops on the actual problems of national electrification. Among others, László Heller and András Lévai (1908–2003) gave speech to an audience of 300. It was stated on this occasion that *‘The future electrification of Hungary must not be based on the war-worn power plants and the obsolete and small countryside power-houses. Only new, modern and large capacity power plants can ensure safe electricity supply for the future’* [21].

The report that evaluated the work of the Transportation Section, which was formed in Autumn 1946 on the occasion of the hundredth anniversary of the Hungarian State Railways (MÁV), stated that *‘The lectures are heard by a large audience and in every case there is a serious in-depth debate’*.

The Székesfehérvár group organised a workshop on the industrial recovery of Székesfehérvár and its neighbourhood, involving engineers from different fields.

To avoid any misunderstanding it must be emphasised that the debates organised and the summaries compiled did not reflect the ‘triumphant’ mood of policy so characteristic in the 1950’s of Hungary. *‘We wanted to do something for this country as at this time the forthcoming storm could not be seen’* told many engineers in a discussion later⁶. Unfortunately, in the factories the so-called *‘engineer withdrawals’* started at the beginning of 1947 in order to ‘protect’ the ‘power of workers’. ‘I was one of the engineers withdrawn from Csepel’ – Endre Valkó, secretary general of MTESz told on an MTESz event in the eighties.

At that time approximately half as many engineers – 5000 – worked in the country as compared with the pre-war period. (MMTSzSz had nearly 12 thousand members including those with secondary school technical and natural science qualification. The membership went up to 24 thousand by 1948, when the Trade Union of Engineers was dissolved) [22]. In 1947 there were 7053 engineers in Hungary, see *Table 1*.

According to the employment data of the 1949 census, there were 9438 engineers in 1948 in Hungary⁷. The increasing number of engineers could be observed from 1950/1951: in this academic year the first group of students completed their studies at the State Technical College⁸

The intensified debates that were encouraged externally and which deteriorated the relationship of engineers and workers have already been mentioned in regard to the wage struggles. The conflict was based on the ideology of the political movement, according to which engineers were condemned to be the servants of capitalists. Nevertheless, the different groups of the technical intelligentsia and the leaders of MMTSzSz, who co-ordinated them, did achieve some results by searching the ways of professional co-operation in new and hard circumstances.

The initiative called ‘Workers for science – scientists for workers’, which

⁶Reminiscences by Endre Valkó, former secretary general of MTESz, told to the author (29 June 1998).

⁷Computations by the author, based on the 1948 census.

⁸The State Technical College was working between 1947 and 1951. Imre Vörös (1903–1984), professor of the Technical University was its director.

Table 1.

Mechanical engineer	3079
Electrical engineer	171
Chemical engineer	651
Textile engineer	194
Architect	772
Mining and metallurgical engineer	380
Forestry engineer	243
General engineer (civil engineer)	1275
Geologist	41
Other engineer	247
<i>Total:</i>	<i>7053</i>

started in Spring 1946, was a unique attempt. Even earlier, the workers of many factories had participated in the reconstruction of university buildings and in Spring 1946 the different trade unions of the intelligentsia (engineers, physicians, teachers) presented jointly the difficult economic situation of scientific institutions and in their notice asked for the help of factories and companies [23]. Professor Albert Szent-Györgyi (1893–1986), winner of the Nobel prize, president of the Natural Sciences Association at that time (predecessor of TIT, the Society for the Awareness of Science, N.J.), was the president in the co-ordinating committee of the work. Other members include professors Aladár Buzágh, István Rusznyák and a number of factories (W.M. Ganz Factory Csepel) also had representatives in the committee.

‘The Hungarian scientific life is in deep crisis’ wrote the journal ‘*Műszaki Értelmiség*’ in its 16 June 1946 issue: ‘*In the present economic situation the government cannot provide even the basic working conditions of the institutes. Unless the society helps the scientific institutions, there will be a long-term setback in their development*’.

6–800 workers of the MÁVAG, the employees of the Oetl Machine Factory or the W.M. Ganz Factory Csepel applied one after the other and performed many hours of work also demanding professional skills. The movement did not stop on the outskirts of Budapest: the cities of the countryside, which had universities or research institutions, saw similar initiatives (e.g. the local group of MMTSszSz organised similar actions in Pécs and Szeged).

The MÁVAG workers worked 4800 hours on the reconstruction of the university of science; without any compensation. The Goldberger Factory rebuilt the Textile Chemistry Department of the Technical University, and other workers performed thousands of hours of work on many buildings (K, Ch, F). The workers of the United Bulb Factory (Egyesült Izzó) and the MOM company repaired the destroyed equipment and instruments of the Medical University.

Out of the universities in Budapest, the József Nádor University of Technology

and Economics requested the greatest reconstruction. Thus, the Economic Council emphasised in its rescript no. 8192/1946., which was sent to the council members, the minister of religion and education and the rector of the Technical University, that: *'The earliest possible reconstruction of the Technical University is needed to ensure engineer education that is indispensable for re-building the Hungarian economy'*⁹

In the factories scientists of different fields held lectures of the most important questions of their discipline (Albert Szent-Györgyi, László Gillemott, Zoltán Csűrös and others). *'Flowers on the ruins'* – said Albert Szent-Györgyi referring to the essence of the action [24]. The regular work with compiling and presenting scientific information gave inspiration to publish a permanent popular science journal. The even today (2003) widely read *'Élet és Tudomány'* (Life and Science) was born: the first issue was on the streets on the 1st of December 1946. Zoltán Csűrös, professor of the Technical University, became the president of the Editorial Board.

2. The Three Year Plan – from the Engineer's Perspective

The Reorganisation Committee, which was doing the preparatory work for economic stabilisation, assumed that three years are needed at least to attain the pre-war production level of the country¹⁰ According to the inter-party proposition discussed on the 5th of February 1947, there were 1942.8 million forints planned for agricultural investments, 1460 million for mining and industry, 1718.8 for transportation, 1195 for social investments; totalling 6316.8 million forints.¹¹ The Hungarian public had great expectations and sometimes worries towards the three-year plan. Beyond the economic recovery of the country, every class and layer expected the improvement of its own financial situation.

The MMTSzSz had a twofold aim: to prepare for raising the awareness for the three year plan and to actively join the economic reconstruction of the country by elaborating local plan indicators, organising their debate and participate in the implementation. Following World War Two, the production could start in many important factories, the reconstruction of which has been possible with the help of other workers from the given region. Nevertheless, unemployment went up sharply when these works had finished and it gave rise to not only economic, but political tensions as well.

Among others, the letter of the National Committee of Sárvár, written to

⁹Pt. SzL 40f- MMTSzSz 1946/2/c. Rescript to reconstruct the Technical University. As it is known, in the József Nádor University of Technology and Economics two departments formed in 1938, based on the funding by corporations and factories: 1. The Department of Textile Chemistry (with support from the Golberger Factory). Professor Zoltán Csűrös (1901–1979) was the first head. 2. Department of Nuclear Physics (with support from Tungsram). Professor Zoltán Bay (1900-1992) was its first head.

¹⁰More details in this topic can be found in [25]

¹¹Quoted from [26]

the Minister of Industry and Reconstruction on the 24th of February 1947 also refers to the above mentioned¹² *‘we want to find a final solution to the problems of unemployment in Sárvár...the site of the former viscose factory is situated in the neighbourhood of the railway station and there is siding to the place. The factory buildings are in fairly good condition. The water pipes are in working order. In the large capacity factory buildings of any other factory can be deployed without expensive construction. ...Any other factory can be installed there and a start-up could also take over the site and install its own factory...We would like to call the attention of the responsible policy makers to the unemployment that hits our village.’* Thus, on the one hand providing workplace for many skilled workers was a serious problem, but on the other, the industrial policy plans calculated with quite a few additional workplaces (which, indeed, proved to be an exaggeration later).

When debates started, the leaders of MMTSzSz already noted that for efficient production there would be a demand for 26–28000 engineers if the planned industrial development and workplace creation came to reality [27]. These arguments were emphasised on the workshop held in the assembly room of the new city-hall (4th of July 1947). A similar view was shared by the engineers and technicians on the debate in Ózd (18–19 May 1947). Based on the antecedents, the sections of MMTSzSz were already analysing the tasks and implementation possibilities of their professional field. For instance, Albert Fonó (1881–1972) gave account of the debates on the national electrification plan at the end of the series of workshops of the Energy and Heavy Current Section [28].

On the 1st of August 1947, the journal ‘Tovább’ (≈ ‘Go on’) wrote the following (with words of the era): *‘The success of the three-year plan is based on the joint efforts of the Hungarian people and intelligentsia’.*

According to the declaration composed on the Pécs workshop of the MMTSzSz secretaries (9–10 August 1947): *‘The Hungarian technical intelligentsia is aware of the importance of the three-year plan and will stand in the struggle for the country’s economic recovery and progress’* [29].

As it is known, the three-year plan was officially launched on the 1st of August 1947, but the campaign for raising awareness towards the plan was still going on during Autumn 1947. Although there were some problems already in the first months of implementation, Béla Zentai, the secretary general of MMTSzSz, emphasised in his letter (dated on the 10th of December 1947): *‘The campaign is becoming rather confused and blurred or it’s us who do not see the line’* [30].

There was no response, although Zentai and the others wanted regional and in Budapest district-based professional debates. The MMTSzSz leadership told the different engineer groups: *‘Get to know the production and other data of the past three months of your factory!’* As a result, there were intellectual debates organised one after the other in each district of the Capital. It is also worth mentioning because

¹²Archives of political history and the trade unions 40f/MMTSzSz 1947/16. Differently from the quoted letter, there was a separate minister in charge of reconstruction (that time Endre Mistéth, who was arrested for political reasons, then temporarily Jenő Rácz, and the minister of industry. Antal Bán. N.J.)

the Hungarian industry was concentrated mostly in Budapest¹³.

The technical intelligentsia also wanted to get rid of the political overtones of the so-called work contest movement, which started on the 15th of March 1948, and the engineers tried to establish further co-operation with the factory workers. Unfortunately, it did not come reality.

It seemed that the three-year plan was modified in the wrong direction at the turn of 1947/48. The disappointment of Béla Zentai, secretary general of MMT-SzSz, also referred to this change of direction: *'We speak two languages. This ongoing three-year plan is different from what we have elaborated'*¹⁴

István Kossa (1904–1965), secretary general of SzOT (the National Council of Trade Unions) – with whom the technical intelligentsia earlier did not have a cordial relationship – caused surprise to the audience with his response to Zentai: *'We wanted to hear the district secretaries, whom we do not know. We hear Szípkai and Zentai often, sometimes more often than needed'* [31].

The MMTSsz leaders perceived that Kossa's words projected the dissolution of the Trade Union of Engineers in the short run.

At the beginning of the 21st Century it is hard to understand the course of events that took place in political struggles more than 50 years ago. At this time it was clear that the safeguarding of interests of the technical intelligentsia discontinued and after the 1947 elections politicians thought differently of the intelligentsia, especially engineers.

Certainly, as some facts confirm, the total neglect of the technical engineers came only later. The so-called Kossuth Prize was given on the 15th of March 1948 for the first time. 16 out of the 110 nominees were engineers and technical professionals: Károly Széchy, head of the bridge department of the Ministry of Transportation, Alajos Kovács, head of the bridge department of MÁV (the state railways, see above), István Kozma, chemical engineer, principal engineer of the Wolfner leather factory, Bálint Varga, deputy director of MÁV, Endre Akarat, electrical engineer, principal engineer of AGROLUX, Sándor Jordák, mechanical engineer, director of the Budapest-based MÁVAG, Ferenc Strein, construction engineer of Ganz Wagon, Guidó Temesszentandrás, principal engineer of the rolling mill factory in Ózd, Alajos Klaus, principal engineer of the steel works in Diósgyőr, Pál Gombás, Géza Zemplén, Győző Mihálich, Emil Schimanek, József Jáki, Aladár Vendl, professors of the Technical University of Budapest, Sándor Hoffman, chemical engineer, Rezső Bognár, chemist [32].

However, the celebration was over. As it was already mentioned, István Kossa criticised Béla Zentai and the Trade Union of Engineers with groundless animosity on the 11th conference of trade union leaders (20–21 March 1948). By 26–27 June 1948, time of the 2nd MMTSsz Congress it became more and more obvious that

¹³These issues are discussed in detail by the author in the book titled '125 Years of the Economy of Budapest' (Budapest gazdaságának 125 éve – Bp. 1998.). The chapter is titled: The Economy of Budapest 1944-1990 (Budapest gazdasága 1944-1990), pp. 71–101.

¹⁴Reminiscences by Sándor LENGYEL, chemical engineer, as told to the author (16 June 1976).

the ‘*restructuring of the trade union of engineers*’ was on agenda, which actually meant dissolution.

Perhaps the rich programme of the Technical Intellectuals Week organised before the 2nd Congress of MMTSzSz (20–29 June 1948) was somewhat demonstrating against the political decision. Nevertheless, it also summarised the activities so far. Some programme points (speeches) are listed below:

Mining and Geology

János Meisel: The geological conditions of the lignite (brown coal) in Várpalota (Várpalota)

Elemér Vadász: The geological exploration of the Tatabánya Basin (Tatabánya)

György Kertai: The formation of mineral oil and natural gas (Zalaegerszeg)

Géza Szurovy: The tasks of Hungarian geological and mining research (Institute of Mineralogy – University of Science)

Sándor Vitális: Geological research and coal mining in the Mecsek mountains (Komló).

Energy Production

Károly Pál Kovács: The future direction of Hungary’s electricity supply (Salgótarján)

Emil Mosonyi: The future tasks of Hungarian water resource management (Szolnok)

Food Industry

János Holló: Educational reform of the technical intelligentsia in the agro-food industry (Dreher Haggermacher First Hungarian Brewery Co.)

Telecommunication

Miklós Izsák: General introduction to the multichannel cable carrier telecommunication equipment (MMTSzSz headquarters IVth district, Reáltanoda street 13–15.)

Transportation

Károly Széchy: The reconstruction of our road bridges (Ministry of Transportation VIIth district Dob street 75.)

György Csanádi: Problems of Hungarian railways (Ministry of Transportation VIth district Dob street 75.)

Heating Technology

Géza Szikla: Economical storing and burning of Hungarian coals

Chemical Industry

Emil Gárdos: The problems of chemical industry research

Tibor Erdey–Grúz: Corrosion in the chemical industry (University of Science)

Tihamér Gedeon: The actual problems of Hungarian bauxite mining and alumina production (Ajka)

Zoltán Csűrös: The silicone (Technical University of Budapest)

Zoltán Komondy: The role of the Institute of Technology and Material Analysis in the 3-year Plan (MMTSzSz headquarters)

János Dúzs: Organisational issues of the development of Hungarian industry (National Institute for Planning Vth district Szemere street 6.)

Research

Béla Zentai: Research work and the engineer (Ganz)

Efficiency Wage

Rudolf Mártonfi: The development of efficiency wage in Hungary and its impact on production (MMTSzSz Centre)

In parallel with and as part of the Technical Intellectuals Week, *the 2^d Congress of the Free Trade Union of Hungarian Engineers and Technicians was held on 26-27 June 1948* in the assembly room of the new City Hall.¹⁵

246 delegates represented the 22000 members of MMTSzSz, 168 of which were coming from Budapest and 78 from the countryside (136 engineers and 110 technicians or works managers). 180 delegates worked in factories. The programme of the second congress differed from that of the first, because after a short report by Béla Zentai, the secretary general, the debates were organised in workgroups, where each delegate could speak at least once. The debate was focused on two issues: the role and opportunity of technical professionals in economic policy (with special attention to the three-year plan) and the restructuring of the trade union of engineers.

As the delegates mentioned, ‘formal elements’ appeared in the centennial work contest movement launched in Spring 1948, and this activity also became

¹⁵These issues are discussed in detail by the author in his book titled ‘Technical Development – Science Education. Technical and Natural Science Associations in Hungary’ [33]

more and more the battlefield of political struggles. The idea of restructuring the trade union of engineers raised much concern.

It became obvious that this is a political and not a professional question: it was time for the dissolution of an active interest safeguarding organisation that also contributed to the economic processes, but which often worded criticism from a professional angle. In practice restructuring meant that the engineers and technicians were relocated to the given trade union according to skills and workplace location (as it is well known, such restructuring did not take place in other intellectual groups and the safeguarding of interests virtually disappeared from the policy of trade unions in the fifties).

In the debates of the second congress the demand for an association of technical-professional organisations and unions emerged several times and it seemed that the political elite also let it go – as a temporary solution.

The elected leadership, which also renewed, had a difficult job. Zoltán Komondy (1892–1957), professor of the Technical University of Budapest, became the president of MMTSzSz, Béla Zentai stayed as secretary general. The vice presidents were Sándor Lengyel, Aurél Jurek, Emil Mosonyi. István Gerendás and Miklós Philip were the deputy secretary generals. The Central Directorate of MMTSzSz had 19 members, including Máté Major, Tibor Erdey-Grúz, Imre Karcag, Györgyné Sárkány. Ernő Havas, Miklós Spíró, Ervin Irsay, Károly Perczel, György Osztrovszki, Zoltán Mariska, Endre Valkó, Ferenc Talyigás, János Dúzs are names from the 59-member committee.

Although dissolution of the Free Trade Union of Hungarian Engineers and Technicians accelerated, the days after the second congress saw the establishment of MTESZ, the Federation of Technical and Scientific Societies (29 June 1948).

On the 7th of August, 1948, when István Kossa was appointed to be the minister of industry, Antal Apró became the secretary general of the Council of Trade Unions, and the 17th Congress of the Trade Unions (17–18 October 1948) declared the formation of the National Council of Trade Unions (SZOT). Although some trade union leaders considered the role of intellectuals, especially technical intellectuals, important, they could not or did not want to counteract the dissolution of the trade union of engineers. In the session of the Council held on the 13th of December 1948, it was stated that *‘during and right after the restructuring of the trade union of engineers, the Federation of Technical and Scientific Societies must not conduct opinion poll or recruitment’*. The closing session of MMTSzSz was held on the 18th of June 1949.

The Free Trade Union of Hungarian Engineers and Technicians entered into Hungarian history books with its activity between 1944 and 1948. And its members – although in different circumstances and with different activities – will be there in the half century of the Federation of Technical and Scientific Societies, at the turning points of Hungarian history, economy and society.

In summary, we can conclude that a bad political decision – and politics against the intelligentsia, especially engineers, in the coming years – caused substantial damages to the Hungarian economy and these cannot be recovered with ad-hoc trials or experiments. Devaluation and suppression of professionalism set the Hungarian

economy back and it had consequences to engineering education as well. These processes will be discussed in another paper.

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