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Mining Engineer Lawsuits in the Rakosi Era
with specific regard to the case of Bela Vargha and accomplices

titled

Doctorate (PhD) Dissertation Thesis

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I. My topic choice, questions and aims

After 1945, in Hungary mining industry had a particularly high priority in the reconstruction of the country and the gradually developing communist dictatorship, so it significantly benefitted from the investments of the period. At the same time, however, it became the victim of the continuously rising power mistrust and economic policy which ignored the natural features and capability of the country and also became the victim of the improper, short-term decisions.

The mining engineering lawsuits in the Rakosi era can be considered to have been initiated in order to investigate fatal tragedies or the causes of stagnation or decline in engineering. It created a great reason to use them to get ideological or class-based revenge on people accusing them of industrial sabotage and deliberate misconduct.

Based on the cases investigated by me, the power line, suspecting political intention behind the mining disasters, started to emerge in 1950. The mining accidents due to the laws of trade, which was incomprehensible for incompetent people and the power mistrust led to several political sabotage lawsuits.

In my work - inter alia - I tried to demonstrate the mechanism of the artificially created sabotage cases and also whether there were any common features in the different lawsuits.

The starting point of my dissertation was to demonstrate what kind of international and home affairs induced such, at first sight on the surface “just” sabotage-like economic cases taking place from 1945 to the absolute communist takeover and then in the period of the totalitarian dictatorship which - being aware of the given political situation - counted as clear and dominant politically motivated economic lawsuits.

Partly it was essential to look at what extent the set-up economic lawsuits could be pasted among other major lawsuits, partly what extent the economic lawsuits contributed in the economic policy of the communist party and what ideas reasoned them.

The main topic of the dissertation is the lawsuit against Bela Vargha and accomplices motivated by the recognition of the unreal demand of the five-year plan in coal mining dated to 1950, which ones the power certainly intended to justify by scapegoating and not by political confession. The AVH already started its investigation in May 1951. The first arrests took place in August 1952. The basic concepts relied on a deliberate, organised sabotage action aiming the change of the political system, supported by foreign capitalists, working so well in several previous cases.

The case got supervised at the highest level: Gabor Peter took part in the interrogations in person and Erno Gero - in agreement with Matyas Rakosi - kept ordering more and more physical evidence. The AVH methods did not differ from its usual ones. In the investigation period it was rife to use physical punishment, psychological threats or extortions. Most culprits were held in preliminary and their statements were extorted by interrogations lasting 30-40 hours sometimes, using coercive measures. Gathering daily cell-sneak reports had an essential role in the AVH-led interrogative period. However, it still was not enough to prove the deliberate sabotage, the 16 000 interrogative pages, investigating the cases of 13 detainees, could not achieve the so desired outcome.

My aim presenting the Bela Vargha and accomplices case was to demonstrate what kind of political-economic surrounding the investigation was started in, how specific the selection of the culprits was, how established the accusations were and what kind of ideology they were supposed to justify. Finally, how the accusations changed during the investigation until the - sometimes existing, sometimes missing - court sentences.

Another aim of the dissertation was to demonstrate the investigation methods of the AVH and the AVH-like Home Office (established in 1953.) by using the almost entirely complete material of the Bela Vargha and accomplices case. To demonstrate the fact how respected experts pursuing to prevent the dissipation of the high quality coal assets became victims of the communist party, which launched an improper, robbery-like mining activity.

II. Dissertation resources and process methods

As there was no one who processed the 1952 - 1954 miner files in details, I could rely on few historic material. So during my work my main resource was mainly resources stored in archives.

The most important resource base is a 42-page investigation material stored in the State Security Archives. The material called "miner files" and for some unknown reason it missed the so-called "re-arranging" procedure. This material follows each investigation periods step by step up to paroles or court judgements.

Certainly we must approach these materials with reasonable resource-criticism, similarly to the state security cases of the period, since the interrogation records and self-statements were all statements forced by investigation authorities or they were pre-written ones.

Following the interrogation procedure these were often countervailed by lockup network reports, made about the prisoners after returning to their cells. The hired lockup agents were verbose and constructive. It was very instructive to compare the two different documents in which the detainees explained the information recorded in their “statements” to the agents sitting next to the culprits.

In the ABTL we can also find documents regarding the revision of the gibbeted mining engineers and their rehabilitation. Apart from making conclusion for a given investigated case from these almost complete documents, we can also do the same regarding other (often imperfect) investigation materials and methods in the period. (e.g. MESZHART case, Jozsef Bende and his accomplices case)

The investigation documents made in Bela Vargha and accomplices case and other rehabilitation related documents are stored among other file materials in the building of Budapest Archives.

To get to know the coal-mining features and opportunities of the period, some studies published in scientific periodicals of the era helped my work as well - Mining and Metallurgy Magazine (BKL) and announcements of the Engineering Sciences Department of the Hungarian Scientific Academy - written mainly by mining experts mentioned in the investigation materials.

Both the investigation material documents and the coal mining related ones of the era (reports, correspondences, statements) can be found in Cabinet reports, party documents (MKP, SZDP, MDP) and in documents of the Economic Authorities Department and the State Economy Committee, and can be researched in the National Archives of Hungarian National Archives (MNL OL). The used political management related correspondence and economic police-related documents are stored in the building of Political History and Union Archives (PIL) During my research an issue by Gyula Erdmann (1975) publishing some major documents related to the 1945-1949 mining history in Hungary proved to be an essential by-resource. It helped me to make the conceptual nature of the charges, found in the investigation documents, clear.

In addition to the archive materials some other documents offered by Laszlo Dzsida Jr. (the convicted Laszlo Dzsida's son) helped to reconstruct the investigation process.

I also managed to get in touch with dr. Pal Kaposztas's great grandson, Tamas Lanczi, who supported my work with family-stories and photographs.

Regarding the mining files, two shorter studies have been published so far (Klara Katona (2002), Laszlo Molnar (1993)). These mainly highlight some major information of it, only.

I started my research in this issue nearly ten years ago. As a result of it an edited volume was born demonstrating the major documents of the miner files with a summarising prelude study. My current dissertation is the extended version of the first one, studying the topic on a broader base and comparing it with some other major mining lawsuits in the Rakosi era.

III. The result of my PhD thesis

In the background of the economic lawsuits in the Rakosi era both in Hungary and all the other countries belonging to the Soviet influenced group, the foreign power's enforced political and economic intention prevailed. The communist dictatorship enforced an entirely inoperable economic system on the Hungarian nation and actualized its political aims by comprehensive terror.

Based on the research carried out so far, the economic lawsuits can be considered to have been brought off in 1950 or the following years. The onslaughts against the trade managers were begun right after the war. However, as that time there was a pressing need for mining professionals, it affected just a narrower society.

Launching the plan-economy, however, from 1947 the numbers of onslaughts against mining professionals started to rise, leading to sabotage lawsuits set up by the political leadership and the AVH.

An obvious common feature in the mining-related documents is the fact that the dates of the investigations carried out in 1950 and the following years often differed from the dates of events which justified the reasons for the investigations. (e.g. MESZHART case). In the mentioned period the reason for magisterial processes, besides the investigations whose aim was to find the cause of the massive fatal catastrophes, was the longer-term stagnant production and the slow pace of that.

- As the investigations often differed from the dates of events mentioned in the documents, which dated back to the World War II, but sometimes even to the previous decades, mining engineers, technical leaders, geologists could get among the culprits of the sabotage lawsuits at any time in the fifties.
- The documents suggest a certain AVH schema to the person of culprits: they paid particular attention to technical white-collars, mainly if during or before the war they

had fulfilled senior positions. They could become discriminated persons and then scapegoats easily.

- The aim of the investigations, from the very beginning, was to make the culprits, themselves, confess their “guilt”, since the AVH do not have any other major evidence to prove the charges motivated by their political intention. Most of the cases had one special feature in common: the reason, due to which the investigation process was started, changed several times during the legal process. In quite a few cases differences can be seen between the suspicion implied at the beginning of the investigation and the charge recorded in the indictment, or the charge and the finally declared crime. These facts partly all refer to the conceptual feature of the lawsuits, partly that in certain cases, the Prosecutor’s Office did not accept the AVH (later the successor’s institution) investigation results as facts.
- The major initial point of the Vargha case and even the economy policy of the period was the question whether the coal production should be adjusted to the existing coal assets, or ignoring the assets, only the demands should be taken into consideration. The Soviet-style plan-economy, however, did not pay any attention to the economic features of the country at all regarding the exploitable and available coal assets. Proving the conceptual feature of the investigations, the base of the charges was the statement that the five-year plan could not be fulfilled, but they wanted to prove this charge with disfigured facts such as deliberate sabotage acts in the coal mining activity.
- As by the period of the five-year plan decision-making had been in the hand of party-trusted leaders of coal mining-related government agencies, they did not want to impeach them, so they had those professionals left only who had played major role in the mining industry both before 1945 and afterwards, during the three-year plan period, which had served the reconstruction of the country.
- The internal security officers - related “illegitimacy” investigation materials provide the major resources regarding the AVH investigation methods and high-handed activities. So it is exceptional when we can follow the used coercive measures and their influence on the culprits in investigation materials, carried out by the AVH. Furthermore, the dissertation gives detailed insight into the character, using and tasks of cell-sneaks.

- Finally, regarding the investigation it can be said that the AVH did not work as a law enforcement authority, but - based on the (changing) party course line - it desperately searched and found “responsible” persons to a concocted conception, and among others tried to prove the lack of success of the farfetched economy policy.

The complete rehabilitation of the 13 arrested persons still has not been brought off. The six sentenced culprits, Laszlo Dzsida, Henrik Heinrich, dr. Rezsó Mohi, dr. György Markus, dr. József Dery and dr. Béla Vargha, by individual revisions, freed from the detrimental legal consequences in 1956-57. Those paroled without sentences, e.g. Imre Hansági, dr. Pál Kaposztas, dr. Géza Krupar. Dr. Sándor Vitalis, dr. Ferenc Kelemen and dr. György Markus, did not get any kind of moral or financial compensation at all. Neither did dr. Sándor Schmidt, who lost his life during the investigation duress.

IV. Publications, conference-presentations, other activities on the subject

IV. 1. Independent Publications

- *Politicized Economic Police. Economic Ordinary Ward, 1945-1948.* NEB Bureau 2015.
- *Dug Out “Lignite Crimes” The Anatomy of a Rakosi Era Mining Lawsuit.* Budapest, Historic Archives of State Security – L’Harmattan Publisher, 2013.

IV. 2. Extracts, Chapters

- Organisational Changes at The Home Office, 1953-1956. *Trojan Horse at the Home Office – The AVH Organisation and General Staff, 1953-1956.* Edited by György Gyarmati and Maria Palasik. Budapest, Historic Archives of State Security – L’Harmattan Publishing Company 2013. 63–127.

IV. 3. Monographs, Communiques in Periodicals and Independent Publications

- BM II/4. (Transportation Intelligence) Office. In *The Organisation of Revenge – The Military Police Reorganisation and Operation 1956–1962.* Edited by Gergő Bendegúz Cseh and Imre Okvath. Budapest, State Security Services Historic Archives – L’Harmattan Publishing Company, 2013. 103–121.
- Dug up “Lignite Crimes” In *The Big Brother’s Grocery. Monographs from The History of The Hungarian Secret Service after 1945.* Edited by György Gyarmati and

Maria Palasik. Budapest, State Security Historic Archives – L’ Harmattan Publishing Company, 2012. 131–151.

- Organization changes in the State Security Ward (1950–1953). *Betekinto*, 2009/2. http://www.betekinto.hu/sites/default/files/2009_2_cserenyi_zsitnyanyi.pdf
- Additions to a Sabotage Lawsuit methodology. *Betekinto*, 2008/1. http://www.betekinto.hu/sites/default/files/2008_1_cserenyi_zsitnyanyi.pdf
- Additions to an Unfinished Concept. In *Variációk. Holiday study to Reverence of Sandor M. Kiss*. Edited by Istvan Otvos. Piliscsaba, PPKE BTK, 2004, 293–308.

IV. 4. Conference Presentations

- 27 May 2016. „*Saint Jerome Disappeared Under the Granny.*” *The Chorin- and Weiss Families’ two Counsellors In Deployment*. Stateless in Their State. (The 65. Anniversary of the Deployment in Budapest). Conference of the Historic Archives of the State Security, Budapest.
- 30 November 2015. *Wagon Lit Conductors. „Legalised” Smuggling at The Transport Intelligence*. Episodes from the House of Secrets – Conference. Conference of the Historic Archives of the State Security.

IV. 5. Scientific and Social Activities

- 1 June 2016. Presentation (“Dug Up Lignite Crimes”) held at the joint session of the Hungarian Geological Association (Science-historic Section) and the National Hungarian Mining and Metallurgy Society. 2016. Assistance in Adam Toser’s documentary “*The socialism was built this way (too)*”, as an expert.
- 27 October 2014 “Lignite Crimes” – Presentation in Tatabánya at the OMBKE Mining Section.

IV. 6. Monographs published in English

- „Lignite Crimes” unearthed. Anatomy of a mining engineers’ trial of the Rákosi era. In *Big Brother’s miserable little grocery store. Studies on the history of the Hungarian secret services after World War II*. Edited by György Gyarmati and Mária Palasik. Budapest, Historical Archives of the Hungarian State Security – L’Harmattan, 2012. 131–152.