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ARTICLES

Captivating Cartoons: Normalizing Hatred

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Abstract

In 1940s Hungary, there were two political parties—National Socialists on the right and communists on the left—typically depicted in mainstream media as extremist and prone to violence. They shared one crucial feature: both published joke magazines. Clearly envisioned as tools to recruit followers, their periodicals also served a broader purpose in transforming extremist ideas into commonsensical propositions for debate. Their rhetorical strategies were remarkably similar, consisting of three stages: 1) depicting disturbing conditions intended to inflame sentiments, 2) presenting a different view to convey the party's preferred political stance, and finally 3) sketching ambitions for the future. Readers were led along a carefully orchestrated path into an alternative view of political possibilities, more effective for being dispersed along familiar avenues in Hungarian humor. The analysis is informed by the work of Jean-Paul Sartre, Sara Ahmed, and Thomas Szanto on the pleasures of hating and the allure of a community who hate together.

In 1940s Hungary, there were two political parties—one on the right and one on the left—that were typically depicted in mainstream media as extremist and prone to violence.[1] They shared one crucial feature: both trafficked in jokes. Joke magazines were a popular item on newsstands, but these two propaganda tabloids were conspicuous for being allied with political parties. One, entitled Steel Brush (*Drót Kefe*), was published from 1940–44 to serve the interests of Arrow Cross, an extreme rightist political party; the other, Ludas Matyi, was founded in 1945 by the Communist Party. Both periodicals employed the extensive repertoire of Budapest humor, populated by shrewd merchants, cuckolded husbands, and clever simpletons. Sprinkled among these iconic stories were subtle and not so subtle political messages promoting the respective party's ideological platform. No doubt envisioned as tools to recruit followers, these periodicals also served a broader purpose in transforming extremist ideas into commonsensical propositions for debate.

Faced with these curious facts, one might ask what are jokes doing here? In the western canon, we date intellectual debates over humor to the ancient Greeks. Sigmund Freud figures prominently in this lineage, as does Henri Bergson.[2] Central to the debate was the question of why we laugh when we do, explanations clustering around two poles: psychological responses to incongruity and the social imperative of asserting superiority.

[1] The original version of this paper was presented at Miami University in March 2021. I wish to thank Neringa Klumbyte for the invitation to give a lecture, an occasion that led me to think more systematically about the role of satire in Hungarian politics.

[2] Sigmund Freud, *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious* (New York, 1960); Henri Bergson, *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic* (New York, 2013).

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For other scholars, such as Mary Douglas, studying jokes was a means of understanding crucial social tensions within a society by attending to the complexities of cultural nuance and discerning meaning in context.[3] The study of jokes in authoritarian and totalitarian societies has emphasized the way jokes allow people to voice their dissatisfactions as a form of temporary relief or to adopt a more explicitly subversive stance vis-à-vis the regime.[4] My concern is different. What do jokes do? What is their special power? And why would they be so useful to extremist political movements? In the following account, I will analyze the strikingly similar ways National Socialists and communists devised to recruit followers to their cause, a strategy that hinged on the clever ambiguities of political satire.[5]

What do jokes do? They entertain, certainly, but they are capable of so much more. As satire or parody, jokes may persuade, seduce, beguile, provoke, and even mislead. Humor thrives on ambiguity, moving seamlessly between sharp political commentary and light comic relief. Satire as a genre delights in ambiguity, so much so that multiple authors find it difficult to define or delimit it as a style or form of rhetoric.[6] Marjike Meijer Drees and Sonja De Leeuw cite George Test's aphorism: "attempting to define satire has been like trying to put a shadow in a sack."[7] In his article entitled "The Quantum Paradox of Truthiness," James Caron describes satire as "light at quantum levels, both wave and particle."[8] As both

[3] Mary Douglas, "The Social Control of Cognition: Some Factors in Joke Perception." *Man* 3, no. 3 (September 1968): 361–76.

[4] The literature on this topic in eastern Europe and the Soviet Union/Russia is voluminous. I mention only a few. Neringa Klumbyte, *Authoritarian Laughter: Political Humor and Soviet Dystopia in Lithuania* (Ithaca, 2022); Robert Cochran, "'What Courage!' Romanian Leader Jokes," *The Journal of American Folklore* 102, no. 405 (1989): 259–74; Seth Graham, *Resonant Dissonance: The Russian Joke in Cultural Context* (Evanston, 2009); Anna Krylova, "Saying 'Lenin' and Meaning 'Party': Subversion and Laughter in Soviet and Post-Soviet Society," in Adele Marie Barker, ed., *Consuming Russia: Popular Culture, Sex and Post-Soviet Society* (Durham, 1999), 243–65; Patrick Merziger, "'Totalitarian Humor'? National Socialist Propaganda and Active Audiences in Entertainment," *History Workshop Journal* 79 (Spring 2015): 181–97; Serguei Oushakine, "Introduction: Jokes of Repression," *East European Politics and Societies* 25 (November 2011): 655–57; Elena Rodina, "When Humor, Obscenities, and Politics Meet: Russian "anekdoty" as a Response to Anti-Obscenity Law," *Zeitschrift für Slavische Philologie* 73, no. 1 (2017): 31–54. If we broaden the geographic range considered, see, for example, Adeyemi Adegoju and Oluwabunmi Oyebode, "Humor as Discursive Practice in Nigeria's 2015 Presidential Election: Online Campaign Discourse," *Discourse Studies* 17, no. 6 (December 2015): 643–62; Walter Armbrust, "The Trickster in Egypt's January 25th Revolution," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 55, no. 4 (October 2013): 834–64; Ashley Esarey and Xiao Qiang, "Political Expression in the Chinese Blogsphere: Below the Radar," *Asia Survey* 48, no. 5 (2008): 752–72; Angelique Haugerud, *No Billionaire Left Behind: Satirical Activism in America* (Stanford, 2013); Christopher Houston and Banu Senay, "Humor, Amnesia, and Making Place. Constitutive Acts of the Subject in Gezi Park, Istanbul," *Social Analysis* 61, no. 3 (September 2017): 19–40; Paul Manning, "Rose-colored Glasses? Color Revolutions and Cartoon Chaos in Postsocialist Georgia," *Cultural Anthropology: Journal of the Society for Cultural Anthropology* 22, no. 2 (May 2007): 171–213; Harish C. Mehta, "Fighting, Negotiating, Laughing: The Use of Humor in the Vietnam War," *The Historian* 74, no. 4 (Winter 2012): 743–88; Ronald Provencher, "Covering Malay Humor Magazines: Satire and Parody of Malaysian Political Dilemmas," *Crossroads: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 5, no. 2 (1990): 1–25; Detlev Schauwecker, "Verbal Subversion and Satire in Japan, 1937–1945, as Documented by the Special High Police," *Japan Review* 15 (2003): 127–51; Susan Slyomovics, "Algeria Caricatures the Gulf War," *Public Culture* 4, no. 2 (Spring 1992): 93–99; Lisa Wedeen, "Ideology and Humor in Dark Times: Notes from Syria," *Critical Inquiry* 39, no. 4 (Summer 2013): 841–73.

[5] The distinction I am drawing between subversive speech and inflammatory rhetoric may be too fine a line for some readers, but one I insist on. I do not believe that anyone telling a joke in Hitler's Germany or Stalin's (or Khrushchev's or Brezhnev's) Soviet Russia ever really imagined that they would or could topple the regime. In contrast, publishers of *Steel Brush* and *Ludas Matyi* were actively working to achieve that goal, the joke magazine being only one means among many others to destabilize and dismantle the regime in power.

[6] James Caron, "The Quantum Paradox of Truthiness: Satire, Activism, and the Postmodern Condition," in "American Satire and the Postmodern Condition," a special issue of *Studies in American Humor* 2, no. 2 (October 2016): 153–81; Dustin Griffin, *Satire: A Critical Reintroduction* (Lexington, 1994); Marijke Meijer Drees and Sonja de Leeuw, eds., *The Power of Satire* (Amsterdam, 2015).

[7] Meijer Drees and De Leeuw, 3.

[8] Caron, 168.

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these comments make clear, satire cannot be held to account: one simply cannot grab a wave or a beam of light, nor can one put a sack over its head. Satire, and humor more generally, wields a secret power. It relies on deniability; it sanctions disavowal. Frightening implications drawn from a joke may be dismissed as ridiculous fantasies, as delusions. Objections to hurtful speech are rebuffed as willful exaggeration and meanspirited misinterpretation. Bearing the shield of disavowal allows extremist political ideologues to have their cake and eat it too. Deniability makes it possible to express extremist views, advancing a political agenda, all the while evading censure by the wider community. It's just a joke. This capacity to voice radical ideas while simulating ineptitude makes satire ideal for political propaganda.[9]

My purpose in recounting this quaint episode in political cartooning is twofold. The first is to isolate the rhetorical techniques of political persuasion that are wantonly promiscuous as regards ideological principles, but exquisitely attuned to fostering animus and nourishing a habitus of hatred. The second is to illustrate how both the left and the right engaged in these practices. Political satire was considered as crucial to the class struggle waged in the Soviet Union as it was to ethnic cleansing by National Socialists in Germany.

Cartoons and Political Satire

Political satire has a long tradition in central Europe. Political cartooning took off across the globe in the burgeoning markets for newspapers in the latter half of the nineteenth century. No matter how explicit the political sympathies of various cartoonists, however, they were not publishing in periodicals founded and financed by any particular political party. This changed in the twentieth century. Satirical magazines abandoned any attempt at neutrality after 1918, and soon became directly associated with a political party.[10] These publications were designed explicitly to recruit followers to their cause. "At the beginning of the thirties, the National Socialist party intensified efforts to establish satire as a means of propaganda..."[11] Comparable considerations were raised in debates held throughout the 1920s and 30s in Soviet Russia on the role of comedy and satire in the new society.[12] As early as 1923, an article was published in the Soviet Union on the value of humor as a didactic tool in the class struggle, stressing its accessibility to a broad audience.

Extensive didactic exegeses of party policy were harder to digest, much less enjoy, than a cleverly phrased *bon mot* or a funny cartoon.[13] Moreover, deploying humor triggers a well-spring of emotions untouched by dry political pronouncements. In this way, humor

[9] Being able to deny the import of one's comment is an effective means of evading responsibility; this is a general theoretical point. Whether ideologues availed themselves of this "get out of jail free" card depended on the historical context in which offensive sentiments were given voice. Right-wing extremists in the early 1940s were far less apt to disavow the implications of their pronouncements, given that their positions were primarily extremist interpretations of government policies and popular sentiment. As participants in a rejuvenated multi-party political environment, Communist Party ideologues were subject to far more public scrutiny. They also carried the burden of overcoming decades of anti-communist rhetoric, inclining them to have retreated into denial more frequently about the consequences of their jokes than their right-wing compatriots.

[10] Patrick Merziger, "Humour in the *Volksgemeinschaft:* The Disappearance of Destructive Satire in National Socialist Germany," in Martina Kessel and Patrick Merziger, eds., *The Politics of Humor. Laughter, Inclusion and Exclusion in the Twentieth Century* (Toronto, 2012), 134.

[11] Ibid.

[12] See Serguei Oushakine for a thorough analysis of these debates, "'Red Laughter': On Refined Weapons of Soviet Jesters," in "Politics and Comedy," a special issue of *Social Research* 79, no. 1 (Spring 2012): 189–216.

[13] Josef Goebbels expressed the exact same sentiments while reflecting on his early propagandistic activities. Louis Kaplan quotes Goebbels on this point. "Goebbels also insists that laughter can replace thinking to good propagandistic effect. 'With that there arose a completely new style of political caricature. Caricature goes after its essence with grotesque, ironic, and sometimes also cynical effects. It excites the capacity for laughter more

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becomes an extremely powerful tool. In his article on anti-capitalist affect, Jakob Norberg discusses a 1936 essay on satire by Georg Lukács, who argued strongly in favor of satire as a political weapon to inflame simmering resentments and propel action.

> In his characterization of the propulsive literary power of hate, however, Lukács assigns a political function to the affect, informed by his Marxist conception of class struggles in history. The politically oriented satirist, he claims, discerns the unsustainable character of society with perfect clarity and detects its corruption through the medium of a hatred that nobody and nothing can mitigate. To hate means to be clear-eyed and focused on unavoidable political battles, and to write satire is to attack society explicitly and publicly, an enterprise that can only be strengthened by hate. Satire animated by hate can function as a vehicle of revolution.[14]

Hatred is not only clear-eyed; it can also be pleasurable. Mobilizing hatred in the service of a political project can be deeply satisfying, a phenomenon that in his analysis of French antisemitism Jean-Paul Sartre refers to as the positive pleasures and joy of hating.[15] Yet in practice, particularly in a hostile political environment, being explicit about one's agenda may not be wise. Disguising one's goals in the ambiguities satire affords can be far more effective than outright proclamations or denunciations.

In her seminal essay, "Affective Economies," Sara Ahmed proposes a theory of emotion as an economy of forces, considering "the rippling effect of emotions" as circulating and swirling around and between people, intensifying social attachments by interweaving feelings attached to significant recollections, conscious or otherwise.[16] She focuses in particular on the power of hatred to draw some together and repel others, illustrated in discussions of white supremacy and the treatment of asylum seekers in Europe. "The passion of these negative attachments to others is redefined simultaneously as a positive attachment to the imagined subjects brought together through the repetition of the signifier, 'white.' It is the love of white, or those recognizable as white, that supposedly explains this shared 'communal' visceral response of hate. *Together we hate, and this hate is what makes us together.*"[17] In his cleverly titled book, *The Souls of White Jokes,* Raul Perez has also argued that social bonding is forged by the shared gratifications of expressing racist hatred.[18] In Thomas Szanto's phenomenological approach to the study of hatred as emotion and experience, he emphasizes the affective intentionality of hatred.[19] A community of like-minded souls coalesces around a shared purpose.[20] "Hatred is ultimately nothing but a habitus, a

than the capacity for thinking. And, as it is known, he who has the laugher on his side is always right.'" Louis Kaplan, *At Wit's End: The Deadly Discourse on the Jewish Joke* (New York, 2020), 158.

[14] Jakob Norberg, "Anticapitalist Affect: Georg Lukács on Satire and Hate," *New German Critique: An Interdisciplinary Journal of German Studies* 45, no. 3 (November 2018): 155–74.

[15] Jean Paul Sartre, *Anti-Semite and Jew*, (New York, 1965), 27.

[16] Sara Ahmed, "Affective Economies," *Social Text* 79, no. 2 (2004): 117–139.

[17] Ahmed, 118.

[18] Raúl Pérez, *The Soul of White Jokes. How Racist Humor Fuels White Supremacy* (Stanford, 2022).

[19] Bharath Ganesh, "The Ungovernability of Digital Hate Culture," *Journal of International Affairs* 71, no. 2 (Spring-Summer 2018): 30–49; Viveca Greene, ""Deplorable" Satire: Alt-Right Memes, White Genocide Tweets, and Redpilling Normies," in "Satire Today," a special issue of *Studies in American Humor* 5, no. 1 (2019): 31–69; Paul Hirsch, ""This is Our Enemy": The Writers' War Board and Representations of Race in Comic Books, 1942–1945," *Pacific Historical Review* 83, no. 3 (August 2014): 448–486; Louis Kaplan, *At Wit's End*; Nitzan Shoshan, "Managing Hate: Political Delinquency and Affective Governance in Germany," *Cultural Anthropology: Journal of the Society for Cultural Anthropology* 29, no. 1 (February 2014): 150–72.

[20] Thomas Szanto, "In Hate We Trust: The Collectivization and Habitualization of Hatred," in "Time and Intentionality," ed. Thiemo Breyer and Maxime Doyon, special issue, *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences* 19, no. 3 (July 2020): 453–80.

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veritable machine of hazardous social distinctions and demarcations. And what makes this 'affective machine' even more dangerous is that, in terms of its affective mechanism, it's a near-perfect perpetuum mobile."[21]

It is precisely this allure of collective belonging that makes political satire such a powerful propaganda tool. Szanto cites the work of R.J. Sternberg and K. Sternberg, in which they "rightly suggest [that] a distinctive expressive dimension of hatred consists in dynamic narrative structures."[22] One learns to hate by hearing stories weaving fantasies of dangerous elements in one's midst, strengthening one's attachment to a community of shared belief. Cartoons thrive on caricature, making them an ideal medium for telling stories that breed hatred. Moreover, satire—as either a light or a wave, to repeat Caron's metaphor—is well suited to conveying alarming stereotypes in a playful, ambiguous style. I argue, therefore, that the use of satirical cartoons by extremist groups is an extremely effective form of propaganda to recruit followers, for they not only prompt one to reexamine one's ideas; they also beckon one into a welcoming community of fellow believers. This is what jokes can do.

In the following account, I compare the use of satirical cartoons to normalize hatred published by National Socialists between 1940 and 1944 and communists between 1945 and 1948. While their techniques of recruitment are similar, the context in which they advanced their ideas differed substantially. During the war, National Socialists promoted ideas to the right of the conservative government, yet often openly expressed sentiments held by state officials. This is particularly evident in the National Socialists' treatment of the Jewish population in Hungary, where the logical next step of government legislation would have been the complete erasure of Jewish life and influence in the country. Communist publications were banned in Hungary during the war, so *Steel Brush* was not challenged by any humorous voices to the left. At most they were ridiculed in the mainstream conservative press. After the war, the Communist Party's mandate faced open opposition by multiple political parties, including the ruling coalition. *Ludas Matyi*'s competition included a vulgar, decidedly apolitical joke magazine (*Pesti Izé)* and a satirical joke magazine representing the views of the landed peasantry (*Szabad Száj)*, a more conservative voice than parties established after the war to represent the interests of the rural proletariat. Communists were tasked with discrediting the politics of the previous regime, often equating postwar conservative politicians with fascists and war criminals. The social hierarchies of privilege and wealth backing the conservative regime were also targeted, challenging longstanding patterns of authority and morality represented by the aristocracy and Catholic hierarchy.

Budapest Humor and the Press

Satirical magazines in the 1940s followed a long tradition of publishing humor magazines in Hungary that dated back to the mid-nineteenth century. Hungarians found inspiration for this new genre in German publications of the 1840s, adopting a similar style built around the witty banter of popular characters week to week. The characters represented iconic social figures of the time: the aristocrat, the shopkeeper, a gentry squire, petty bureaucrats, tradesmen, poets, and the country bumpkin. Unlike the decidedly rural tradition of anecdotes the writer Jókai solicited for his paper, *Üstökös* (The Comet), jokes in urban publications were strongly influenced by the genre of Jewish jokes, as was the case in Berlin.[23] For this reason, as Mary Gluck argues, these publications were "closely aligned

[21] Szanto, 476.

[22] Szanto, 459.

[23] Géza Buzinkay, *Borsszem Jankó és társai. Magyar élclapok és karikatúráik a XIX. század második felében* (Jankó Borsszem and Friends: Hungarian Satirical Magazines and their Caricatures in the Second Half of the XIX Century, Budapest, 1983), 3.

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in popular imagination with the commercial press and modern journalism."[24] Some newspapers had obvious political sympathies, but other publications were intended primarily for occupational or professional groups, such as the printers' union or theater crowd.[25] By the twentieth century, occasional periodicals were joined on the newsstand by joke collections. Some were topical, such as a 1919 collection of jokes from prisoners of war camps in Siberia, or the comprehensive, five volume collection containing 5000 jokes published in 1932 by the editor of the prominent Jewish joke magazine, *Ojság* (The Oj-news, 1920–39). Throughout the 1930s, newspapers of all stripes published a weekly joke section, usually on Saturdays, drawing on the rich repertoire of jokes circulating in town. Recurring figures include Móricka, the clever Jewish school boy who does not shy away from speaking the truth, and the conversational duo of Kohn and Grün, whose snappy dialogues move quickly to the punch line. Cartoons and caricatures were drawn in the same visual style regardless of the political or confessional associations represented in the wide range of publications available, lending a sameness to the page that aided visual literacy.

The press enjoyed relative freedom in the 1930s, but in 1938, the National Hungarian Press Chamber was established and the government moved to impose stricter guidelines for licensing periodicals. The role of journalists was now to promote official propaganda; all forms of personalized opinionating in the press were to be banned.[26] As a consequence, the prominent right-wing newspaper *Magyarság* (Hungarianness) was prohibited from publishing for three months in the spring of 1939 for printing the Arrow Cross Party's election platform.[27] After the war, newspapers were apportioned among the political parties in the governing coalition, rendering them crucial sites for political wrangling and negotiation. This newfound freedom was significantly curtailed, however, by the severe shortage of paper the country suffered. Constant battles were waged week after week among political parties over the allocation of paper, since both the number of pages and number of copies of any one periodical were limited by this constraint.[28] Yet despite the shortage of paper, political parties made sure their satirical magazines made it to the newsstand. In the fall of 1946, 100,000 copies of *Ludas Matyi* were printed. One year later the number of copies reached 130-140,000. To put this number in context, the main Communist Party newspaper had an initial weekly circulation of 137,000.[29]

Party Politics

The histories of right-wing and left-wing political parties in the 20th century differed in terms of their influence and popularity, but they did share one thing in common. Both parties eventually came to power through extra-judicial means. The Hungarian Communist Party was established in November, 1918 but very quickly came into prominence when the

[24] Mary Gluck, *The Invisible Jewish Budapest: Metropolitan Culture at the Fin de Siècle* (Madison, 2016), 106.

[25] The Catalog of Newspapers in Hungary (*Magyarország újságkatalógusa*) lists 72 satirical magazines (*élclap)* published in the first decades of the twentieth century. The large majority of these were short-lived, lasting several weeks or several months, suggesting perhaps an enthusiastic editor hoping but finally unable to rally sponsorship or a readership. My favorite among those listed is, *Vig telefon* (The Gay Telephone), published by telephone operators in 1899.

[26] Balázs Sipos, *Sajtó és hatalom a Horthy-Korszakban: Politika-és társadalomtörténeti vázlat* (The Press and Power in the Horthy Era, Budapest, 2011), 205.

[27] Sipos, 241.

[28] Robert Takács, "*A koaliciós időszak media- és kulturális nyilvannossága*" (The Media and Cultural Public Sphere of the Coalition Period) in István Feitl and Károly Ignácz, eds., *Régi és új világ határán: 1945 történetei: Tanulmányok* (On the Boundary or the Old and New World, Stories from 1945, Budapest, 2018), 148–49.

[29] Géza Buzinkay, *A magyar sajtó és újságirás története a kezdetektől a rendszerváltásig* (The History of the Hungarian Press and Journalism from its Beginnings until the Regime Change), (Budapest 2016), 406.

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post-WWI government ceded power to them in March, 1919. The communist regime immediately set up a Soviet Republic fashioned after the Russian revolution. The experiment was short-lived, collapsing in July before the influx of foreign troops from Romania and a strong phalanx of right-wing forces. A number of government officials and sympathizers with left-wing politics went into exile, escaping either to Vienna, Berlin, or Moscow. Communist Party members left behind in Hungary were forced to go into hiding; some prominent members, Imre Sallai and Sándor Fürst, were executed; Mátyás Rákosi spent years in jail. The Soviet Army reached the eastern border of Hungary in October, 1944, at which time the Communist Party resurfaced and joined the Provisional National Government at its founding in December, 1944. In the first national election after WWII only 17% of the electorate voted for the Hungarian Communist Party (MKP).

The history of extreme right-wing political parties is more complicated. At least twelve different political parties were founded between 1920 and 1944. Leading figures were constantly at odds over their respective roles in the movement, often establishing and then disbanding parties as factions coalesced around one or another prominent politician.[30] Activists also disagreed over party programs. Some were avowedly pro-German, others decidedly anti-German, some were more explicitly anti-capitalist than others, but all shared strongly antisemitic beliefs. Despite their sectarian tendencies, by 1938 the far-right was perceived by political elites as gaining in popularity and intent on fomenting revolution: "Between 1938 and 1939 various reports emerged of successive Arrow Cross assassination plots, secret armed conspiracies and mass demonstrations."[31] In 1939, approximately twelve separate national socialist or extreme right parties won 20% of the seats in parliament, although the government immediately invalidated the mandate of several of those elected. Eventually they represented 16% of the electorate.[32] In light of the increasing popularity of right-wing parties, conservative advisors within the government insisted on treating the far-right as a police matter; the leader of the Arrow Cross Party, Ferenc Szálasi, was imprisoned for several years.[33] Like the Communist Party in 1919, the Arrow Cross Party came to power in the midst of a political crisis. In mid-October 1944, German authorities got wind of attempts by Hungarian politicians to negotiate peace with the Allies. They quickly delegated control of the government to the Arrow Cross. Officially in power until May, 1945, their tenure in the capital city was brief. Szálasi and other government officials fled westward in November to escape the invading Russian troops.

Comparable Techniques

Mounting a political campaign entails a series of steps to explain how the political party aims to serve its members: who we are, what we propose to offer constituents, and how. In itself, then, the fact that techniques adopted by the National Socialists and communists in their publications are so similar is not surprising. Nonetheless, it is interesting to compare the substance of their campaigns to entice new members. Scattered across the pages

[30] Rudolph Paksa, *A Magyar szélsőjobboldal története* (The History of the Hungarian Extreme Right, *Budapest*, 2012), 245. The sectarianism of the extreme right in Hungary is well illustrated by the fact that at one point there were two national socialist satirical magazines, the second established to ridicule those associated with the first (Rudolf Paksa, personal communication).

[31] Krisztián Ungváry, *Szociálpolitika, modernitás és antiszemitizmus Imrédy Béla politikájában* (Social Policy, Modernity and Antisemitism in Béla Imrédy's Policies) in Ignác Romsics, ed. *A magyar jobboldali hagyomány 1900–1948* (Hungarian Rightwing Tradition 1900–1948), (Budapest, 2009), 320.

[32] Rudolf Paksa, *Magyar Nemzetiszocialisták. az 1930-as évek új szélsőjobboldali mozgalma, pártjai, politikusai, sajtója* (Hungarian National Socialists: The Parties, Politicians, and Press of the Extreme Right Movement of the 1930s, Budapest, 2013), 171–75.

[33] Paksa, 245.

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of *Steel Brush* and *Ludas Matyi* were cartoons 1) depicting disturbing conditions intended to inflame sentiments, 2) presenting a different view to convey the party's preferred political stance, and finally 3) sketching ambitions for the future. Readers were led along a carefully orchestrated path into an alternative view of political possibilities, more effective for being dispersed along familiar avenues in Hungarian humor. The first stage, which I refer to as articulating complaints, depicted the current ills and problems besetting society, issues widely discussed in public places over coffee or beer. Both newspapers translated these complaints into familiar quips such as "Social life is hard for the average bloke, economic rules are rigged, overweening elites take advantage of their powerful position in society." The next step in the party's political logic was to sketch its ideological portrait, assuring readers that the National Socialists or communists constituted an alternative approach. In both *Drot Kefe* and *Ludas Matyi,* readers were exhorted not to despair, reassuring them that if the right political party were to come to power, all these difficulties would vanish. The third phase, which I call future aspirations, proudly displayed images showing what life could be like if the proper authorities were in charge. Judiciously placed throughout the magazine, wedged between the usual repertoire of jokes, the more provocative material acquired an everydayness that masked its extremist roots, and disguised its tendentious import.[34] Both weeklies were decidedly anti-capitalist in tone, but the persons vilified for this depravity were different. In *Steel Brush* Jews were the embodiment of capitalist greed, while in *Ludas Matyi* wealthy peasants and the gentry served as the epitome of undeserved affluence.

As befits an inaugural issue, the first pages of both weeklies were graced with commentary calling for change and promising an alternative vision. *Steel Brush* depicted planes dropping leaflets from the sky, assuring readers that reconnaissance missions were underway to uncover the truth and combat false narratives.[35] (Figure 1). *Ludas Matyi* showed fascists proudly marching into town in 1938, leaving town with war booty in 1944, and returning in handcuffs in 1945, the cartoon accompanied by a somber poem about the horrors of war and the painful task ahead of rescuing one's humanity and learning to laugh again.[36] The issues to follow in each publication would create a cast of characters to serve the narratives of the unfolding morality play. In one, iconic figures like the sneaky and sickly Jew, and their aristocrat toadies, are contrasted with robust and vigilant nationalists; in the other, corpulent peasants are confronted by proud but poor villagers, often flanked by industrial workers and young engineers. Yet most of the material filling the pages could easily have appeared in either magazine: classic everyday jokes and humorous anecdotes about husbands and wives, neighbors, shopkeepers, priests, crooks, and ne'er-do-wells, the vernacular tropes of Budapest humor. As a result, the casual reader might be forgiven for overlooking the publishers' purpose in issuing the paper in the first place. Close to hand in the coffee shop or displayed on street kiosks, the magazines offered light entertainment to pass the time.[37]

[34] I would like to make clear at the outset that I am not making a moral equivalency argument between National Socialists and communists. This was a common pastime during the Cold War as a means of aligning oneself politically. I am not taking sides in this debate, or even engaging in the exercise. I would prefer to evaluate political parties and their leaders in light of their actions, not as better or worse political exemplars. Insisting on a comparison or any sort of moral equivalency metric robs us of the ability to understand why what happened took place. It dehistoricizes events and ignores cultural and social specificities relevant to any serious political analysis. There is value, however, in comparing the means they used to achieve their goals; strategies that have been used elsewhere with great effect.

[35] *Drót Kefe*, March 8, 1940, 1.

[36] *Ludas Matyi*, May 20, 1945, 1.

[37] I make no claims to portraying a representative sample of cartoon themes in each publication. I chose cartoons specifically for their illustration of prominent issues articulated by ideologues of both the left and right.

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Figure 1. Manna from heaven. *Drót Kefe*, March 8, 1940, 1.

Steel Brush, the National Socialists' Recruitment Magazine

It should come as no surprise that Jews were depicted in the far-right weekly as causing harm throughout society. They were abetted in their nefarious acts by aristocratic simpletons and unsuspecting bureaucrats. Clueless aristocrats were easily duped into hiding hoards of cash and jewelry for Jewish families, while naïve officials could be manipulated into facilitating procedures that disproportionately favored Jews in the community. Cartoons fleshed out an image of the Jew in classic caricature, reinforcing antisemitic sentiments by offering concrete visual evidence of their alien character in Hungarian society.

Articulating Complaints

Jews were depicted as interlopers in Hungarian society, thieves of the nation's patrimony. In one cartoon, we see an elderly Jewish man loading pictures of medieval knights and dignified matriarchs onto a horse-drawn cart in front of an elegant manor.[38] (Figure 2). His grandson holds a whistle and says, "Papa, if we can take our ancestors with us, may we take grandfather's whistle too? Maybe we'll be able to snatch up another manorial estate for a song?" Two concerns are illustrated here. The first is the increasingly powerful role that Jewish industrialists and bankers played in late nineteenth century Hungary. Allied with the ruling coalition of liberals in the government, wealthy Jews wielded greater political influence during this period than had been the case before. Emblematic of their growing status within society was the phenomenon, unique to Hungary, of ennobling Jews of high stature. Denoting this unusual phenomenon in the cartoon are the sidecurls (*payos*) drawn onto the

[38] *Drót Kefe,* March 27, 1942, 1.

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Figure 2. Restoring our patrimony. *Drót Kefe*, March 27, 1942, 1.

portraits of feudal knights. The cartoon also refers to the practice of Jews renting manorial estates in the late nineteenth, and early twentieth centuries, which was a sore point for conservative nationalists. This encroachment on precious Hungarian soil by Jews was depicted by conservatives in the agrarian lobby as a desecration. Clearly, the anger the conservative agrarian lobby expressed was also indicative of their fear that the rise of capitalist industry would overshadow their once preeminent role in the Hungarian economy.

With the passage of the Jewish laws in 1939, 1941, and 1942, Jews were increasingly deprived of their income, and eventually of their property. A recurring theme in *Steel Brush* was the figure of Aladár Strohmann, a clueless aristocrat who would agree to hide Jewish assets under his own name. In one cartoon we see a well dressed man whose face is a bird house, sitting comfortably with his feet on the desk.[39] (Figure 3). Plates of roasted pigeons fly toward his mouth: cushy job, bank manager, board membership. The caption cites a proverb from a recent speech by Prime Minister Pál Teleki. "Many people think that a roasted pigeon will fly into their mouths as if it were a dovecote." The proverb refers to people who think that goods and riches will come their way easily without any effort. The aryanization of Jewish property certainly eased the acquisition of valuable assets by well-placed Christians. The caption continues, "The picture shows the person who most believes it, Aladár Strohmann." The cartoon insinuates, in fact, that Jews would find ways to keep control of their assets by delegating their holdings to a straw man, a gullible dupe, evading the government's attempts to deprive them of their wealth.[40]

Alternative Posture

At the end of WWI, the Treaty of Versailles dismantled the Austro-Hungarian Empire. With the stroke of a pen, Hungary lost two-thirds of its former territory. This blow to the cultural and economic integrity of Hungary left a deep scar in the conservative body politic, with

[39] *Drót Kefe*, January 17, 1941, 1.

[40] The term Strohmann refers to a strawman or front for a powerful individual, often a politician, who hides his financial assets by trusting them to a close friend or family member (Yehuda Don, "The Economic Effect of Antisemitic Discrimination: Hungarian Anti-Jewish Laws, 1938–1944," *Jewish Social Studies* 48, no. 1 (1986): 76.) The strohmann phenomenon is alive and well in Hungary today. Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's boyhood friend, Lőrinc Mészáros, was once an unemployed pipefitter. Within a few short years, he has become the wealthiest person in Hungary. A joke recently published in a Hungarian newspaper reads as follows: a mother is asking her son what he would like to be when he grows up. Fireman, policeman? No, strohmann.

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Figure 3. Aladár Strohman's illusions. *Drót Kefe,* January 17, 1941, 1.



Figure 4. Revanchist revenge. *Drót Kefe,* April 21, 1940, 1.

revanchist demands becoming a cornerstone of interwar political debates. This is the topic of the following cartoon.[41] (Figure 4). The cartoon depicts a Hungarian soldier wiping his boots with the Treaty of Versailles to the horror of Georges Clemenceau's ghost in the background. The soldier quips, "This treaty came in handy after all, ..." Debasing an international treaty by using it to clean one's boots expressed revanchists deep disdain of western powers' interference in their affairs. The cartoon also anticipated the territorial revisions enacted by the Second Vienna Award in August of 1940, which returned some of the lands Hungary lost in the Treaty of Versailles in 1919: a portion of Slovakia just across the northern border in 1938, and northern Transylvania in 1940. A related cartoon depicts two men—a Czech and a Romanian—standing in awe outside the gates of the international exhibition being held in Budapest in May, 1941. "After twenty years we've fallen onto hard times, and in the midst of the world burning around them, they organize this kind of exhibition." Hungarian territory by and large escaped the ravages of war until 1944, so it was possible to mount an international trade exhibition in 1941. The cartoon reeks of Schadenfreude. Perhaps it had been a mistake to dismantle the Austro-Hungarian empire after all.

[41] *Drót Kefe,* April 21, 1940, 1.

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Class politics in Hungary were racially inflected. The Hungarian urban middle-class was seen as deracinated, as the cartoon entitled "The sick middle class" makes clear.[42] Lying in a hospital bed is an emaciated patient, sitting alongside him a strapping young peasant man rolling up his sleeves, and between them the equipment needed for a blood transfusion. The caption reads "I will gladly give good blood for a transfusion. Just be sure a senior physician is in charge, so it doesn't go to waste." This cartoon expresses the view that Hungarian peasants embodied the nation's strength, coupled with the belief that the peasantry was thoroughly Hungarian ethnically. It also depicted the urban middle-class as weak-willed and impotent, their class position having been usurped by Jewish entrepreneurs.

In 1941, all those adult males over the age of twenty-one judged unfit for military service were conscripted into labor service to perform a variety of public works, such as road maintenance, draining swamps, and building canals. Separate battalions were established for Jews, including Jewish officers in the reserves who had been stripped of their rank.[43] A cartoon depicts a group of Jewish men who are strenuously digging in the soil.[44] Two guards stand watching. The first guard remarks: "What happened? I couldn't get them to do anything, and here they are eagerly digging away." Second guard: "You need to know the way to do it. I put a bee in their bonnet, saying there's a briefcase buried here with the latest news from London." Radio broadcasts by the BBC were treasured sources of information people listened to clandestinely to learn just how the war was faring across Europe. Jews delegated to work service were initially deployed only in Hungary, but as of 1942, the Jewish forced labor units were sent to the battlefields on the eastern front in the Soviet Union, where they were expected to continue to perform manual labor unarmed and subject to vicious treatment by officers overseeing their activities. Approximately 50,000 forced laborers were called up between 1942 and 1944, of whom only 6–7,000 returned at the end of the war.[45]

Ambitions for the Future

Prior to the land reform in 1945, 38% of all arable land was organized into manorial estates owned by wealthy families and the Catholic Church.[46] Akin to latifundia, these were large enterprises employing dozens and even hundreds of migrant workers and day laborers. In contrast, farms of less than 2.5 hectares constituted 75% of all agricultural properties, covering only 10% of the land. Social critics of the conservative regime depicted the dire conditions of agrarian communities, but repeated calls for land reform fell on deaf ears. Property rights were sacrosanct, a privilege particularly important to the Catholic Church that relied heavily on the income garnered from their estates. In a cartoon entitled "Dream of a protest," peasants confront wealthy landowners to demand land.[47] The landowners reject their pleas, but offer a compromise. Wealthy landowners themselves will donate land to prevent the state from encroaching on their property. A priest cheers in the background, and the peasants are mollified. This is a fantasy of noblesse oblige, depicting a congenial compromise in lieu of outright appropriation. The property rights of the Catholic Church and wealthy landowners were consolidated, while Jews were deprived of their landed properties (whether owned or rented), further eroding the viability of their life in Hungary.

[42] *Drót Kefe,* January 10, 1941, 3.

[43] Szabolcs Szita, *A Magyarországi Zsidó Munkaszolgálat* (The Jewish Labor Service System in Hungary) in Randolph Braham and Attila Pók, eds. *The Holocaust in Hungary, Fifty Years Later,* (Boulder, 1997), 332–33.

[44] *Drót Kefe,* October 30, 1942, 1.

[45] Kinga Frojimovics, "The Special Characteristics of the Holocaust in Hungary, 1938–45," in Braham and Pók, eds., *The Holocaust in Hungary*, 248–63.

[46] Mihály Kerék, *A Magyar Földkérdés* (The Hungarian Land Question, Budapest, 1939).

[47] *Drót Kefe,* October 25, 1940, 1.

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Figure 5. A happy day. *Drót Kefe*, April 24, 1942, 1.

Crucial to the success of the Arrow Cross was the destruction of Hungarian Jewry. Cartoons suggesting solutions are playful, but the message is clear. One of the most disturbing cartoons is entitled "The Last Jew leaves Budapest." On April 20, 1942, Prime Minister Miklós Kallay announced his intention to nationalize all Jewish property and initiate a resettlement plan to force Jews to leave the country. "I know that there is no other solution than to resettle 800,000 Jews." The cartoon published several days later in *Steel Brush* depicts the joyous day on which Kallay's vision is realized.[48] (Figure 5). We see a fat Jew, holding the newspaper of the Social Democrats, and carrying a bundle of cash suspended from the handle of his umbrella, being greeted by two prominent politicians, bouquets in hand, while a worker cheers in the background. The caption reads, "A farsighted photographer for *Steel Brush* captured this original photo at the Eastern Train Station in Budapest." Two years later the Eastern Train Station would be the site for the massive deportation of Jews to Auschwitz.

Prior to adopting a policy of genocide in 1941, Nazi officials had also been contemplating plans to resettle Jews. In the summer of 1940, Madagascar looked to be the most promising option; Nazi demographers had determined that the island could easily absorb the influx of millions of Jews from Europe.[49] Kallay made no mention of Madagascar in his speech, but several cartoons in *Steel Brush* demonstrate that writers for the publication were fully aware of the proposal. Accordingly in fall 1941 and spring 1942, three cartoons mentioning resettling in Madagascar were published. In the first cartoon, two Jewish men are being harassed by crows as they walk down the street.[50] A by-stander asks them why they are covering their ears. They answer by explaining that the crows keep squawking "caw, caw, Madagascar." The verb "cawing" in Hungarian is also used to denote a pessimist prophesizing doom and destruction. In another cartoon, published several weeks before Kallay's speech in April, two long lines are gathered outside the train station, one intended for those leaving for Palestine, the other for those choosing to go to Madagascar.[51] A third cartoon presages life for Jews in their new home. An obviously Jewish gentleman by the name of Mermelstein finds himself in a desert clime, with palm trees and two men—one

[48] *Drót Kefe,* April 24, 1942, 1.

[49] Christopher Browning and Jürgen Matthäus, *The Origins of the Final Solution. The Evolution of Nazi Jewish Policy, September 1939-March 1942* (Lincoln, 2004), 81–89.

[50] *Drót Kefe,* November 7, 1941, 5.

[51] *Drót Kefe,* March 13, 1942, p. 7

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Jew, one native—vigorously debating something in the background.[52] Mermelstein stands before an announcement posted on behalf of the Jewish Republic of Madagascar, which proclaimed that every Jew can now swindle at will. The caption reads, "Oh vey, how shall I be able to evade that regulation!" The message is clear: no matter where they roam, Jews are inherently devious and ungovernable. Our policy for resettlement was warranted. Good riddance.

By the spring of 1945, 60% of the Jewish population in Hungary had perished. In the final months of fighting, thousands were simply shot in the street and their bodies thrown into the Danube.[53] The last issue of *Steel Brush* was published on October 13, 1944, a couple of days before Szálasi and the Arrow Cross came to power. At this point, however, Soviet forces were already encroaching on Hungarian soil, having crossed the border in September.

Ludas Matyi, the Communist Party's Propaganda Magazine[54]

The mood in Hungary at the end of the war was one of exhaustion and exhilaration. Budapest had just survived a 108 day siege, caught up in fierce battles between the retreating German army and the advancing Soviet forces.[55] As the dust settled, people began to imagine the possibilities for a brighter tomorrow. Prominent social critics penned essays sketching the outlines of a more democratic polity and socially just economy. Land reform was quickly initiated. In the meantime, political parties joined in a coalition government jockeyed for position as efforts to establish a more permanent governing body were underway. The possibilities for humorous and pointed commentary were rife.

Articulating Complaints

Black marketeering is a scourge in any postwar economy, but it was particularly heinous in an economy eviscerated by inflation. While families suffered to feed themselves, others profited handsomely from shady deals.[56] In these conditions, black marketeers are an easy target (Figure 6). Two well dressed and well-fed gentleman stand in front of a poster proclaiming that all black marketeers should be locked up. One turns to the other and says, "By the way, I have half a trainload of locks for sale...."[57] It warrants mention that these two figures are not depicted as Jews, even though the usual antisemitic tropes of Jewish finagling were alive and well in talk of the black market in the post-war period. The Communist Party became adept at shifting the anger workers expressed about wages and poor provisions away from party operatives and factory managers onto speculators and shopkeepers, relying on familiar antisemitic tropes to absorb workers' hostility and undermine strike actions.[58]

The Communist Party fared poorly in the first post-war elections in 1945, bested by a coalition led by the Smallholders' Party, a conservative party representing wealthier peasants and their allies. Political parties across the spectrum from left to moderate

[52] *Drót Kefe*, November 21, 1941, 5.

[53] János Gyurgyák, *A zsidókérdés Magyarországon: Politikai eszmetörténet* (The Jewish Question in Hungary, Budapest, 2001), 188.

[54] Ludas Matyi (Matyi the Gooseherder) is the eponymous hero of a nineteenth century epic poem based on a folk tale, in which a clever peasant boy takes revenge against a local lord who steals his geese. It's clever branding, clothing the communist publication in populist garb.

[55] Krisztián Ungváry, *Budapest ostroma* (The Siege of Budapest, Budapest, 1998), 302.

[56] According to a contemporary report by the respected Hungarian Economic Research Institute, in October 1945, the authorities could only guarantee each inhabitant of Budapest a daily ration of 556 calories (Magyar Gazdaságkutató Intézet Iratai, MOL P1611, 32. d., II. sorozat, 386 sorszám).

[57] *Ludas Matyi*, October 7, 1945, 8.

[58] Mark Pittaway, *Industrial Labor and the Making of Socialist Hungary 1944–1958* (Pittsburgh, 2012), 106–10.

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Figure 6. Sinister dealings. *Ludas Matyi,* October 7, 1945, 8.

right—National Socialist parties had been outlawed—fought to secure control over valuable ministries and agencies as the more permanent state began to take shape. The Communist Party touted its democratic ambitions, but its vision of democracy was different from the so-called bourgeois parties. This is revealed in a cartoon, in which we see well dressed women and men, military officers, and aristocrats sitting in cafés and strolling along a downtown boulevard.[59] The gooseherder Ludas Matyi turns to a worker standing beside him to say, "You want to give *them* democracy?" This depiction conveys the idea that bourgeois elites perhaps don't deserve a right to democracy, that's it's now the workers' turn to call the shots. In classic political speech, this is referred to as the dictatorship of the proletariat, a message appealing to the resentments of the poor. As if a rejoinder to this indiscriminate slander of elites, another cartoon comes to their defense, entitled "There were good ones too."[60] A gendarme wearing the iconic feathered helmet and black riding boots sits comfortably in a chair, stroking a bunny, an image evoking the perverse affectations of a sadist. He is directing a crowd of gendarmes below whipping, beating and shoving people into boxcars. The caption reads, "A voice from the past: Everything for democracy! ... Another twenty Jews into the train cars." Apologists take note.

In a confusing and perhaps ambiguous cartoon, a vision of the future is shown in which poor people enter a lavishly furnished apartment, while a fat capitalist stands in the midst of a slum kitchen.[61]

(Figure 7). Above the picture it reads: Workers' Life, Capitalists' Life. The caption reads, "Editor: Are you crazy? You changed the pictures! What were you thinking? Cartoonist: I am not imagining this. The National Association of Factory Owners are!" One can read the cartoon as ridiculing factory owners for imagining that such extreme reversals are in store; on the other hand, one might also read this as a promissory note for the proletariat.

[59] *Ludas Matyi,* October 14, 1945, 8.
[60] *Ludas Matyi,* June 10, 1945, 1.
[61] *Ludas Matyi,* June 18, 1947, 5.

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Figure 7. Trading places. *Ludas Matyi,* June 18, 1947, 5.

Alternative Posture

The war is over, fascism has been defeated, so now is the time for reckoning. One cartoon makes this abundantly clear. On the left we see iconic figures of aristocrats and the gentry, on the right are peasants and workers.[62] (Figure 8). The wealthy are labeled rats, the workers as people. In the background, we see the spirit of Sándor Petőfi, a nineteenth century romantic poet whose poem "National Song" expresses the revolutionary spirit of 1848. "Shall we be slaves or freemen? This is the question. Choose between them!" The cartoon has the same refrain: "This is the question. Choose!" Choose between rats who have enslaved you and men who promise freedom. In this new era, the choice is yours. Another cartoon exposes class hatred openly.[63] A man representing the gentry—feather in his hat, large belly, plaid pants—complains to a peasant decked out in classic Hungarian garb: short vest, billowing sleeves and close-fitting pants and boots. The gentry figure says, "They've taken my land. How am I supposed to live respectfully as befits my social position?" The peasant replies, "But I don't wish for you to live, honorable sir." A harsh judgement, conveying the longstanding bitterness that poor landowners felt toward wealthier peasants, who had lorded over their poorer neighbors with obvious disdain.

Aspirational Visions

Cartoons depicting the rosy future of proletarian solidarity are familiar. A cartoon published on December 16, 1945 makes a promise to nationalize industry, far before any such moves were even contemplated in the national debate. Two stalwart men shake hands: one a peasant, the other a miner. Above the mine hangs a sign saying nationalized, and a sign stuck in the ground describes it as land acquired from the land reform. Floating above them in the air are wealthy gentlemen with their young girlfriends. The caption reads, "Good luck! For those of us who live from the soil, everything has been taken care of this summer.

[62] *Ludas Matyi,* March 14, 1947, 4.
[63] *Ludas Matyi,* May 7, 1947, 7.

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Figure 8. Choose sides. *Ludas Matyi,* March 14, 1947, 4.

Now they are taking care of you who live from the depths of earth. Now something must be done with those who live from the air" Peasants and workers commonly believed that the bourgeoisie were not engaged in any kind of productive activity. They simply made money; they lived off the air. As the saying goes, "I'm working, so I don't have time to make money." Wealth was acquired by complex finagling, activities too time consuming for the average worker to pursue. It also financed a decadent and amoral lifestyle. This injustice fueled class hatred.

The Communist Party regularly took credit for policies that were the result of sustained coalition politics. Here a cartoon does just that, entitled "Picnic at Whitsuntide."[64] (Figure 9). We see Péter Veres, leader of the poor peasants' party, clothed in peasant garb, cutting a cake for the picnic, which represents the land reform. Mátyás Rákosi, first secretary of the Communist Party, is slicing salami, the slices bearing the image of the new currency that ended months of inflation. Behind them is Árpád Szakasits, head of the Social Democrats who represented urban workers, cracking open a keg of wine, from which will flow higher wages. Standing alongside them at the picnic are two figures: István Balogh, a prominent member of the conservative Smallholders' Party and a man dressed in jodhpurs and wearing a hat denoting his status as a member of the gentry. The caption reads:

> Rákosi: "I have brought the golden Forint, Péter has brought the land, and Árpád has brought good wages. What have you brought, Mr. Smallholder?
> Balogh: "I have brought my younger brother. You should immediately name him chief of police!"

[64] *Ludas Matyi,* June 9, 1946, 1.

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Figure 9. Coalition politics. *Ludas Matyi,* June 9, 1946, 1.

All the important reforms underway grouped in this scene are attributed to the work of leftist politicians: land reform, improved lifestyles, and a reliable currency. In actual fact, the new currency and higher wages were the result of extensive deliberations among all parties in the coalition government. The conservative peasant party, in contrast, is depicted as a party rife with nepotism and keen to control the security apparatus of the state.

The Communist Party promised a brighter future, but to do so meant having to defeat reactionary forces. A recurring column in *Ludas Matyi* was devoted to recounting the foolishness of senile aristocrats. The heading of the column depicted two wealthy gentlemen—one with a monocle, the other an elegant cane—whispering to each other, entitled "With all due respect, what do you think?" [65] The images are easy to decipher, but a further clue to their identity is found in the wording of the title, which mimics a speech pattern common among aristocrats. They recount rumors circulating around town to remind readers of the danger of anti-democratic forces still lurking in society, as well as a means to clarify the righteousness of the Communist Party's political program. The elegant gentlemen commiserate over new policies being introduced, expressing their dismay and disbelief. Discussing the upcoming redistribution of land, they ridicule the slogan promoting land reform long heard among the poor: "land to those who cultivate it!" "That's ridiculous! The street doesn't belong to the person who sweeps it." It continues, "One hundred acres for a poor peasant! Depending on the luck of the draw, you could lose that in one night's poker game." "Do you think poor peasants know how to play poker?" "Well, if they don't, they are sure to lose."[66] Their conversations are full of non sequiturs showing how clueless aristocrats are about everyday life. In another column, the two aristocrats are surprised to learn of plans for an election.[67] "Will you nominate yourself?" His friend demurs, explaining his chances are not as good as they were when he owned 3000 acres and was guaranteed a seat in the Parliament. "Now you can only campaign if a party puts you on their list." He responds, "Oh, several parties have put me on their lists. I'm on one list for nominees to the

[65] *Ludas Matyi,* May 20, 1945, 3.
[66] *Ludas Matyi,* May 20, 1945, 3.
[67] *Ludas Matyi,* July 1, 1945, 4.

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Figure 10. A dangerous ploy. *Ludas Matyi,* March 31, 1946, 6.

Parliament, and I'm on another list as a war criminal. The situation is very complicated." In yet another column, one aristocrat explains that the election will be a secret ballot. "Then how do people find out about it?"[68]

On several occasions jokes were made about former Arrow Cross party members choosing to be circumcised to hide their identity. This series of jokes refers to the perception at the time that many former Arrow Cross members quickly switched their allegiance to the Communist Party to retain their privileges and avoid recrimination.[69] Two columns of the whispering aristocrats were devoted to the rumor that four Arrow Cross party members were planning to emigrate to Palestine. But in order to do so, they had to have themselves circumcised, using dollars they had stashed away when they were in power. There's a twist, however. They decide to have the operation at the Jewish Hospital. "That's so nice. At one time they sheared [killed] Jews, and now they are giving the surgeon at the Jewish Hospital a chance to take revenge by shearing them."[70] In a separate cartoon on this same topic, we see two members of the Arrow Cross arriving in Palestine, suitcases in hand, carrying a backpack with a Hebrew grammar book in the pocket. Labels affixed to the suitcases list the names of two cities where postwar atrocities had taken place. Kunmadaras had been the site of a postwar antisemitic pogrom, while in Budaörs German speaking Hungarian citizens had been rounded up and forced into exile.[71] Even though armed conflict had ceased, hostilities continued in the form of ethnic cleansing, prompting people on both sides of the conflict to flee (Figure 10). As they stand watching Jews and Arabs battling with each other, one says to the other, "Look at us. If Jews recognize us, they will beat us." The other responds, "And if not, then we'll be attacked by Arabs." No matter how extreme, attempts to camouflage oneself are no guarantee of safety. We promise that Arrow Cross henchmen will be emasculated, wherever they roam. This series of jokes bears a sadistic tone, which is not surprising since a number of the cartoonists and humorists working at *Ludas Matyi* were Jews who had survived the Holocaust.

[68] *Ludas Matyi,* October 7, 1945, 7.

[69] I have always thought these rumors were exaggerated, since they reflected the view many held that party membership was not motivated by ideological commitments but by a desire for power and financial gain. I am perfectly aware of actual instances of "turn-coats," but I prefer to treat these stories more generally as indicative of a popular attitude that politics was driven by opportunism rather than moral principle.

[70] *Ludas Matyi,* March 31, 1946, 6.

[71] *Ludas Matyi,* June 30, 1946, 5.

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The last issue of *Ludas Matyi* was published in December of 1993, several years after the demise of Communist Party rule in Hungary. All throughout the socialist period, *Ludas Matyi* was an integral organ of the party/state's ideological project. As befits a humor magazine, the practice of publishing classic jokes and silly stories continued, alongside a steady stream of pro-regime propaganda: proud workers, happy youths parading with Communist Party regalia, and peasants eagerly fulfilling their harvest quotas. Over time the weekly became a reliable source of amusement, with cartoons featuring scantily clad women in provocative poses, kerchiefed village grandmothers trading barbs on their front stoop, and the occasional jab at fumbling bureaucrats, incompetent managers, and politicians lining their own pockets. Long gone was the harsh edge of class struggle, replaced by anodyne commentary on everyday life. Unfortunately, the entire world of joking around would change unalterably with the rise of capitalist class dynamics in the years to come, replaced as much by paranoia and ultranationalism as by playful memes on the internet.[72]

This has been an exercise in comparing the very similar way extremes of the left and right in 1940s Hungary used jokes to advance their political agenda. Crucial to this task was introducing extremist views as playful alternatives, as ideas worth pondering as people went about their lives. In the meantime, clever jokes and sharp editorial cartoons formed an on-ramp to political allegiance with unpopular political factions. At the *Steel Brush,* editors expressed antisemitic attitudes that were commonly held and formed the basis of government regulations throughout the war, so at first glance its cartoons may not have appeared unusual. The exterminationist agenda—initially understood in terms of resettlement and eventually carried out as genocide—was far more extreme than anyone could have imagined when the *Steel Brush* first appeared in print. We have no evidence indicating how widely read or popular the *Steel Brush* may have been, so any speculation on its impact would be pointless. Editors of *Ludas Matyi* could not rely on a wellspring of communist sympathies to build a following; the difficulties during the Soviet Republic in 1919, and the ensuing barrage of anti-communist propaganda throughout the interwar period, meant that stirring up class hatred would be an uphill battle. Drunken harangues about exploitation and discrimination were a nightly affair in pubs (and kitchens) throughout the land, but it took far more to assemble a viable political coalition to form a government.[73] Leftist activists, union stalwarts and members of the Social Democratic Party were potential allies in the struggle, but with time the Communist Party did everything possible to destabilize that party and vilify its leaders, eventually swallowing the remaining faction whole in 1948. In this sense the initial years of *Ludas Matyi* were tasked with teaching the language and visual contours of class hatred, to be elaborated in the ensuing forty years of Communist Party rule.

Key to the analysis here, and its broader impact, is Jean-Paul Sartre's insight into the pleasure of hate, and its capacity to rally followers keen to take pleasure in openly expressing animus. And if Ahmed and Szanto are correct about the emotional attraction and affective intentionality of hatred, this is a communality around which to build families and forge social bonds. It becomes a habitus, a commonsense perception to be bequeathed to one's children. Using humor to circulate and propagate hatred—whether it be published in newspaper cartoons or appear in memes on social media—is a powerful tool for sowing discord.

Disarming hateful stereotypes is difficult, in part because one often ends up repeating the ugly ideas in the process of dismantling the rhetorical edifice. But this is only a first

[72] Seth Graham, "The Wages of Syncretism: Folkloric New Russians and Post-Soviet Popular Culture," *The Russian Review* 62, no. 1 (January 2003): 37–53; Martha Lampland and Maya Nadkarni, "'What Happened to Jokes?' The Shifting Landscape of Humor in Hungary," *East European Politics and Societies* 30, no. 2 (May 2016): 449–71.

[73] One of my favorite quotes from the many 1950s party documents I read is the following: "Class warfare in the countryside is very difficult." Martha Lampland, *The Value of Labor: The Science Commodification in Hungary, 1920–1956* (Chicago, 2016), 234.

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step or partial measure. A more comprehensive approach to disarming hate requires developing tools to entice people to join alternative communities that promote inclusion and a camaraderie of hope. We must develop creative strategies using humor and other rhetorical techniques to convince people that opening doors and welcoming difference is a pleasurable experience. We are rewarded by living in communities where difference of opinion is an invitation to learn more about each other and ourselves. This is how bonds of mutual respect and charitable tolerance are forged that rebuff hatred and pernicious narcissism. Laughing with is fun.

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