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The Last Wave of Hungarian Collectivisation in the Mirror of Complaints¹

SUMMARY

The complaints filed by those who had been affected by the last wave of collectivisation help us get to know their strategies and decision making processes, thus these documents are a very interesting, colourful part of the sources documenting this period.

The personal ups and downs of those harmed by the collectivisation cannot be simply processed by looking through files of complaints since the personal experiences of collectivisation are not revealed only through complaints. One can, however, state that the large number of filed complaints made it possible to conduct various investigations and these offer a valuable insight into particular positions on those involved in agriculture at the turn of the 1950's and 1960's by giving the reader a glimpse of the procedures, methods and of the grievances these actions caused. They also reveal another segment of the Kádár era.

Key words: complaints, agriculture, collectivisation, co-ops, private farmers, Hungary

The Early Waves of Collectivisation and the Features of Agricultural Policy in Hungary after 1948

From 1949 on, the Hungarian Workers' Party, which was in complete control, aimed to change the social industrial and agricultural features of the country, following the Soviet pattern. In agriculture (like in industry) the main aim was to change the proprietary system. On the way to achieve this, due to the measures against those who worked in agriculture (obligatory deliveries and taxes, the latter ones were much higher in the case of private farmers, especially those who

¹ This paper is an abridged and revised version of an earlier work of mine: *Complaints from the final period of collectivisation, [in:] Countryside and Communism in Eastern Europe: Perceptions, Attitudes, Propaganda*, eds. S. Radu, C. Budeancă, Berlin 2016, pp. 296–334.

were considered kulaks²) the number of private farms decreased by approximately 400,000 between the end of 1948 and the summer of 1953 when the first wave of collectivisation took place, and the percentage of private property fell to two thirds. At the same time, the number of co-ops grew to more than 5,000 with as many as 370,000 members. Peasants who were pressed by the state either joined the co-ops or went to work for state farms, but most of them, 360,000 people found jobs in industry.³ After Stalin died, the pressure was eased and during the first presidency of Imre Nagy, taxes and obligatory deliveries were reduced and overdue taxes and obligatory deliveries were partly cancelled. It became possible for co-op members to quit at once, therefore they began to leave co-ops in great numbers.⁴ After Mátyás Rákosi regained power in 1955, collectivisation became the main aim again in agriculture,⁵ which was stopped by the revolution and war of independence in 1956.⁶

The third wave of co-op organisation and its consequences

In Hungary the last stage of organising co-ops took place under the new government after 1956, from the end of 1958 to 1961. People were encouraged by agitators to join cooperatives. In some cases even hundreds of agitators visited

² The term *kulák* became widely used in Hungarian Communist language usage since 1948. This expression was to indicate the relation of wealthy peasants to the tools of production. This notion was created in accordance with the theory of the fight of classes and was planted into practice in the tax policy. In 1948 those who had a land property of at least 15 hold [an old Hungarian measure of area] (8.55 hectares) or whose income reached 150 aranykorona [gold crown – is a measure of value defining the profitability, i. e. the quality and the location, of a plot] were obliged to pay a contribution to develop agriculture. As this measure affected a considerable number of the middle-scale farmers, in 1949 the limit of contribution payment was raised to 25 hold (14.25 hectares) and in the same year it was incorporated in the criteria that their income should reach 350 gold crowns. N. Nagy, *Peasant behaviour forms and survival techniques in villages of the Homokhátság region in the years of compulsory produce delivery, 1945–1956*, “Acta Ethnographica Hungarica” 2013, vol. 58, no. 1, p. 42; J. Tóth, *Padlássöprések kora. A beszolgáltatás Pest megyében* [The Age of Attic Cleansing. Obligatory Deliveries in Pest County], Budapest 2011, pp. 18–19.

³ I. Romsics, *Hungary in the Twentieth Century*, Budapest 2010), pp. 276–278; Zs. Varga, *Agrarian Development from 1945 to the Present Day*, [in:] *History of Hungarian Agriculture and Rural Life, 1848–2002*, J. Estók, G. Fehér, P. Gunst, Zs. Varga, Budapest 2003, pp. 236–240.

⁴ I. Romsics, *Hungary in the...*, pp. 293–296. On the changes in the agrarian sector, see: Zs. Varga, *Agrarian Development...*, pp. 240–242.

⁵ I. Romsics, *Hungary in the...*, pp. 297–298.

⁶ On the changes in the agrarian sector between 1948 and 1956, see: J.Ö. Kovács, *The Forced Collectivization of Agriculture in Hungary, 1948–1961*, [in:] *The Collectivization of Agriculture in Communist Eastern Europe. Comparison and Entanglements*, eds. C. Iordachi, A. Bauerkämper, Budapest, New York 2014, pp. 215–221.

a settlement paying a visit to the chosen farmers or ordering them to come to the council and tried to persuade them to join the cooperative by promises, threats or if these were not successful by physical means.⁷ The agitators paid special attention to the farmers who served as models for the community trying to persuade them to join the cooperatives.⁸ When such a farmer joined, the less wealthy farmers who were connected to him both by social and by work relationship followed suit.⁹

Compared to the earlier period, after a while those who controlled agriculture did not copy the Soviet model in a servile way.¹⁰ The political changes in the leadership of the agricultural sector at a country level brought about a change of direction different from the earlier one, which had been due to a greater emphasis on the policy affecting the standard of living and the solution to the problems of food supply. In 1960 the standpoint represented by Imre Dögei, the Minister of Agriculture and his deputies was replaced by that of the Agricultural Department led by Lajos Fehér, which cooperated with the Central Committee of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party (HSWP CC); Dögei was dismissed at the beginning of 1960 and Pál Losonczy took his place. After that, it became easier to choose the leaders of the cooperatives (compared to the earlier practice, the leaders were more acceptable to the community, e.g. those who used to be big farmers could also become leaders), to control co-ops, to create a work system and more favourable conditions were set up for private plots and for the remuneration of those working in co-ops.¹¹ The government tried to make the co-ops attractive in several ways, for example from 1949 on, the social insurance was gradually extended comprising benefits, child care allowance, old age pension and sick-pay to those who worked in co-ops. However, the value of these benefits was reduced by the fact that they were lower than those paid to workers and employees.¹²

⁷ On private people's experiences about the wave of co-op organisation, see: J.Ö. Kovács, *The Forced Collectivization...*, pp. 229–232.

⁸ T. Valuch, *Magyarország társadalomtörténete a XX. század második felében* [The Social History of Hungary in the Second Half of the 20th Century], Budapest 2001, p. 196.

⁹ Z. Tagányi, *A faluközösség a változó társadalomban. Esettanulmány Varsány példáján* [The Village Community in the Changing Society. A case study of Varsány], [in:] *A falu a mai magyar társadalomban* [The Village in the Contemporary Hungarian Society], ed. V. András, Budapest 1982, p. 344. Quotation *ibidem*.

¹⁰ On the last wave of collectivisation and its differences from the earlier ones, see: Zs. Varga, *The Appropriation and Modification of the "Soviet Model" of Collectivization: The Hungarian Case*, [in:] *The Collectivization of Agriculture in Communist Eastern Europe. Comparison and Entanglements*, eds. C. Iordachi, A. Bauerkämper Budapest, New York 2014, pp. 433–465.

¹¹ Further details on the change of course in collectivisation, see: Zs. Varga, *Politika, paraszti érdekérvényesítés és szövetkezetek Magyarországon 1956–1967* [Politics, the Assertion of Agrarian Interests and Co-operatives in Hungary 1956–1967], Budapest 2001, pp. 58–71.

¹² Zs. Varga, *Mit ér a munkás, ha paraszt (is)? A falusi munkásság és a hatalom a Kádár-korszakban* [What is a Worker Worth if They Are Peasants (too)? Village Workers and the Power in the Kádár Era], "Korall" 2012, vol. 13, no. 49, p. 45.

Due to collectivisation, the number of co-op members went up from 170,000 in 1958 to 1.2 million in 1962, whereas the number of private farmers plummeted from more than 1.6 million to 145,000; later their number went on decreasing and went under 100,000.¹³ The change in employment structure, social mobility and together with them commuting and migration gained momentum. The instability of the income coming from agriculture was one of the main reasons of migration, therefore the families whose existence was undermined had to seek new sources of income. A considerable part of the agricultural society went to find jobs in industry as after the forced industrialization there was demand for workforce in the factories. It was also typical that co-ops had to cope with workforce shortage as it was mainly the working men who left agriculture and it was women, elderly people hoping for old age pension and sick people demanding sick-pay who joined the cooperatives. Allotting private plots also made many people remaining in the villages join the co-ops.¹⁴ It was part and parcel of forced collectivisation that many people felt that compared to their earlier status as private farmers, being an employee in a co-op or a factory was a loss of prestige.

The waves of collectivisation brought about a basic change in the lives of village people as peasants disappeared both in terms of history and social statistics (the former structure of villages and even families underwent a change) and many things were lost that were accumulated by this social group in terms of knowledge, values and work organisation.¹⁵

¹³ More details on the social effects of collectivisation, see: T. Valuch, *Magyarország társadalomtörténete...*, pp. 197–200; T. Valuch, “Községünkben nagy előrehaladást értünk el a szocializmus építése terén.” *A történeti parasztság és az életmód változásai Magyarországon a hatvanas években* [“There Has Been Great Progress in the Building of Socialism in Our Village.” The Historical Peasantry and Changes in Lifestyle in Hungary in the sixties] [in:] *Múlt századi hétköznapok. Tanulmányok a Kádár-rendszer kialakulásának időszakáról* [Daily Life in the Last Century. Studies in the Formative Period of the Kádár Regime], ed. R.M. János, Budapest 2003), pp. 129–176.

¹⁴ According to Act 7 of 1959, each co-op member with a household who preformed a certain number of work unit had the right to maintain a household plot. It could have been maximum 1 hold (0.57 hectar) and in the beginning the number of animals allowed to be kept was also limited. While in the 1960’s official economic politics considered private plots as a temporary and forced concession, it was not only maintained in the next decade, but it also caught on. Meanwhile its characteristics also changed, from self-sufficient they became commodity producers for the market. At the end of the decade small farmers made a considerable part of the production in several sectors of agriculture (concerning pigs, grape, fruit and vegetable growing they gave more than 50–60% of the production. Their share of some small animals or in prime vegetables was over 80 or even 90%). J. Molnár, “A” *háztáji* [“The” Household Plot], [in:] *Magyarország agrártörténete* [Hungary’s Agrarian History], eds. I. Orosz, L. Für, P. Romány, Budapest 1996, pp. 631–643.

¹⁵ On this topic, see the works on ‘de-peasanting’ published in *Századvég*: T. Valuch, *A történeti parasztság változásai az 1960-as években* [Changes of the Historical Peasantry in the 1960s], “*Századvég*” 2003, vol. 8, no. 1, Új folyam no. 27, pp. 3–29; I. Kovách, *A magyar társadalom «parasztalanítása» – európai összehasonlításban* [The «Elimination» of Peasantry

Concerning the effect co-op organisation had on the collective identity of Hungarian peasantry, two things have to be noted: on the one hand, the self-image is made up of several factors,¹⁶ and as most private farmers lost its main support, their land, the self-identification of many was shattered. On the other hand, when the self-image of a group is weakened or destroyed in the case of some members, the self-identification of the whole group is at risk.¹⁷

Apart from the social and economic impacts, the forced change in the agricultural sector left its traces in other ways too, the suffering party was/could have been hurt mentally too during “the socialist re-organisation of agriculture”. This phenomenon, which became well-known owing to Pál Juhász psychiatrist and his colleagues, was called co-op neurosis from the early 1960’s on. In the village of Csengersima in Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg County the experts tried to find out whether the neurosis (a mental illness accompanied with depression) was present, and after the illness had been diagnosed, they examined the reasons of it. The research was induced by the new lifestyle and the changed employment status following the organisation of cooperatives from 1958 on. Analysing the year 1961, the experts concluded that the problems that arose from the organisation of cooperatives were among the reasons for neurosis the sick people were suffering

in Hungarian Society – Compared to Europe], “Századvég” 2003, vol. 8, no. 2, Új folyam no. 28, pp. 41–65; L. Laki, *Törés és folyamatosság* [Break and Continuity], “Századvég” 2003, vol. 8, no. 3, Új folyam no. 29, pp. 87–92; G. Gyáni, *Paraszt: mit jelent és mi jelentésének a határa? Megjegyzések Kovách Imre: “A magyar társadalom »parasztalanítása« – európai összehasonlításban” című tanulmányához* [Peasant: What Does It Mean and What Are the Limitations to Its Meaning? Notes on the Study Called “The »Elimination of Peasantry« in Hungarian Society – Compared to Europe” by Imre Kovách], “Századvég” 2003, vol. 8, no. 3, Új folyam no. 29, pp. 71–76; I. Harcsa, *Parasztalanítás – egy fogalom születése* [The Elimination of Peasantry – the Birth of a Notion], “Századvég” 2003, vol. 8, no. 3, Új folyam no. 29, pp. 77–85; Gy. Benda, *Hosszú távú folyamatok és rövid távú ingadozások, társadalomstatistikai vizsgálatok és lokális kutatások. Hozzászólás Kovách Imre és Valuch Tibor tanulmányához* [Long Term Processes and Short Term Fluctuations, Social Statistical Analyses and Local Researches. Observations Concerning the Study by Imre Kovách and Tibor Valuch], “Századvég” 2003, vol. 8, no. 4, Új folyam no. 30, pp. 99–102; I. Kovách, *Parasztalanítás: kérdőjelek és válaszok. Válasz Harcsa Istvánnak, Laki Lászlónak, Gyáni Gábornak és Benda Gyulának* [The Elimination of Peasantry: Question Marks and Answers. An Answer to István Harcsa, Gábor Gyáni and Gyula Benda], “Századvég” 2003, vol. 8, no. 4, Új folyam no. 30, pp. 105–108.

¹⁶ Talking about either private or collective identity, it can be said that their constituents are not constant, their frameworks are in continuous motion, changing all the time, but when the central element, in this case the land, disappeared, those who had cultivated land as private farmers were not able to reconstruct their self-identification as there was nothing to rely on. On the change of identity, see: Gy. Bindorffer, *Kettős identitás. Etnikai és nemzeti azonosságudat Dunabogdányban* [Dual Identity. Ethnic and National Sense of Identity in Dunabogdány], Budapest 2001, p. 20.

¹⁷ J. Assmann, *Cultural memory and early civilization. Writing, remembrance, and political imagination*, New York 2011, pp. 113–114.

from.¹⁸ The neurosis triggered by the co-ops was discussed in a separate study, its conclusion was based on the examination of several phenomena: a) the change of the standard of living (among those suffering from neurosis there were some whose standard of living increased but in most cases it fell after the collectivisation), b) the issue of the end of material independence and the changes in the ways of gaining material wealth, c) the evaluation of adaptability due to the hierarchy set up during the mass production in big farms, d) the satisfaction/dissatisfaction with the leaders of the co-op, e) the dissolution of the former family, work and other structures, f) the new way of assessing people different from the earlier ones, g) the uncertainty and tension resulting from the merger of the cooperative of the researched village and that of its neighbour, h) the issue of dismissing those who proved to be inadequate to lead, i) the isolation of those who remained private farmers.¹⁹

The negative effects of co-op organisation were faded for a long time, or to be more precise, the Kádár government considered the atrocities committed against private farmers a sensitive topic to be avoided both officially and unofficially. Although I do not discuss the memory of the events, it has to be noted that as those who suffered the atrocities could not mention the events in public, these memories were suppressed for long. This suppression was revealed by the democratic political course after 1989, when the memories of forced co-op organisation were allowed to surface.²⁰

¹⁸ P. Juhász, *A falusi betegek neurosisának kórokai* [The Causes of Neurosis in the Case of Village People], *Ideggyógyászati Szemle* 1964, vol. 17, no. 2, pp. 37–44; P. Juhász, *Egy kelet-magyarországi falu lakói neurosisának szociogén kórokai* [The Socio-genic Causis of Neurosis in the Case of the Inhabitants of a Village in Eastern Hungary], *Magyar Tudomány* 1970, vol. 77, Új folyam vol. 15, no. 2, pp. 93–101.

¹⁹ P. Juhász, *“A mezőgazdasági termelőszövetkezeti mozgalom a falusiak neurosisának szempontjából,”* [The Movement of Agricultural Cooperatives from the Point of View of Village People Suffering from Neurosis], [in:] *Pszichológiai tanulmányok VII.* [Psychological Studies VII.], ch. ed. Dr. P. Gegesi Kiss, Budapest 1965, pp. 247–253.

²⁰ The memory of collectivisation was emphasized in many of the works that were sent in for the grant for peasant autobiographies announced by the Lakitelek Foundation in 1991. The contrast between the concept of the Kádár era and that of the times after the change of regime are clearly shown by the fact that the peasants’ autobiographies written before 1981 hardly discussed the 2 or 3 decades after 1945, they compressed that period into a couple of sentences.” More details on the grant announced by the Lakitelek Foundation, see: M. Demeter-Zayzon, “Emlékezem, hogy rám is emlékezzenek...” A Lakitelek Alapítvány 1991-es paraszti önéletrő pályázatára beérkezett anyag elemzése, [“I Remember to Be Remembered...” The Analysis of the Material Sent in for the Grant for Peasant Autobiographies Announced by the Lakitelek Foundation in 1991], *Etnographia* 1994, vol. 105, pp. 247–268.

Private complaints caused by collectivization

The general characteristics of complaints

The Ministry of Agriculture, like the other main authorities, had an office for complaints called Complaints Office. It was a department of the Secretariat of the Ministry (until 1950 it was called Presidential Main Department); the secretariat was established back in 1945, but the Complaints Office was only started in 1953. In 1957, after the Secretariat was reorganised, the Complaints Office was closed and was restarted only in 1960. Therefore any supposed or real complaints made by agrarian workers have been preserved from two periods here, from the years 1953–1956 and 1960–1967. In the second part of my work I intend to present the documents of a year from the Office.

I have chosen to analyse the complaints received in 1960. The only reason for choosing this year is that this was the first year during the wave of collectivisation between 1958 and 1961, from which complaints can be found among the documents of the Complaints Office. The complaints are not limited to the events of that year, there are complaints among them which are related to the earlier waves of collectivisation. 167 complaints can be found from that year and I will focus on 129 as these are the ones that concern the complaints caused by the third wave of collectivisation. However, the 129 cases do not mean the same number of complainants as there were cases where one complaint covered many complainants. In one case, for example, a complaint was made in the name of 34 complainants,²¹ in another case²² all the members of a co-op made a complaint. The 129 cases that have been selected comprise not only the co-op members' grievances but also the complaints made by private farmers.

Before presenting the documents, the question should be answered whether this was really the number of complaints that were sent to the Complaints Office in 1960 and if not, how the Office selected the documents and how many complaints there could be at a country level. We can receive an indirect answer by looking at the number of complaints sent to other institutions. Several newspapers and the Hungarian Radio and Television were flooded by the letters of complaint connected to agriculture and the organisation of co-ops within it, which were regularly forwarded along with the requests for investigations to the Ministry of Agriculture or the Central Committee of the HSWP. In a report written to the Agricultural Department of the HSWP CC, concerning the

²¹ Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár Országos Levéltára [National Archives of Hungary], XIX-K-1-o, Földművelésügyi Minisztérium, Bejelentések Irodája [Ministry of Agriculture, Complaints Office] – hereafter cited as MNL OL, XIX-K-1-o –, To-29/1/1960. Box 48.

²² MNL OL, XIX-K-1-o, Me-21/1960. Box 48.

period between 4 January and 8 January 1960, the editorial board of newspaper called *Szabad Föld* mentioned that “the number of incoming letters have increased extremely” and most of them are concerned with co-op problems. The report also summarizes the content of 37 letters.²³ Again the *Szabad Föld* sent to the Agricultural Department of the HSWP CC the following report on 17 March 1961: “On average we receive 70–80 letters but sometimes even more not including the letters addressed to Doctor Buga /10–12 every day/ or the letters sent to the column called «Beszéljük meg (Let’s discuss it)», whose number also reaches 10–15 a day. Most of the letters reflect the practical problems in connection with the Socialist reorganisation of agriculture”. The report contains an excerpt of 82 individual cases and in three cases it gives a summary of problems raised by several letter writers.²⁴ A report was also written on the letters sent to the editorial board of the aforementioned newspaper between 1 January and 4 February 1960. The great number of complaints is indicated by the fact that among the 5,316 letters received “the letters concerning the problems of co-ops and mainly their organisation are in the largest number”.²⁵ A report on the problems of the co-op members by the Hungarian Radio and Television was sent to the Agricultural Department of the HSWP CC. The report was written based upon 257 letters and investigations.²⁶ Another report was made on the problems of the co-ops by the Hungarian Radio and Television on 12 July 1961. The report discussed the complaints received in that year, altogether 581 letters were taken into consideration.²⁷ According to the party organisations, the magnitude of the complaints – I will discuss in detail a couple of reports on them – decreased, but more and more of them were addressed to the press or the Hungarian Radio and Television, and according to the report, the Hungarian Radio and Television received 56 letters of complaint between

²³ Feljegyzés a Szabad Föld szerkesztőségébe 1960. január 4-től 8-ig beérkezett levelekről [Report on the letters received by the editors of Szabad Föld between 4 and 8 January 1960]. Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár Országos Levéltára [National Archives of Hungary], M-KS-288. f. 28., Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt Központi Szervei, Mezőgazdasági Osztály [Central Organizations of Hungarian Socialist Workers’ Party, Departure of Agriculture] – hereafter cited as MNL OL, M-KS-288. f. 28. – 1960. Box 16.

²⁴ Jelentés a Szabad Föld szerkesztőségébe érkezett levelekről [Report on the letters received by the editors of Szabad Föld]. MNL OL, M-KS-288. f. 28./1960. Box 16.

²⁵ Jelentés a Szabad Föld szerkesztőségébe 1960. január 1-től február 4-ig érkezett levelekről [Report on the letters received by the editors of Szabad Föld between 1 January and 4 February 1960]. MNL OL, M-KS-288. f. 28./1960. Box 21.

²⁶ Feljegyzés a termelőszövetkezeti tagok egyes problémáiról [Report on the individual problems of co-op members]. MNL OL, M-KS-288. f. 28./1960. Box 16.

²⁷ Feljegyzés a tsz-ek zárszámadásával foglalkozó levelek tartalmáról [Report on the content of the letters concerning the final balance of co-ops]. MNL OL, M-KS-288. f. 28./1960. Box 16.

16 and 31 January 1960.²⁸ Apart from the ones cited here, many reports, investigations and statistical reports were made concerning the complaints – mainly broken down to counties – at various party, administrative or law court levels; some authorities enclosed the letters of complaint to their reports. Many cases were described in detail in them, and what is more, the complaints were mostly investigated and measures were taken in accordance with the decisions. Although not all of the aforementioned cases reflect the 1960 situation, all of them were written due to the same issue, which lasted for several years and they are telling about the number of complaints for both the whole period and for some parts of it, to put it more concretely, they greatly exceed the number of cases received by the Complaints Office. All in all, it can be assumed that not all the complaints dating from 1960 were forwarded by the Complaints Office to the archives or in or sometimes not the whole case. Moreover, due to the great variety of the addressees of the complaints – the press, the Hungarian Radio and Television etc. – the number of complaints from the Ministry of Agriculture that have been archived in the National Archives of Hungary will not even approximate the real number of complaints written in a year in the whole country.

I think it is worth describing the general procedures. After a complaint reached the Complaints Office, it was summarized then the Office forwarded the complaint to the competent office for further investigation. The investigation was carried out and the decision was made by the Department of Agriculture of the Implementation Committee of the Town or District Council in the first instance, if a complainant was not satisfied with the sentence, their complaints were forwarded to the Department of Agriculture of the Implementation Committee of the County Council, against whose sentence there was no appealing.²⁹ The authority competent in a case usually based their decision on an investigation conducted on the site, in many cases even the reports written on the investigation have been preserved, which can contribute with precious data to our knowledge of the case or in some cases the complainants themselves. After the report had been written, a decision was made, which was sent both by the Agricultural Department of the Implementation Committee of the Town or District Council and by that of the County Council in different forms both to the complainant and to the Complaints Office. Many people protested against the decisions even in

²⁸ Tájékoztató jelentés a Politikai Bizottság számára a tsz mozgalom számszerű fejlesztése során elkövetett különféle durva módszerekről [Report to the Political Committee on the rough methods followed during the development of the co-op movement]. MNL OL, M-KS-288. f. 28./1960. Box 21.

²⁹ There were some exceptional cases when the decision was not made by the Department of Agriculture of the Implementation Committee of the District, Town or County Council. In these cases the complainant could turn to a law court.

the second instance, but these could only exert a psychological pressure at most as is shown by the following case. After a complainant urged the authorities to change their former decision many times both in person and by sending letters, the official gave the following response: "Moreover, we have to add that the complainant is a staid letter writer, who ignores the advice and information given by the land arranging office, and his obstinacy and letters of complaint even hinder the arrangement of his own case instead of helping to conclude it".³⁰

The formal characteristics of complaints and reports

If we see the way the complaints were sent to the ministry, it can be stated that in 53 of the 129 cases a letter of complaint was sent to the addressee.³¹ In 17 cases the letters are missing, although according to the particular file they were available at a certain stage of the case. 28 of the 36 letters that still exist were handwritten and 8 were typed by the complainants. The complaints were either reporting in person or it is not clear whether the complainants reported their grievances in person or in a letter. One person reported on the phone.³²

Not all complainants turned directly to the Complaints Office, many sent their reports directly to the Ministry of Agriculture or one of the head departments. Several people wrote to newspapers (in 2 cases to *Szabad Föld* and in 1 case to *Népszabadság*) or to the Press Department of the Hungarian Radio and Television (in 7 cases) and the addressees, requiring investigation in the cases, forwarded the documents sent to them to the appropriate place. In the latter group there are two complainants that sent their complaints to several forums, probably hoping for a better judgement. There were three complainants who sent their complaints to the state party. Two claimants turned directly to János Kádár asking for investigation, the letter was forwarded to the Central Committee of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party and then it forwarded it to the Complaints Office.

With regard to the long list of addressees the question may arise whether the greater publicity provided by the press, the radio, the television and the state party could have resulted in a more favourable judgement. Apart from the letters addressed to the minister and the head departments of the ministry, there were 15 cases that received a great publicity, in 4 cases the decision was favourable and

³⁰ MNL OL, XIX-K-1-o, Be-2/1960. Box 48.

³¹ In 4 of the 53 cases after sending a letter, the complainant appeared in the Complaints Office in person, sometimes at the beginning of the case, sometimes during the investigation.

³² In 4 cases the complainant turned to the authorities in different ways at the different stages of the case, both in person and in letter. In one of the cases where it is impossible to detect the way a complaint reached the Complaints Office, the complainant urged the arrangement of the case in a letter.

in 7 cases the final decision was unfavourable to the complainant and in 4 cases where the complaint was made up of several sections, the decision was partly favourable and partly unfavourable to the complainants. So greater publicity did not mean a positive assessment automatically. However, it may seem to be a little schematic to look at the proportion of favourable and unfavourable decisions this way if one does not take into consideration that those seeking remedy for their grievances were not always satisfied with the decisions held favourable for them by the agricultural department of a county or district council. One claimant for example complained that he had lent some money to the co-op, but the co-op did not pay it back. After the investigation the co-op announced that it is willing to pay the aforementioned sum if the claimant could prove his statement or the leaders, who were no longer in their former positions at the time the complaint was issued, would give a written receipt of the debt.³³ There is a complaint where there were several claimants and in the case of some the decision was positive but in the case of others it was unfavourable for them.³⁴ Therefore in 27 cases of the 129 it can be stated that the decision was favourable for the claimant and in 61 cases it can firmly be stated that the decision was unfavourable for the claimants. In 3 cases the submission is available but the result of the investigation and the decision made in the case are not attached to the file. In some cases the Complaints Office did not make a decision but only took a position in the question and although it favours the claimant, the decision is not known.

Some of the submissions cannot be considered complaints but requests or questions: in one of them someone asks the Ministry of Agriculture to allow him/her not to join the co-op in that particular economic year due to his poor health, he would like to work on his private farm and he would like the agitators not to harass him. According to the answer, if he joins the co-op, he will receive a job in accordance with his health condition, so he can manage.³⁵ It can also be stated that several cases were left unresolved, so after it was reported, the case was not solved by the investigation or even if it cast light to some offence or law infringement, those responsible were not found or the case took a different course and due to it, the roles changed. (To understand these cases better, one should glean from the texts what might have happened in the time between the report was issued and the case was closed.) Mrs. Cs. D., for example, was given two replacement plots during the settlement of land properties. She was working on them, but according to her statement, the president of the local co-op wanted to take away her plots and therefore he acted and spoke rudely to her while she was working. "[...] while she was hoeing – before the eyes of her two children and

³³ MNL OL, XIX-K-1-o, Ba-9/1960. Box 48.

³⁴ MNL OL, XIX-K-1-o, Ki-3/1960. Box 48; MNL OL, XIX-K-1-o, Ne-6/1960. Box 48.

³⁵ MNL OL, XIX-K-1-o, Bo-32/1960. Box 48.

her 72-year old father, he pushed her violently. She wore the traces of this violence on her arm for several days. Once she turned to the district council with her complaint, where they sent a message with her to the president of the co-op, saying that they are starting to be fed up with his behaviour. The president answered to the message that she might as well go to the ministry, he takes orders from no one.” According to the investigation, the following things happened: the claimant received two real estates of 2 and 3 hold (1.15 and 1.72 hectares) respectively in two villages (Tenk and Erdőtelke), which means 5 hold (2.87 hectares) altogether. In Tenk he did not cultivate her new plot but she sowed part of her former plot, which had been incorporated in the land of the co-op; the rest of the land was cultivated by the co-op. In Erdőtelke the president of the co-op led the claimant out of her former plot as she began to cultivate that instead of her new plot. Therefore the action of the co-op president was justified.

“During the investigation it has been proved that the claimant has a difficult and quarrelling nature and she swore both at the president of the co-op and the workers of the council and called them servants several times. She stated that she did not know what they made her sign but she admitted to signing the aforementioned documents [the documents with the lot number of her original land and that of the land given in exchange for it – K. Cs.]. Certainly this argumentation is unacceptable. According to the record made with the claimant during the investigation, she stated that she had no objection to either the action of the co-op or that of the Executive Committee of the Council. I do not consider the action of the co-op president unlawful or against the rules as the claimant did not want to stop cultivating the land sown by him unlawfully despite several warnings. In my opinion, the president of the co-op acted lawfully in this case, protecting the rights of the co-op”.³⁶ It cannot be clarified exactly what happened in the time between the case was reported and the investigation, but it is likely that the claimant was convinced by “persuasion” or she withdrew her claim seeing the cooperation of those against her.

It has turned out that some letters were not written by the claimants themselves. In some of these cases the difficulty to write letters and the incorrect spelling indicates old age and/or the lack of education.

In other cases the claimant is not the same person as the one who suffered injustice and the complaint was put in words by a child or any other relative of the person concerned. “Please, find attached the letter written to us by Mrs. B. K., a resident in Budapest at the following address [...], in which she relates the following events. Her mother joined the co-op called Kossuth with her land of 900 négyszögöl [0.32 ha] in Heves. She was not allowed to retain it as a household plot, but she was given a land of corn somewhere else instead. The claimant

³⁶ MNL OL, XIX-K-1-o, D-08-1960. Box 48.

noted that the village council gave the above mentioned land of her mother to a private farmer. She considers this procedure unjust and requests that the aforementioned land near accommodation road [...] in Heves should be given to her brother K. Cs. a resident in Bocsonád at [...] instead of another private farmer. If it cannot be given to her brother, it should be given to her mother from the next economic year on".³⁷ It was not unique when the office concerned "found out" that the person suffering injustice did not even know about the submission of a complaint. In one of the cases the claimant complained that the co-op in Balatonberény wanted to take away the horse from his mother's stable. However, according to the investigation, the claim is unjustified as the complaint was not written by the claimant but someone else asked to do this by her mother. The mother admitted to this and asked the investigation to be stopped. What really happened cannot be clarified without the help of the protagonists or those who knew the case well, but it is telling that according to the records written only a day earlier, the mother had stated that she had talked with her son about the actions to be taken. With regard to this, it can be presumed that the mother changed the number of those concerned in the complaint in the interest of her son. The investigation also "found out" that the complaint was written by an ex-land owner "who works in the village as a cantor trying to undermine the authority of organisations and state organs and helping to mislead the authorities".³⁸ It can be supposed that in many cases the claimants asked others to write the complaints for them because it was easier for the person writing the complaint to use the language expected by the offices due to their qualifications or positions.

The characteristics of the contents of complaints and reports

Below I would like to give a short analysis of some characteristic features of the language used by one of the parties, namely the claimant.

Taking a letter in our hand, it is the addressee or the form of address that is conspicuous. The letters of complaint are often addressed to the Minister of Agriculture himself: "Dear Comrade Minister of Agriculture",³⁹ and among the addressees one can find the Ministry of Agriculture too,⁴⁰ "With all respect, I ask the Ministry of Agriculture".⁴¹ In another case that is to be discussed in detail below, the "Dear Editorial Board" of *Népszabadság* is addressed by the president

³⁷ MNL OL, XIX-K-1-o, Ko-24/1960. Box 48.

³⁸ MNL OL, XIX-K-1-o, Ki-25/1960. Box 48.

³⁹ MNL OL, XIX-K-1-o, E-5/1960. Box 48.

⁴⁰ MNL OL, XIX-K-1-o, B-10/1960. Box 48; MNL OL, XIX-K-1-o, Be-12/1960. Box 48; MNL OL, XIX-K-1-o, Cs-22/1960. Box 48.

⁴¹ MNL OL, XIX-K-1-o, Cs-19/1960. Box 48.

of a council who sought to justify his deeds,⁴² another letter writer addressed the President of National Board of Cooperatives.⁴³ The writer of the above mentioned letter addressed a concrete person whom he called comrade in accordance with the spirit of the age;⁴⁴ besides the writer of this letter, there were other complainants too who used the title comrade at the beginning of their letters. Some letters did not contain address forms at all. One of the letters, although it was addressed by the claimant to *Szabad Föld* hoping for greater publicity, is more like an application sent to an official place: “Undersigned Cs. K., 71-year old resident in Bokros...”⁴⁵

Concerning the ending of the letters, it can be considered common that the letters are ended only with a signature⁴⁶ or with the signature with the expression “Yours faithfully” added.⁴⁷

By just looking over the address forms and endings briefly, it is conspicuous that some of the complainants who worked in agriculture acquired the language furthered by the system, or in some cases they may have identified themselves with it; besides the address comrade the following letter ending expressions can be found. “Having repeated our request we remain in patriotic respect”; “looking forward to your reply with regards from a comrade”;⁴⁸ “with regards from a comrade”;⁴⁹ “remaining with regards from a comrade”;⁵⁰ “looking forward to your reply with regards from a comrade”;⁵¹ “Requesting Your action and answer, I send my regards as a comrade”.⁵²

In the complaints the expressions and figures of speech characteristic of the times of the state party can be seen elsewhere too. They can show, although very rarely, what was the purpose of the letter writers by using the language created by the dictatorship. Reading one of them, the above mentioned president of a council, it seems very likely that apart from trying to prove that he was right, the letter writer tried to show that he identified himself with the system and tried to identify his “opponent” for the system and to stigmatize him when describing his case he mentions that the farmer who he has a dispute with over his plot: “leads the

⁴² MNL OL, XIX-K-1-o, Bu-16/1960. Box 48.

⁴³ MNL OL, XIX-K-1-o, D-10/1/1960. Box 48.

⁴⁴ MNL OL, XIX-K-1-o, Be-10/1960. Box 48.

⁴⁵ MNL OL, XIX-K-1-o, Ba-9/1960. Box 48.

⁴⁶ Some cases where the letters of complaint contained only signatures: MNL OL, XIX-K-1-o, Ba-9/1960. Box 48.; MNL OL, XIX-K-1-o, Be-10/1960. Box 48.

⁴⁷ This ending formula can be seen in the letters attached to the following case files: MNL OL, XIX-K-1-o, B-10/1960. Box 48.; MNL OL, XIX-K-1-o, J-7/1960. Box 48.

⁴⁸ MNL OL, XIX-K-1-o, Be-12/1960. Box 48.

⁴⁹ MNL OL, XIX-K-1-o, Bo-32/1960. Box 48.

⁵⁰ MNL OL, XIX-K-1-o, Cs-19/1960. Box 48.

⁵¹ MNL OL, XIX-K-1-o, Bu-16/1960. Box 48.

⁵² MNL OL, XIX-K-1-o, D-10/1/1960. Box 48.

life of a declassed proletarian, [highlighted by me – K. Cs.] does not work and has debts of thousands of forints that cannot be exacted”.⁵³ As opposed to him, in the case of the letter writers the use of figures of speech rather suggests an adaptation.⁵⁴

Analysing the contents of the letters it can also be observed that the officers did not consider the submissions only cases to be solved but they also commented on them “led by their inner conviction” or “officially”. That’s what happened in the case when the writer of the submission did not only describe her complaint (she complained that he was a private farmer, however, her plot was incorporated in the land of the co-op saying that she lived together with her younger brother, who joined the co-op and no plot was given to her in exchange for the land taken away), but she also made remarks on the activities of the president of the council. “Wherever I go or wherever I turn to, the president of the Council of Apátfalva is always ahead of me...”; “Well, the Council is so honest here.” This is underscored with red by the official jotting down the following remark next to it: “it exhausts the notion of slander”.⁵⁵ It was common that neither the co-ops nor their leaders were treated with great respect. In another case the claimant complained that his wife, who was a member of the co-op, looks after five children, so they promised him that he could stay with them, however, the co-op is continuously forcing him to take part in the production and they do not take into consideration that he is often ill. Moreover, he also complained that the co-op took away some livestock and three sheaves of crops from his household plot. According to the investigation, the co-op could not enforce its earlier promises and only those were not to work who could prove that they were ill or old and his wife had taken part in cultivating their land earlier. The co-op acted in accordance with the regulation when it took both the livestock and the crops. Finally, when the case was considered closed, the Agricultural Department of the Executive Committee of the District Council added: “The disputes and arguments between Your wife and the leaders of the co-op are caused by Your wife, who does not keep the basic regulation and tries to denigrate the president and the other leaders spreading the rumour that they are embezzling thieves and all this is nothing else but slander against the leaders”.⁵⁶

⁵³ MNL OL, XIX-K-1-o, Bu-16/1960. Box 48.

⁵⁴ Analysing the work of the American Soviet expert, Stephen Kotkin, Sándor Horváth writes on the Bolshevik language used in the USSR that people acquired this ritual way of speech applied in everyday life to achieve their aims and they applied it later. S. Horváth, *A mindennapi szocializmus és a jelenkortörténet. Nézőpontok a szocialista korszak kutatásához* [Everyday Socialism and Present Day History. Point of View for the Research of the Socialist Era], “Századvég” 2006, vol. 11, no. 2, Új folyam no. 40, pp. 22–23. The chapter of the aforementioned work discussed here: S. Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain. Stalinism as a Civilization*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London 1997, pp. 198–237.

⁵⁵ MNL OL, XIX-K-1-o, Be-10/1960. Box 48.

⁵⁶ MNL OL, XIX-K-1-o, L-16/1960. Box 48.

The social background of the person issuing a complaint to the Complaints Office can also be examined. I thought that before a thorough analysis of the sources, it is practical to divide the claimants into two major groups, the group of private farmers and that of co-op members (the supporting and normal members are not separated). However, after the cases were inspected more thoroughly, it turned out that this issue cannot be solved so simply, because there is a group, although only few people belonged here, which was constituted by those who were neither co-op members nor private farmers. Taking it into consideration, it can be stated that as co-op workers and as private farmers altogether 63 people turned to the Complaints Office with their complaints (or to be more exact that is the number of submissions as it happened in several cases that some complainants handed in their complaint together), which makes up 48.83% in both groups concerning all the cases. Apart from them, the Complaints Office dealt with 4 cases (which make up 3.1% of all cases) where the claimants belonged to neither group; and this picture is more refined if we take the case where the complaint can be connected to both co-op members and to private farmers. Certainly, by dividing letter writers into two groups, the circle of complaint writers is simplified as the co-op members (except for those who received old age pension or permanent health care treatment or those who were waiting for them to be granted) almost all of them were agricultural workers, but in the case of private farmers the situation was not so simple. Some of them had several irons in the fire, i.e. their main income did not come from agriculture, they only cultivated land besides their other job in another branch of the economy (commuters).⁵⁷ (The assessment of commuters fluctuated between two extremities in that era: according to one, they are unreliable and backward both politically and culturally, so their group must be eliminated. According to the other, their existence is favourable from an economic point of view, so one needn't try to eliminate them, and with the progress of socialism their group will disappear).⁵⁸ In one case the claimant complained that although he was not a member of the co-op as he was a weir-keeper and earlier he had been an industrial worker, the co-op took his land and did not give him replacement.⁵⁹ (The income gained from several sectors, i.e. agriculture and industry, made it possible for those living in villages to start to become wealthier after they recovered from the shock caused by collectivisation. As a result, from the second half of the 1960's houses were modernized, new houses were built and a lot of durable goods such as furniture, refrigerators,

⁵⁷ On the phenomenon of commuters, see: Zs. Varga, *Mit ér a munkás...*, pp. 37–57.

⁵⁸ On the discourse on the assessment of commuters, see: The discourse on the assessment of commuters, see: E.Zs. Tóth, *Fekete vonat, Cséplő Gyuri, A pártfogolt – Ingázók a dokumentumfilmekben* [Black Train, Gyuri Cséplő, The Protégé – Commuters in Documentaries], "Eszmélet" 2008, vol. 20, no. 77, pp. 50–57.

⁵⁹ MNL OL, XIX-K-1-o, Cs-19/1960. Box 48.

other kitchen tools, TVs etc. were purchased).⁶⁰ At another time, the following event happened. “[The complainant] appeared at the council of the village on 19 January and enquired about the processes concerning land. Then two people who were unknown to her told her to sign a printed paper that was placed in front of her. The claimant signed it without reading it, she cannot see properly without glasses, trusting that [her case] would be arranged according to her request. She wanted to lend her land to the co-op as she needs the income. At the moment she works as a cleaning lady for the External Trading Company, so she has a low salary. She requests a revision of the circumstances of the offer and she would like it [the offer for the benefit of the state] to be repealed”.⁶¹ The deception that can be seen in this case (like the physical atrocities to be described below) can be considered an element of the means of dictatorship, reflecting the abuse of power committed by the agitators and their trust in their indemnity even if someone reports them.

In the case of the 4 claimants who were neither private farmers nor co-op members, no common feature can be detected except that they were all connected to agriculture. The most complicated case that has already been mentioned several times cannot be considered a complaint. The submission was sent by the president of a council who wrote a letter to Népszabadság, and the newspaper forwarded it to the Complaints Office. The writer of the letter asked if he was right when during the arrangement of the land a private farmer wasn't left on his own land to continue working there, so the principle of staying in the same place was not applied. It happened because that person offered his land but did not hand in the signed documents to the council, so it was not valid. However, his land was given to someone else in the meantime. The sender of the submission mentioned that he did not allow scything and selling the crops on that piece of land because it was not used by him at the time of harvest. Up to this point one could say that it is a common case, a local leader wanted to justify his deeds. However, the rest of the process differed from the normal ones as the system did not protect this cog-wheel in its machine. During the investigation it turned out that the aforementioned resident did not sign the declaration of offer, but he received permission to scythe and use the crops, so the action of the president of the council was unjust. The plot could not be given back to its owner as it had already been given to someone else, so he would be given a replacement plot somewhere else. It also came to light that the writer of the submission committed abuses against others too, and there are several legal processes in progress against him.⁶² In the last case a railway worker complained that although his son had

⁶⁰ T. Valuch, *From Long Houses to Square. Changing Village Living Conditions in Sixties Hungary*, [in:] *Muddling through in the Long 1960s. Ideas and Everyday Life in High Politics and the Lower Classes of Communist Hungary*, eds. J.M. Rainer, Gy. Péteri, Trondheim 2005, pp. 135–159.

⁶¹ MNL OL, XIX-K-1-o, Mo-5/1960. Box 48.

⁶² MNL OL, XIX-K-1-o, Bu-16/1960. Box 48.

not joined the co-op, his wife was a member of it, working as a mechanic in Budapest, the co-op obliged him to work and the company had already planned to make him redundant. There were several investigations in this case. They came to the conclusion that the co-op had not infringed the law because when he applied for the job of a mechanic, the son of the complainant was only required to ask for a document of the local co-op proving that his work is not needed there; as the co-op was suffering from the lack of hands, they did not make out such documents, neither did the village council. The company might employ his son, it cannot be and will not be prevented by the co-op. After the complainant was informed about it, it turned out that his son had already worked a few days for the co-op and would probably stay there.⁶³

The next question is what types of cases one can see in the complaints. The summary of the letters sent to *Szabad Föld* between 1 January and 4 February 1960 divided the complaints concerning co-op organisation into 8 categories, according to their content. 1) Co-op organisation, 2) Land related issues: complaints about the incorporation of private plots into the co-op's land, 3) Land rental fee, the issue of elderly people, 4) Co-op – wood – compensation, 5) Other co-op related problems, 6) Tax related problems, 7) complaints about the machine stations, 8) Others.⁶⁴ Another report by *Szabad Föld*, dating from early 1961 divided the complaints into 7 categories: 1) the co-op or the village make it difficult to work outside the co-op, 2) the elderly co-op members complain about the lack of co-op support and the subtraction of the fee of the National Health Insurance, 3) there are problems with the final reports and the settlement of work units, 4) complaints about the household plots, 5) complaints about violent co-op organisation, 6) the complaints of sick co-op members who are unable to work, 7) complaints with unique characteristics that fall in no category.⁶⁵ The report of the Hungarian Radio and Television at the beginning of February 1961 is about the measures aiming to strengthen the work morals, the issues concerning household plots and land rent⁶⁶ and the problems of supporting members.⁶⁷ The report of the same institute in July summarizes the problems with organising co-ops, the problems with cultivating land, the lack of workforce, the unpaid land rent, the quarrels between the co-op members and the unpaid common

⁶³ MNL OL, XIX-K-1-o, R-2/1960. Box 48.

⁶⁴ Jelentés a Szabad Föld szerkesztőségébe 1960. január 1-től február 4-ig érkezett levelekről [Report on the letters received by the editors of Szabad Föld between 1 January and 4 February 1960]. MNL OL, M-KS-288. f. 28./1960. Box 21.

⁶⁵ Jelentés a Szabad Föld szerkesztőségébe érkezett levelekről [Report on the letters received by the editorial board of Szabad Föld]. MNL OL, M-KS-288. f. 28./1960. Box 16.

⁶⁶ Land rent were paid to those whose land was used by the co-op, but they did not waive their ownership rights.

⁶⁷ Feljegyzés a termelősövetkezeti tagok egyes problémáiról [Report on the individual problems of co-op members]. MNL OL, M-KS-288. f. 28./1960. Box 16.

basic fees.⁶⁸ When categorizing them, I tried to retain the uniqueness of each case, so cases that were made up of several segments have not been classified into categories that would cover only part of that complaint.

Table 1. The types of complaints in the case of co-op members

Type of complaint	Number of cases	Their percentage among all the cases
Indicating the intention to quit	4	6.34%
Applying for a job in a state farm	1	1.58%
Complaint about the settlement of work units	2	3.17%
Complaint about the settlement of work units, and indicating the intention to quit	1	1.58%
Complaint in connection with the supporting members	2	3.17%
The sum of damages, and complaint about the settlement of work units	1	1.58%
Complaint about the obligation to cut off vineyards and orchards	1	1.58%
Complaint about the sum of the damages	3	4.76%
Complaints about household plots	8	12.69%
Complaints about the obligatory incorporation of livestock with the co-op	2	3.17%
Complaint about the prevention of storing crops	1	1.58%
Complaints about the fee of the National Health Insurance	2	3.17%
Complaints about the obligatory incorporation with the co-op and the deprivation of household plots	1	1.58%
Complaints about being excluded	5	7.93%
Asking for replacement plot and indicating the intention to quit	1	3.17%
Complaint about being obliged to work for the co-op	3	4.76%
Dispute between two co-ops over a land that was given to the co-op	1	1.58%

⁶⁸ Feljegyzés a tsz-ek zárszámadásával foglalkozó levelek tartalmáról [Report on the content of the letters concerning the final balances of co-ops]. MNL OL, M-KS-288. f. 28./1960. Box 16.

Type of complaint	Number of cases	Their percentage among all the cases
Complaint about being admitted as a regular member	1	1.58%
Complaint about not being admitted as a regular member	1	
Requiring a temporary work permission outside the co-op	1	1.58%
Complaint about violent co-op organisation and the expropriation of equipment	1	1.58%
Complaint about not issuing the document forgetting discount health care and about the sum of the advance of work units	1	1.58%
Complaint about malfeasance and problems deriving from mismanagement	2	3.17%
Complaints about the problems caused by unsettled membership	2	3.17%
Complaint about replacement plots and the deception committed when the claimant joined the co-op	1	1.58%
Requiring a release from physical work	1	1.58%
Complaint because no household plot was allotted and indicating the intention to quit	1	1.58%
Requiring wheat because of hard living conditions	1	1.58%
Complaint about an unpaid bonus	1	1.58%
Complaint about the prohibition of harvesting the crops, and that the co-op later complained about it (the ownership of the land is in question)	3	4.76%
Complaint about the prohibition of harvesting the crops and indicating the intention to quit	1	1.58%
The issue of maintaining private farming	1	1.58%
Requiring not hard work because of illness and asking the household plot to be allotted	1	1.58%
Asking for a lease as the land is used by the co-op and the state farm	1	1.58%
Complaint about the sum of the damages and the settlement of work units	1	1.58%
Complaint that they failed to allot the fodder to the livestock kept in the private household	1	1.58%
Complaint about the prohibition of re-organising the co-op	1	1.58%

Source: Own compilation based on 129 complaints sent to Complaints Office in 1960.

I do not intend to deal with every type of case either in connection with co-op members or with private farmers, but I would like to draw attention to some major tendencies and background phenomena.

The greatest number of complaints was connected to household plots (8 cases). In most cases co-op members were not given household plots, but it also occurred that the household plot was not allotted on the land that a person gave to the co-op but somewhere else and in some cases the right to use the household plot was denied. The party leadership was also aware of the phenomenon. Concerning the political activities in the co-ops, a report of April 1960 highlighted among the reasons for the bad relationship between the leadership of the co-ops and the party organisations and the co-op members that the establishment of private plots is not making progress properly and their importance is underestimated by the competent people.⁶⁹ There were a great number of cases when a complaint was made about being excluded from the co-op, 5 such cases are known. In these cases people were excluded due to illnesses (these were settled by giving the complainant old age pension), improper work performance and improper behaviour (excessive drinking, vituperation of the co-op and large-scale farming, improper use of the equipment of the co-op). In one case when a supporting membership was repealed, the decision was not explained. As in earlier times, work units were not settled properly, therefore this problem surfaced two times independently and two times it was combined with some other complaints. The intention to quit is also quite frequent, it is mentioned in 4 cases.

There are quite a lot of examples of the family strategies mentioned in the first half of the study when the cases are examined. To create a financial position as favourable as possible and/or to get away from agriculture (or an attitude neglecting the changed circumstances) may have been the background purpose of the following complainant. After joining the local co-op, the complainant was incapable of working in agriculture permanently according to the medical examination. After that the claimant complained that the co-op subtracted his National Health Care fee and the old age pension contribution for the whole year in advance from the price they received for a calf that was sold from the claimant's household and what is more, the co-op did not want to allot a household plot for him. According to the investigation, the complainant was really ill, but he could have worked for the co-op, he was just not willing to do so because he earned better money by driving to transport. It was right to subtract

⁶⁹ Az MSZMP. Politikai Bizottsága 1960. április 12-i határozata a termelészövetkezetek politikai, gazdasági és szervező munkája további javítására [The decision of the Political Committee of the HSWP made on 12 April 1960 on the further development of the political, economic and organising work of the cooperatives]. p. 2. NB/1340. MNL OL, M-KS-288. f. 28./1960. Box 21.

the National Health Care fee from the price of the calf, the only offence was that they had subtracted it for the whole year in advance. To demonstrate the difficult situation, they mention that the co-op was to pay National Health Care fees for about 60 members.⁷⁰ To complete the above mentioned case, it is a recurring phenomenon in several complaints that elderly people who were still active at that moment or earlier had worked in agriculture joined the co-op because they wanted the old age pension and/or the National Health Care fee.⁷¹ As can be seen in these complaints, the co-ops were struggling with the lack of work force, and the seriousness of the situation is indicated by a statistical paper, according to which the majority or all of the registered co-op members, their percentage was between 25–60%, withdrew from community work.⁷² To solve this problem, co-ops tried to recruit new members, which is reflected by several cases. In another case the complainant said that her co-op membership is unsettled and she was not given a household plot. During the investigation it came to light that the complainant and her daughter joined the co-op at the same time as regular members. As they brought land into the co-op, the co-op was to ensure them National Health Care service and it regularly pays the National Health Care fee for them. Later the claimant's daughter was warned to take part in the work according to her ability several times. "[...] She was asked to participate in the common work as she is still young and to help strengthen the co-op politically and economically. / The co-op is in a difficult situation, struggling with lack of workforce." The warning was useless. According to the investigation, the woman mentioned that she was susceptible to illnesses, but she failed to appear before the medical board. According to the records, the method of settling this problem was discussed with the claimant; the report did not make mention of the issue of the household plot.⁷³

In the case of private farmers usually the following types of complaints can be distinguished.

⁷⁰ MNL OL, XIX-K-1-o, F-10/1960. Box 48.

⁷¹ The following cases fall in this category: MNL OL, XIX-K-1-o, Be-17/1960. Box 48., MNL OL, XIX-K-1-o, Ha-13/1960. Box 48., MNL OL, XIX-K-1-o, Na-10/1960. Box 48., MNL OL, XIX-K-1-o, R-25/1/1960. Box 48.

⁷² Zs. Varga, *Megtanulták a leckét...*, p. 468.

⁷³ MNL OL, XIX-K-1-o, Na-10/1960. Box 48.

Table 2. The types of complaints in the case of private farmers

Type of complaint	Number of cases	Their percentage among all the cases
Complaint about the obligatory incorporation of land with the co-op because of living in a common household	8	12.69%
Complaint about the obligatory incorporation of land with the co-op without the consent of the owner and the unpaid land rent	1	1.58%
Problems with the replacement plot received in exchange for the plot that was taken away by the co-op	16	25.39%
Complaint that the land lease took effect too early	1	1.58%
Asking to be allowed to continue private farming	1	1.58%
Complaint about a violent co-op president	1	1.58%
Complaint about the prohibition of harvesting the crops, and that the co-op later complained about it (the ownership of the land is in question)	8	12.69%
Complaint about the sum of the damages or that they were not paid	8	12.69%
Complaint about the obligatory incorporation of livestock with the co-op	2	3.17%
Complaint about the obligatory transportation of the crops to a common corn-floor	2	3.17%
Complaint about the violent organisation of the co-op	1	1.58%
Complaint that the fees of the land used by the co-op were not paid	5	7.93%
Complaint that the application form was signed due to deception	1	1.58%
Complaint that the co-op took away and used the land	1	1.58%
Complaint that the claimant was not admitted to the co-op	1	1.58%
Complaint about some injustice caused by the land arrangement	5	7.93%
Enquiring about the sum of the damages due after the crops that fell in the land of the co-op	1	1.58%

Source: Own compilation based on 129 complaints sent to Complaints Office in 1960.

A quarter of the complaints (16 cases) sent by private farmers was connected to the replacement plot received in exchange for the plot acquired by the co-op. They mainly complained about the quality of the plots, their distance from the homes of the claimants and in some cases the co-op was reluctant to allot them. To continue with the bigger groups, there are three with 8 cases each. One of them complained about the obligatory incorporation in the lands of the co-op due to living in a common household. Another group contains complaints about the prohibition of harvesting the crops and that later the co-op complained about it. In these cases, as the ownership of the land was not settled between the farmer and the co-op, sometimes the co-op was quicker to harvest the debated crops. The third group contains complaints about the sum of the damages and that they were not paid. It is worth examining what may have been the motivation of the obligatory incorporation of land or livestock with co-op of those who lived in a common household. The law creators, counting on the possible complications, passed Law Decree 7 of 1959, providing for agricultural cooperatives and the group of cooperatives. Paragraph 20 § of the Decree provided for the delivery of land, according to Par 1 “The member is obliged to deliver all the lands including grazing lands or forests owned, leased or used under any legal title by them or their family members living in the same household to the common use of the co-op except for the household plot that can legally be retained.”⁷⁴ So even if a family with several generations living in the same house but in different households divided their land and attributed the ownerships of the plots to different family members, their strategy was to fail if one of them joined the co-op. According to the decree, in this case all the owners were subject to the obligatory incorporation of their lands, livestock and equipment.⁷⁵ In a report written during the investigation of such a case, the administrator drew attention to this strategy. “Moreover, I would like to note that before the co-op was founded, the aforementioned family used the plot under different titles /: my son, daughter, grandmother, brother-in-law etc./: In fact, all the plots registered and leased under different names were cultivated by B. Á. and his family. [...] According to the village council, the party organisation, the presidents of the village co-ops and the district council, B. Á. is not the only one who wants to harvest the autumnal crops by different machinations, threatening the co-op’s need for bread crops”.⁷⁶ Another big group (5 cases) contains

⁷⁴ 1959. évi 7. számú törvényerejű rendelet a mezőgazdasági termelészövetkezetekről és termelészövetkezeti csoportokról. Földbeviteli kötelezettség. 20. §. (1). [Law Decree 7 of 1959 on agricultural cooperatives and groups of cooperatives. Delivery of land. Paragraph 20th. Par 1]. [in:] *Törvények és rendeletek hivatalos gyűjteménye, 1959.* [Official Collection of Laws and Regulations, 1959], Budapest 1960, p. 97.

⁷⁵ In such cases sometimes the decision was favourable for the complainant: MNL OL, XIX-K-1-o, Sza-18/1960. Box 48.

⁷⁶ MNL OL, XIX-K-1-o, Ka-10/1960. Box 48.

those complaints when the fees after the land leases were not paid and the number of complaints about the injustices caused by the land arrangement was the same. The latter ones were caused by the fact that the replacement plot was not the same size as the one delivered to the co-op. There are case types with as few as only one case. One of the claimants was an elderly man and after working in agriculture all his life he wanted to receive old age pension, but no co-op had been founded in his village. The nearest one is 11 km away, but travelling is difficult for him as he is disabled. He asked his problem to be solved within the co-op. The investigation recommended a concrete co-op to him, and that was to identify what type of job the claimant was capable of.⁷⁷

Comparing the different types of cases of the complaints made by co-op members and private farmers it is clear that in the cases of co-op members a much wider gamut of complaints can be observed (we have distinguished 37 types), private farmers sent only half as many types of complaints (17) to the Complaints Office. The complaints of the two groups do not have a lot in common. The prohibition of harvesting the crops sown by the complainants, the violent co-op organisation, the obligatory incorporation of livestock and the low sum of damages are complaints that belong here. The complaints about the violent co-op foundations that escalated to assault are mentioned once in each group. A private farmer was called to the house of the council to clarify his taxation and then they tried to force him to sign the application form to join the co-o, in the fight the old man, who was eighty years old, fell over. The investigation could not find out the agitators.⁷⁸ One co-op member complained that after he was forced to join the co-op, the size of his household plot was decreased, his van was confiscated and his gardening tools were evaluated at a low price. The complainant noted that the injustices committed against him had a bad effect on the village. According to the investigation carried out by the Group of Cooperation Policy of the Agricultural Department of the Executive Committee of the Council of County Somogy, the complaint about violence is not true: “[...] it has been found that during the organisation of the co-op in the village, the above mentioned person signed the application form without being forced. The agitators tried to convince the aforementioned person by describing the advantages of large scale farming”.⁷⁹ According to the complaints, there were other violent activities when the common co-op was organised. In one case the complainant said that he had signed the application form, but due to the poor health of his wife, he agreed with the leaders of the co-op that he was going to carry on private farming. He began to

⁷⁷ MNL OL, XIX-K-1-o, R-25/1/1960. Box 48.

⁷⁸ MNL OL, XIX-K-1-o, Ko-53/1960. Box 48.

⁷⁹ At first the complainant wrote to Kádár himself, from there the complaint was forwarded to the Office of the HSWP CC, and then it ended up at the Complaints Office. MNL OL, XIX-K-1-o, Ko-15/1/1960. Box 48.

cultivate a plot leased by him; the village council registered the land lease. “Despite the above mentioned events, on 2 November at 11 p.m. about 30 people break into his house led by the president of the council armed with sticks and took away his horse together with the farming tools. When asked, they told him that he would not receive any compensation.” According to the investigation, the co-op only took the items listed in the application form, but “not the way the co-op member described it, armed with sticks, but in accordance with the decree, and certainly the member will be compensated for these items”.⁸⁰

Concerning the violent methods of organising co-ops, it can be stated that such a low number of violent atrocities seems to be somewhat surprising if we take into account that the Political Committee (PC) and the HSWP CC paid special attention to this problem. Among the summarizing reports there is one, dating from 14 May 1960, which discussed exclusively the violent actions done during the organisational work. It emphasized that several agitators offended the principle of voluntary entry – although it was forbidden by an earlier decision of the Central Committee – e.g. by summoning people or having them escorted to the council house (town hall), and using a harsh way of speaking and threats. Moreover “In about 45 villages physical violence was committed during the organisation.” According to the report, peasants were beaten up, hit or made to stand on one leg, and in some villages especially violent atrocities were committed. These excesses were explained by the listlessness of the agitators who became tired of persuading the obstinate peasants, but in one place (in Héreg) a provocateur with a criminal history ‘was found’. Seemingly they tried to investigate the cases thoroughly, they tried to appease the peasants or in some places whole villages and reportedly sometimes even the declarations of joining were given back “but in most cases they were not accepted”. In 96 cases disciplinary punishments were meted out for party members and in 16 cases the general attorney had to investigate and in 8 cases 23 people were charged, those who were convicted received a few months of imprisonment and one person, the aforementioned ‘provocateur’ received a sentence of 7 years and 6 months.⁸¹ Another letter dated to 6 February also focusses on events of this kind. Besides the ‘successful’ organisation of co-ops, it also relates that when people joined “by applying rough methods, the principle of voluntary entry was infringed”, and that they affected every county. According to the report, the complaints sent to the Hungarian Radio and Television inform us about extremely rough methods, they even highlight

⁸⁰ MNL OL, XIX-K-1-o, S-40/1960. Box 48.

⁸¹ Tájékoztató jelentés a Politikai Bizottság számára az 1959–1960. évi téli termelőszövetkezeti szervezés során elkövetett durvaságokról és azok orvoslásáról [An informative report to the Political Committee on the violent atrocities committed during the co-op organisation in 1959–1960 and their remedies]. Quotations: p. 1., p. 2. MNL OL, M-KS-288. f. 28./1960. Box 21.

that “parts of them or sometimes all of them are true” and “some of the letters are outright hostile”. It is emphasized here too that measures were taken against the application of physical violence. In several places party disciplinary punishments were given, party and council members were replaced, and even criminal investigations were started. Those concerned were apologized by the county authorities or they tried to make it clear that outrage is not among the methods of the party, it is not part of the policy they represent. After the general statements, a county level statistics can also be read about the atrocities.⁸² Among the violent methods of organizing, threats with weapons were not uncommon, once a report describing the violent organisation of co-ops was written to Lajos Fehér himself on 5 complainants who directly turned to the CC. The complaints were written between 6 and 10 February 1960. It says that “in the village of Békés, they went carrying weapons to the house of a person who did not want to join and what’s more – according to the complaint – it also occurred that they shot in through the window.⁸³ In another case a man who started to run away from the agitators was fired at: “Ferenc Erdei jun., a resident in Sándorfalva, ran to the fields from the yard of his farm when the agitators appeared, the agitators started to chase him in a knee-deep snow and shot at him several times, then he was caught [...] and beaten”.⁸⁴ Concerning the violent co-op organisation, an anonymous letter that was full of spelling mistakes from Fejér county was forwarded to the Pest County Committee of the HSWP wrote the following lines: “we heard it from our ancestors that there had been Turkish and Tartar raids, but this is the first time we have heard of a Hungarian raid, if they want co-ops at any cost they should tell it us openly what they want and shouldn’t torture the good working people whose majority have already broken their backs in the honest work as most young people today are running away from their villages as from the place of execution if they keep on escaping, who will work here in a few years?...”.⁸⁵

It can also be detected to what extent the complaints cover the country. In those cases when the home of the complainants was not in the same place as their agricultural property, it was the property that I took into account.

⁸² Tájékoztató jelentés a Politikai Bizottság számára a tsz mozgalom számszerű fejlesztése során elkövetett különféle durva módszerekről [An informative report to the Political Committee on the various violent atrocities committed during the co-op organisation]. Quotations: p. 1. MNL OL, M-KS-288. f. 28./1960. Box 21.

⁸³ Feljegyzés Fehér Lajos elvtárs részére [A report to Comrade Lajos Fehér]. p 1. MNL OL, M-KS-288. f. 28./1960. Box 21.

⁸⁴ Feljegyzés a termelészövetkezeti munka során elkövetett helytelen módszerekről [Report on the incorrect methods applied during the organisation of co-ops]. p. 1. MNL OL, M-KS-288. f. 28./1960. Box 21.

⁸⁵ Fa/10/333. MNL OL, M-KS-288. f. 28./1960. Box 21.

Table 3. The distribution of complaints according to counties

County	Number of cases (co-op members)	Number of cases (private farmers)	Number of cases (others)	The proportion among all the complaints			
				co-op member	private farmer	other (neither private farmers nor co-op members)	total
Bács-Kiskun	7	9		5.42%	6.97%		12.39%
Baranya	2	1		1.55%	0.77%		2.32%
Békés	3	4		2.32%	3.10%		5.42%
Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén	1			0.77%			0.77%
Csongrád	4	5		3.10%	3.87%		6.97%
Fejér	3	6		2.32%	4.65%		6.97%
Győr-Moson-Sopron							0.00%
Hajdú-Bihar	4	6		3.10%	4.65%		7.75%
Heves	4	8		3.10%	6.2%		9.30%
Jász-Nagykun-Szolnok	6	3		4.65%	2.32%		6.97%
Komárom-Esztergom	2	3		1.55%	2.32%		3.87%
Nógrád	1	2		0.77%	1.55%		2.32%
Pest	3	5		2.32%	3.87%		6.19%
Somogy	7	2	1	5.42%	1.55%	0.77%	7.74%
Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg	3	1	1	2.32%	0.77%	0.77%	3.86%
Tolna	3	2	1	2.32%	1.55%	0.77%	4.64%
Vas		3			2.32%		2.32%
Veszprém	6	3		4.65%	2.32%		6.97%
Zala	2		1 (co-op members and private farmers)	1.55%		0.77%	2.32%

Source: Own compilation based on 129 complaints sent to Complaints Office in 1960.

The complainants sent complaints to the office that were not only connected to the agricultural area around the nearby villages and farmhouses, in quite a number of cases “complaints connecting considerable distances” can be found in the files; in these cases the claimant’s home was far from the agricultural property. I have found 15 cases like that altogether, and in most of these cases, in 14 cases, the claimant lived and worked in the capital city. In these cases the migration or commuting lifestyle caused by the organisation of co-ops can be supposed, however, as these cases do not provide a firm base to answer these questions, I will not intend to discuss them in detail. There are cases (namely 4 cases) where the complaints are not connected to the property but to the living conditions. According to one of them, the complainant joined the co-op somewhere in Nógrád County, he wrote in his letter that he had done it for his wife, but now he had a job in Budapest and considering that he had never done any agricultural work, he wanted to quit the co-op. However, the leader of the cooperative required the complainant to be made redundant, promising that the co-op could provide him with a permanent job.⁸⁶

Conclusion

As I tried to highlight it above, complaints constitute a very colourful and interesting group of sources that help understand the decision making processes and strategies deployed by the parties concerned in the last wave of collectivization. It can be stated, in spite of the fact that only a small number of injustices committed against land owners were manifested in the form of letters of complaints. Many people may have felt it futile to quarrel with the government for various reasons – moreover, it is also a question why those who submitted a complaint thought that the government would show a positive attitude towards their complaint (what made them do so). We cannot even be sure whether the Complaints Office retained all the submissions or all of them were sent to the archives. On the other hand, an annual compilation of the submissions does not necessarily give a true picture of the complaints as the complaints of another year would probably show completely or partly different parameters. Moreover, it can be stated that even the personal perspective of those who were aggrieved by collectivization cannot be examined relying merely on complaints if this segment of that issue can be fully processed at all, as it is not only the complaints that contain the personal experiences of collectivization. (The personal dimensions of co-op organisation, possibly those of both parties, appear in the law court files, memoirs,

⁸⁶ MNL OL, XIX-K-1-o, J-9/1960. Box 48.

diaries, autobiographies and interviews among others.) Nevertheless, it can firmly be stated that the different analyses based upon the submissions may cast light to such aspects of the situation of those working in agriculture that would hardly if at all be revealed to those interested in the history of Hungary and/or the history of Hungarian economy by any other source or they would be revealed in a different way.

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