

**Remembering the working class as a black and white photograph;  
Remembering the peasantry as a fairy tale  
Jeff Taylor (CEU)**

Three stages of historical development exist in Hungary, but they do not live side by side. The peasantry, artifact of a feudalism, still toils in villages. The working class still turns gears in grimy soviet-style factories in the northeast. And Budapest has become a model postindustrial metropolis where knowledge workers tap keyboards in offices and shop in malls. A park, in the heart of the capital city, then would be an odd place to see all these historical stages brought shoulder to shoulder, but in the Millenáris Park nestled in Budapest's swank 2nd district we find a discourse between the ascendant digital world, and industrial and agrarian ones it has consigned to oblivion.

- I. Why would they put it here?** The park was built on the site of the Ganz Electrical Works factory. In Hungary, The Ganz was the original industrializer. Ganz initiated a long-string of paradigm-shifting inventions.
- A.** Shell-casted rail wheels. The cast-iron wheels had remarkably hard, durable surface at their edges, but remained malleable in their interior where they would be fitted to axles. The wheels were Hungary's first world class industrial export product
  - B.** The axel grain mill. The mills produced fine export quality flour, and the rapid expansion of grain mills along the banks of the Danube turned Budapest in to the largest grain milling city in world in 1899. Ganz, however, was not just drawing the peasants in to the city with allure of an industrial wage, it was driving them out of the countryside through relentless historical juggernaut of labor-saving devices.
  - C.** Electrical Engineering: The firm continued its torrent of earth-shaking inventions.
    - 1. First internal combustion engine which employed the carburetor
    - 2. Electrical transformer, and so when combined with turbines, allowed for mass transmission of electricity.
    - 3. First electrical meter, so that power could not only be distributed, it could be billed for, as well.
    - 4. First electrified railroad in 1909.
- II. Industry up their Noses.** To the Communists, when they nationalized it in 1949, the Ganz Works offered a symbol of proletariat triumphant.
- A.** During the revolution in October that year, the factory was the site of a meeting of the Unified Workers council, where resolutions were passed that:
    - 1. "The factory is the property of the workers"
    - 2. "Overall control of the enterprise is invested in the democratically elected council of the workers," who be the ones to approve and ratify all projects concerning the enterprise on the following issues:
      - a. To decide basic wage levels and the methods by which these are to be assessed;
      - b. To decide on all contracts involving the export of goods; To decide on the conduct of all credit operations;
      - c. To control the hiring and firing of all persons employed in the enterprise, and
      - d. To appoint the director of the enterprise, who is to be responsible to

the workers' council.<sup>1</sup>

- B. Ganz factory workers fought Soviet tanks and artillery for 7 days in one the most pitched battles of the Hungarian Revolution of that year. They were shelled into submission, the survivors machine gunned against the factory walls.
- C. Ganz was broken up in early post communism. For 8 years debates ensued, on what to do with this prime real estate.

**III. The Capitalists Come Down from the Hills.** Mamut Shopping Mall consolidated the district farmers market, a couple of empty lots, and a derelict park into Hungary's second largest shopping center. The mall itself contains all the usual mall stuff:

- A. world chains, regional chains, local chains, and the occasional store that exist nowhere else. Still Mamut is hard for the mall-hater to hate. The
- B. Three-story Libri bookstore/cafe
- C. Multiplex

**IV. From Proletariat Culture back to Folk Culture.** Four buildings were slated to remain from the original Ganz works These massive 19<sup>th</sup> Century factory halls of brick and cast iron represented the structures of unanimous architectural merit.

- A. The buildings were reconstructed to be:
  - 1. A museum-sized exhibition space,
  - 2. state of the art theater
  - 3. General purpose cafe/dance hall/small concert venue. it is best known as the place for Sunday night dance houses. Which has come to mean a modern evolution for folk dance.
- B. Dreamers of Dreams: World Famous Hungarians exhibition in 2001. Dreamers paid special attention to the many Hungarians who were inventors:
  - 1. Károly Goldmark, inventor of the Lp record and a man we have to thank, more than anyone else, for television (he also became CEO of CBS)
  - 2. Biro and his ballpoint.
  - 3. Mechwart and his axel mill
  - 4. Kandó and his trains.
  - 5. Cultural giants figured prominently
    - a. Tivadar Kosztka Csontváry is certainly a cult figure to Hungarians, but he has never earned much admiration abroad.
    - b. Béla Bartók may be the most widely and highly regarded Hungarian in foreign countries
- C. Nationalist associations: liberal intellectuals, wouldn't go near it. They too closely associated the park with its patron and funder, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán. And although the exhibition was world class, its target audience was clear: the exhibition texts were only in Hungarian.
- D. Election headquarters: Orbán also chose his park as the setting for his victory celebrations during the bitter election of 2002. It was at the Fidesz Campaign Headquarters located at the Millenáris when Orbán first realized he was heading for a narrow defeat.
- E. Orbán vanquished: the intelligentsia could not stay away forever. The park offered too many good events, and it was, in itself beautiful.
- F. The winning plan was submitted by fourth-year students of the Horticulture

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<sup>1</sup> Nagy Balász. "Budapest 1956: The Central Workers' Council (1961)" Published first in English in *International Socialism* 18, 1962.  
<http://www.marxists.de/statecap/nagy/budapest.htm>

University. Their stunning design captured the 3 historical periods idea brilliantly. The layout is as postmodern as any IT campus, but references to

1. industrialization appear throughout the space: in the sculpture a cooling tower (a Hungarian invention), on the rustbelt and grass benches, and the potted trees on rails.
2. Peasantry through the plantings.

**V. Wheat as Exotic Plant.** The visitors to this park are going to largely be urban children, and neither they nor their parents will produce anything. They will provide services and further knowledge. They will not make rail cars or grow food. They are more likely to see an orchid than a stalk of corn.

**A.** The botanical garden of the Millenáris is planted with

1. tomatoes
2. carrots
3. cabbage,
4. multiple varieties of the Hungarian Paprika (pepper)
5. a dense little field of wheat
6. Along an artificial hill grows a vineyard.

**VI. The Peasantry was a Fairy Tale.** The finest gem within this magnificent park, though, is the playground. The fixtures tell the story of an obscure fairy tale, Zöld Peter [Green Peter], and all of the objects were hand-carved by sculptors.

**A.** Castle, with a difficult princess, and a fabulous Three Musketeers-style getaway cable swing.

**B.** Agrarian accouterments. The mundane life of the peasant is merged into the fantasy world of castles and princesses.

1. goats
2. ox
3. cart.

It is on this site that the postindustrial world became possible, so it is fitting to use it as museum to the worlds that came before. Yet the act of remembrance has already shifted them into something more artistic, making the working class a black and white film, and the peasantry a fairy tale.