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### Kallai on Gradual Improvement of Parliamentary Work

On January 24, the members of Parliament from Bacs County met in Kecskemet in order to evaluate their parliamentary activity during 1967 and set tasks for 1968. The significance of the conference however, went beyond the boundaries of the county because it was attended by Gyula Kallai, the Speaker of the House, and because both the hosts and their prominent guest posed problems of general importance for the future course of parliamentary work.

The possibility of raising the standard of parliamentary performance was approached from several viewpoints. Thus, the MP's from Bacs County expressed the opinion that improvement toward that end could be achieved if speakers restricted themselves to dealing with two or three problems instead of tackling a large number of issues. This would make their speeches shorter and give more time and opportunity for debate. The members of the House called, moreover, for the "revision" of the House statutes in order to bring them in conformity with the need for an "expansion of democracy." It should be recalled that this key issue was already raised at the September 1967 session of Parliament and was judged as the "most interesting feature" of that session.

In fact, the change of the statutes might be the harbinger of more debate in the House. It might enable the deputies to vote on a bill paragraph by paragraph, as is the established practice in Western Parliaments (cf. Hungarian Unit, "Hungary's Parliament Begins to Assert Itself," Radio Free Europe Research, 9 October 1967). At the September session, Speaker Gyula Kallai himself acknowledged the

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necessity for a revision of the House statutes, while the press endorsed it as a step urgently needed for a more active Parliament. It may, therefore, be said that the members of Parliament representing Bacs County performed a useful service in the cause of more vigorous parliamentary activity by reopening this key issue.

Gyula Kallai made several statements of principle at the meeting. He forecast that the work of Parliament would assert itself "more efficiently" in the future life of the country. He pointed to the necessity to take a step forward toward that goal "from session to session." He expressed the opinion that the progress of parliamentary work and that of the country as a whole were "inseparable."

Kallai staked out two main fields of activity for the members of the House. On the one hand, they should intensify their contacts with the electorate, listen to their problems and suggestions and discuss with them "every delicate" issue. Only by doing so would the MP's be in a position to give a wider response to the views of the electorate at the sessions of the House.

The second main field, said the Speaker, lay in the deputies' parliamentary activity proper. In this regard, Kallai mentioned that one way the control function of the House over the Government could be exerted would be to discuss occasionally the implementation of particularly important laws. Kallai felt, for example, that the execution of the agricultural cooperative and land laws was likely to come up soon for debate by the Parliament. Another important activity, in his opinion, might be the revision and modification of obsolete laws. (Cf., Magyar Nemzet, 25 January 1968.)

It remains to be seen how far such pledges and hopes for more vigorous parliamentary activity will come true in 1968. The three "business" sessions of the House held in 1967 were characterized by more active participation of the members in both the work of the various standing committees and in the plenary sessions. In particular, the more substantial involvement of the deputies in committee work at a very early stage of the discussion of the bills marked noteworthy progress over the distressingly rubber-stamp tradition of past years. At the plenary sessions of the House, the members often displayed a laudably frank and critical spirit. The weak spot of Parliament's record in 1967 was the little attention which was devoted to "question time." It was held only once, at the September 1967 session, and even that in a rather perfunctory way. This is all the more discouraging since it is "question time" which should supply the best platform for both the more effective control over activities of the members of the Government and the voicing of the opinions and mood of the electorate. It should offer the members of the House the



opportunity to show more initiative and thus bring more life into Parliamentary sessions. "Question time" also seems to be the most feasible (because easiest) framework for the MP's to do something "on their own" instead of merely "reacting" to the initiatives of the Government. Under the present conditions, it would be much more difficult, though in principle not impossible, for the members of the House to take the initiative by either introducing a bill or asking that the discussion of a nation-wide issue be placed on the agenda. In sum, the invigoration of "question time" might offer the most suitable ground for the desired step-by-step improvement of parliamentary work "from session to session."

Besides watching for signs of more vigorous activity, Parliament should also be observed in 1968 for another reason. The death of two members of the House in 1967 (Ferenc Munnich, representing a constituency in Fejer County, and Lajos Torok, elected in Zala County) opened up the prospect of holding by-elections. They are supposed to take place (under decree-law No.35/1967 of the Presidential Council) within six months of the deaths of the former members, i.e., in the first half of 1968.

The filling of these vacant seats will offer a good opportunity to put into practice the election law of 1966, which allows the electorate to nominate more than one candidate for each seat (cf. Hungarian SR, RFER, 15 November 1966). It should be remembered that at the first elections held under the new election law (19 March 1967), the number of constituencies with multiple candidates was disappointingly low and the electors were criticized for their "lack of initiative" by the top leaders of the regime, including Janos Kadar (cf. Hungarian SR, RFER, 21 March 1967).

It remains to be seen whether the electors of constituency No.4 of County Fejer (Munnich) and those of the constituency No.5 County Zala (Torok) will now live up to expectation. In particular, the Fejer county constituency, which cast 100 per cent of their votes for late Ferenc Munnich, who was not only a popular candidate (a native of the constituency) but, as the great old man of the regime "par excellence" too "towering" a figure to be opposed by a counter-candidate, should now feel free to put up more than one nominee.

#### Gratifying Balance Sheet for the First Year of Child-Care Aid

Magyar Nemzet of 19 January 1968 sums up the experience gathered during the first year of the new child-care aid. The paper stressed that by the end of October 1967, about 26,000 mothers had taken advantage of the aid while their number had probably increased

to some 35,000 by the end of that year. This means that more mothers than originally expected decided to apply for the allowance. By the end of October 1967, the state had paid out child-care aid amounting to 42.5 million forint. The number of mothers drawing the allowance is said to be especially high among women working in the agricultural producers' cooperatives. On January 12, Radio Budapest pointed out some favorable side effects of the child-care aid. For example, there has been a sizeable drop in the number of mothers receiving paid sick leave and a decrease in the number of sick children.

The virtues of child-care aid were praised by Nepszava on 26 November 1967 as the "right" instrument to improve the shockingly low birth rate in Hungary. The latter hit an all-time low in 1962, with as few as 12.9 live births per one-thousand population. Over the next four years, there was a very slow annual increase which reached 13.6 per thousand in 1966 (with 138,489 live births in contrast to the 130,053 of 1962). According to Nepszabadsag of January 28, however, the birth rate jumped to 14.5 per thousand in 1967, which meant an absolute jump to approximately 148,000 live births. Nepszava pointed out that economic measures rather than "administrative" restrictions on induced abortion (which have been suggested from some quarters) are the "right" approach to the problem of increasing the birth rate. It is a "complex" problem, the paper emphasized, as was already stressed by Janos Kadar in his report to the Ninth Party Congress in November 1966. Therefore, it should be tackled in a "complex" manner. Nothing speaks more eloquently for the solution chosen by the regime than the fact that the number of expectant mothers in Budapest rose by 16 per cent in the first nine months of 1967 compared to the corresponding figure for 1966. In some districts of the capital, the increase amounted to 25 per cent.

Unfortunately, however, the rise in the number of births fails to go hand in hand with a decrease in the number of legally procured abortions. In 1966, the latter amounted to 186,683 compared to 138,489 live births. According to Nepszava of 26 November 1967, this unwelcome trend also continued in 1967. The reason for it lies in the utterly inadequate information provided the female population about the best ways to avoid unwanted pregnancy.

At the present time, too many women are trying to avert child birth instead of pregnancy. The sale of a highly efficient contraceptive pill is being hampered by "administrative" limitations which ought to be lifted. The situation is all the more alarming because in 1967, about 30 per cent of the total nursing time of the maternity wards was devoted to women undergoing induced abortion (cf. Dunantuli Naplo, 23 November 1967). The increase in births due



to the impact of the child welfare allowance, however, will now result in a growing demand for hospital beds by expectant mothers.

The likely consequences of child-care aid for the birth rate draw attention to a number of long-term problems. Since the decree on child-care aid bars mothers who receive the allowance from sending their children to nurseries, the strain placed on these institutions has somewhat eased. This is not true in all places, though, since there are also women who decide to continue work after childbirth instead of receiving the aid. The latter, of course, must place their offspring in nurseries and thus there is still a need to expand their capacity. More serious long-term problems are posed by the lack of kindergartens (in Budapest, 50 per cent of the children of kindergarten age can find no accommodation!). Here, the timely extension of capacity seems all the more mandatory, since a new provision which goes into effect in 1969 sets the minimum age of children eligible for a kindergarten at two-and-a-half years instead of the current three. (Cf. Nepszabadsag, 19 November 1967, and Magyar Nemzet, 19 January 1968.) Thus, the expected rise in the number of babies presents the regime with serious problems of long-run planning and more spending.

#### More Young People Go to East Germany

The characteristics of the second group of "Gastarbeiter" scheduled to go to the GDR have become a bit clearer. In addition to information previously supplied by the provincial dailies (cf. Hungarian Situation Report, RFER, 19 January 1968), the labor section of the Budapest town council granted an interview to the Budapest daily Esti Hirlap on January 23. It appears that the second group, which is to leave Hungary in March, will be primarily composed of skilled printing workers, locksmiths, building carpenters, heating mechanics and skilled building workers. The Hungarian enterprises to which such workers belong must give their previous agreement to the application. Individual applications will be taken into consideration only if the specified enterprises are unable to supply the full number of workers needed. Perhaps one of the goals of the present recruitment campaign is to ease the situation in Budapest, since application is only open to permanent residents of Budapest between 18 and 28 years of age who have completed their military service. Knowledge of the German language is not a condition, but is an advantage. The wage and working conditions are the same as with the first group, that is, the directives of the East German Labor Code apply.

Esti Hirlap concludes with the announcement that following the March group, further groups of young workers will go to the GDR in August 1968.