

Pázmány Péter Roman Catholic University

Faculty of Humanities

History Doctorate School

Economy History Workshop

**Theses of the Dissertation**

**LÁSZLÓ MÁRTON**

**COLLECTIVISATION IN SZEKLERLAND**

**(1949-1962)**

Marosvásárhely

2013



## **The Antecedents of the Research. The Questions of the Research**

In the course of universal history the rural society has suffered the deepest transformation under the shortest time in the period of so called “communism”, when under a decade the farming manner, the land ownership and the stratification rural society were radically transformed.

This absurd, ideologically determined experiment was accompanied by the tragedies of the individual and the community, ignoring human nature and the economic rationality. This experiment ended in total failure, leaving behind a burdensome heritage.

One victim of these changes was the rural society, which was deprived of his property, its elite were crushed, and was forced to join the collective farms. The process is known as “collectivisation”, but it was more than that: it meant the total transformation of rural society and economy.

The detailed description of this transformation, the analysis of the process and its components did not occur until now. There was no chronology of the collectivisation in Szeklerland, there are no case studies about the most violent actions and about the movements against collectivisation; we could rely on only a few interview-volumes and studies.

## **Methodology**

The methods used by the author were determined by the available sources, elaborated mainly by the authorities. Therefore the method of critical comparison was used, alongside with the data collected from sources of oral history.

As far as written sources are concerned, it was primary to decode the “gobbledegook” of the authorities – the communist rhetoric – this was the way to get near to the truth. Another characteristic of the Party documents is the conflation of the unique and general phenomena. Therefore in many cases the information from these documents could not be used. This is why the author had to reconstruct the events from every village.

As far as the statistics are concerned, the general opinion is that the statistic data from the period of communism are forged, and therefore cannot be used, consequently the author tried to analyse the statistics by comparing them, and – when possible – the data relating to regions were compiled using the available “basic” (communal, and “raion”/district) data. The conclusions that can be drawn from the statistical data were treated cautiously, mainly to illustrate the deceleration or acceleration of certain processes.

One of the hardest tasks was the ascertaining of the violent methods, atrocities; one can find data concerning this in the documents only when – after a large-scale movement – the events were investigated following an order of a high-level authority.

## **New Results**

As a result of the research we have an extended chronology of the collectivisation in Szeklerland, a fairly detailed description of the movements against collectivisation is completed; in the murder cases the victims were successfully identified, the date and the location of the execution have been established, and in one full reconstruction of the events has been carried out.

The process of collectivisation has been drawn up, broken down to months for the period between 1953-1962, and the methods used during collectivisation, also establishing a typology.

Due to the nature of the sources the chronology is patchy: several periods – with more data – could be reconstructed in great detail, other periods are sketchy.

Among the *distraction methods* the *agricultural tax* was analysed for the years 1947-1955, this is that period, for which there are comparable data. It was determined, that increase of the value of cereals and that of the most important agricultural products reported to the average income – and that of the relating taxes – is continuous.

In the case of the domestic animals there was a moderate increase, halted in 1955, at this time agricultural policy makers realised that the decreasing of the number of the livestock must be stopped, and the first step in this direction could be the relaxing of the tax burdens imposed on them.

In the course of the examination of the two *monetary reforms*, it can be established, that the exchange significantly impoverished the rural wealthy layer, and it had a restraining effect on the private initiatives and producers' activity.

In the case of *compulsory delivery system* the author could examine only the manner of the produce harvesting, the withdrawal rate temporarily could not be quantified because of the incompatible and fragmented data. Though, based on written and oral reminiscences one may state that the compulsory delivery system was the most important device of the state deprivation. On one hand the farmers received only a fraction of the free market price of their produces, and on the other hand the volume of the delivery towards the state was so high, especially in the case of the kulaks, that they remained with almost nothing. This was made even more difficult by the fact that due to inefficient organisation the farmers and the delivered livestock were moved back and forth. In addition the quotas were established without taking into consideration the local characteristics and asking for produce that were not grown in a specific place.

In case of the *changes in land ownership* one can observe that the state leaders had a well-established, longterm strategy. First in 1947 the land acquisition was placed under state control, lest the owners of large properties would not be able to sell them, and in 1949 they were confiscated by the state.

In the same year the state acquired the majority of the land owned by the Churches (they depended on state subvention), and in the same

year collectivisation began – and the small land properties gradually disappeared.

The farmers with bigger land had increased quotas – they often could not execute it – and the state “gallantly” offered to take over these lands from those who wanted to. This possibility was used by many farmers, to get rid of the land. At the end of this one and a half decade long process there were only insignificant privately owned land properties left, the rest was engulfed by collective farms, and the big land properties functioned as state property.

Analysing the *process of collectivisation* it could be established that the authorities have combined the compelling, incentive methods with physical violence.

The poverty-stricken rural layer was lured into the new collective farms with the promise of small household lands, the well to do farmers were forced into collective farms through extortion, intimidation and physical violence.

Of course the rural society resisted, that sometimes culminated in movements, which engulfed whole regions. The authorities have crushed these, sometimes temporarily retreated, or compromised, but the process could only be slowed down, and under one and a half decade crushed the rural society.

The authorities used violent methods for the first time in the summer of 1950, using executions to intimidate the people. The reaction of the rural society was further resistance, but if needed authorities applied armed force and crushed the resistance.

After a consolidation period a new wave of mass-collectivisation began in the summer of 1952, but soon after Stalin's death the further moves were stopped.

The collectivisation stagnated until end of 1955, and in the next year because of the events from Hungary progress was halted in Szeklerland. Instead of collectivisation the authorities accentuated the organisation of agricultural cooperatives: they were organised agricultural association: their territories increased by half in 1956, doubled in 1957, in increased by five times 1958, doubled in 1959. In 1957 the number of the members doubled, and tripled in 1958.

The growth of the collective farms was moderate until 1961, but in that year the transformation of the agricultural associations into collective farms was started: the overall number of members and territories of the agricultural associations and collective farms at the beginning and the end of the year was roughly the same – with fluctuations – but during the year part of the members and territories were “reorganised” into collective farms. This process lasted until March 1962, after that the fusion of the collective farms begins.

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