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**THE VULTURE AND THE CALAMITY<sup>1</sup> or why were Hungarian taxi drivers able to rebel against increased gasoline prices?**

(shortened version of the chapter in **Transition to Capitalism?** ed. Kovács, János M., Transaction Publishers, New Brunswick, London, 1994, pp. 275-292)

On October 25 1990 the Hungarian Government announced an official decree raising the gasoline prices by 76%. In the late afternoon thousands of angry taxi drivers protested before the Parliament and in the evening they blocked all the bridges across the Danube. Within hours the taxi drivers controlled the main streets in and out of Budapest.

On the next day (it was Friday) schools and offices, factories and the international airport practically were paralysed. The border between Austria and Hungary was closed to motorist to both directions.

By Saturday basic foodstuffs began to run low and the air became fresh, some people got afraid of the future, while others had a picnic on the middle of the empty bridges. In every hour the tension increased. The Government either deliberately or as a result of their confusion hesitated between police (or even military) attack and negotiations. The taxi drivers sometimes opened the blockades and closed down again. New actors appeared on the scene, trade unions offering their participation in a "round-table" discussion, the Hungarian Democratic Forum (the dominant party in the coalition) organized a demonstration against the blockade, the Free Democrats (the biggest party of opposition) issued a plea for peaceful solution and to supported the taxi drivers, non- taxi drivers joined the blockades all over the country, etc..

On Sunday, finally, the Government and the representatives of employees and employers engaged in a "round-table" discussion. The whole country watched the live show all day long. The result was a compromise i.e. the Government did not withdrew its decree but the rate of price increase was reduced and promised pardon for those who participated in the action. The blockades were demolished in hours and an ordinary Monday followed the "long weekend of rebellion".

**Why vulture?**

The purpose of this treatise is twofold; first, to prove that taxi drivers were able to rebel against increased gasoline prices because of their vulture character; second, to suggest that they chose rebellion as a form of protest because they had long been in trouble and had been afraid that the calamity of the gasoline price increase would turn their trouble into a crisis.

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<sup>1</sup> I would define crisis as a slowly emerging, not unexpected event which often has been fermenting for a long time. Trouble is less severe than a crisis and therefore its negative effects are easier to remedy. Difficulty and calamity are unexpected, shocking events, the former less, the latter more severely threatening social actors.

Why do I use the degrading analogy of a vulture to describe taxi drivers? I borrowed the term from the British socioanthropologist, G.Mars (1983) who in an analysis of occupational crime distinguished four categories symbolizing them with animal names<sup>2</sup>.

In his model the hawk is the symbol of the independent and individualistic entrepreneur whose goal it is to maximize profits, is free to decide what to embark on, how much to invest, how much and in what ways to cheat and to the prejudice of whom. Hawks are, for example, university professors, street peddlers, managers or hotel receptionists.

The donkey is just the opposite of the hawk. It represents a subordinated and isolated wage earner working in a fixed job who sometimes cheats his superior, and sometime the customer but both in a piecemeal fashion and on a small scale. In doing so the donkey takes great risks in doing so because he is easy to check and replace. Donkeys include shop assistants or cashiers.

The wolf works in a pack which is held together by strong solidarity and long-standing personal ties and earns invisible income in a team effort. The team spirit is manifested to the outside world as a seclusive subculture united by the collective identity. Developed internal division of labour leads to distinct roles and hierarchy known to and recognized by all members and which hardly change. Such occupations include dustmen or dock workers.

The central figure in my story, the taxi driver, can be classified into Mars's fourth category - that of the vulture. The vulture is similar to the hawk insofar as both prey individually i.e. there is neither specialization nor unequal hierarchical standing among them but is close to the wolf because there exists a loose network behind their actions that can quickly be activated as an efficient tool if needed. Under normal circumstances such a network is useful for coordinating, training and disciplining vultures but it has an equally important function of spotting danger immediately and giving increased efficiency of protection. Since the network is informal, there is no defined hierarchy among vultures although there are a few elected representatives who maintain the 'inter-vulture' network. Mars's favourite examples for the vulture are insurance brokers, real estate agents and car dealers.

### **The vulture character of taxi drivers**

Let us first look at the sociodemographic composition of taxi drivers. I would describe the typical taxi driver as a young to middle aged male living in the city, with professional driving skills and a considerable knowledge of the area he works in.

As to the working patterns of taxi drivers, the most important feature of this occupation is that it means considerable mobility in terms of area and time, and hardly resembles the two typical work places of our times - the factory and the office. Here, the place of work itself is on the move, there is no difference between day and night, only between good periods and bad ones, and the worse the weather, the higher the income; when other people enjoy leisure (on holidays, weekends, at night), it is the best time for the taxi driver to work. The taxi drivers are

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<sup>2</sup> In his book the author gives an excellent socio anthropological analysis of cheats, thefts, frauds, abuses, misappropriations and other illegal activities (Mars, G.: 'Cheats at Work', Allen and Unwin Pr. London, 1983).

in full control of their working hours and enjoy enormous flexibility which would be unthinkable in a factory or an office.

In this respect, taxi driving compares with household work where chores never end but can be interrupted at any time. This kind of unsystematic work schedule and constant mobility also makes it possible for the taxi driver to make himself scarce both for the family and the Internal Revenue. It takes a wife on her guard to know where her taxi driver husband can be. The high level of freedom from all kinds of control, the flexibility and constant mobility in time and space, the individualistic and independent decision making play a great role in giving a sort of a "macho" image to the taxi drivers' subculture. This occupation from the outside world seems to be characterized by a romantic way of life.

Their sociodemographic characteristics (young males) and since there are dense and widespread personal networks among them, also adds to the "macho" image.

This image is also supported by the personal service nature of the occupation. Taxi drivers must be very good in communicating with strangers. A taxi driver must be able to strike up and conduct a conversation, bear with all sorts of passengers and find the most effective technique to earn maximum tips. To do so, he has to be polite with a foreigner, technical with an egghead, cute with a mother and her baby, sympathetic with a tired worker and tough with a hooker and a pimp. However, he must also be able to tell when it is opportune to earn more than the ordinary fare plus tip (by cheating with the taximeter, giving wrong change, offering extra deals, etc).

A very important factor in their lifestyle and also a further element of their "macho" image, taxi driving is a hazardous occupation. The hazards are not only due to the very nature of road transport where heavy metal objects have a tendency to crash but they also follow from the passenger's character which is basically unknown for the driver. In return for the higher income from night hires, taxi drivers often have to pay a high price not only with their health and family life but sometimes also with their own lives.

Finally, the Tax-Driver-Image is influenced by the fact that though taxi drivers are not part of but mix with the underworld every day.

It is not by any chance that the public deals so extensively with taxi drivers and is so ambivalent about them: envying their entrepreneurial and illegal income but appreciating their entrepreneurial spirit and recognizing the hazards they are exposed to: hating their driving style but admiring their professionalism; condemning them for beating up passengers but thinking highly of them when they take a woman in labour to the hospital and help catch criminals□.

The work organization of taxi drivers is determined by the ways they can get customers. There are basically two forms of getting in touch with clients, either pick him up on the street (or at the stand) or being ordered to the clients' address. It is this latter form which generates a centralized but very loose network among the taxi drivers, otherwise working both individually and independently. There is a cellular radio system to allocate the hires. But the cellular radio system is much more than that. In emergency, the network may be the key to survival and there are such cases quite often (accidents, fire, robbery, fights, etc). In addition to being the nervous system in the work organization, the cellular radio network is the tool for taxi drivers in their social contacts, a communication channel for sending messages to one another, calling the family, setting up dates, searching for rare commodities, reporting on traffic jams, etc.

As to the social position of taxi drivers, it is not difficult to become a taxi driver. It practically requires no school expenses to get a professional driving license as one can obtain it while in the army or at the expense of the leisure time after school or work. Due to the fact that the overwhelming proportion of males below 40 have driving license, this license does not give social prestige. On the one hand, you are still "only" a taxi driver even if you hold a university degree, and on the other hand, you can be a taxi driver without any education.

But in the past some years to become a taxi driver more often than not one should have also invested a car. From the mid-1980ies self-employment is became very widespread on this occupation. This occupation was the first one in which case the state tried to transform the widely existing hidden-illegal second economic activity into a visible-legal one. Without any restriction everybody with a driving license could get access to a driving permission i.e. one could become a taxi driver without any bribe or entrance fee. The number of these self-employed or small-entrepreneur taxi drivers nowadays is greater than that of the other occupational form the "double-dipper" wage earner. In this case the taxi driver is employed by a state run firm for a fix monthly salary but earns his income mainly from the tips.

Does the ownership of a car increase social standing? Not really. On the one hand, because motor car is no longer an unattainable desire of the typical Hungarian household, on the other hand, because the taxi driver's cab is not entirely an investment since it is used for household purposes just as it is used in the "business". Consequently, the cost of the automobile purchased as a taxi-cab is only partly a business-related expense.

Turning our attention to the labour market strategy of taxi drivers' there is hardly any difference between a "double-dipper" and a small-entrepreneur taxi driver. To increase the amount of tips one should apply the same methods with which the small-entrepreneur maximizes his profit. One possible strategy implies overwork i.e. taxi drivers often extend the working hours to the physiological maximum. Secondly, both types of taxi drivers apply the same techniques - carefully tailored to the expected behaviour of the customer - to increase the likelihood to get and the amount of tip.

But both types of taxi driver may do other business during working hours in order to supplement his income. Such activities include various sorts of second economy activities e.g. dealing in foreign exchange or prostitutes.

Finally, both group have the same practices to reduce the driving costs. Just to mention a few of these practices they combine passengers going in the same direction, jump the queue to avoid idle periods (and save gasoline), turn off the engine on slope, combining work and household chores (shopping, taking children to school, etc).

While individual taxi drivers can decide independently how to combine the previously mentioned strategies, to improve their income maximization potential on the labour market they have purposefully and thoroughly organized it.

First of all, for years there is a smoothly functioning price cartel, secondly there are strong groups which monopolize certain segments of the business (airport, hotels, furniture transport, etc.). The extensive personal contacts intertwining the entire subculture of taxi drivers provide a firm basis for organizing both price cartel and monopolistic clans since it invokes and

help to maintain loyalty towards the Taxi-Driver-Image in general and towards clans in particular.

It is fair to assume that the total income in both types of taxi drivers is largely similar i.e. the tips plus wage earned by "double dipper" taxi drivers may well be equal to the small-entrepreneurs' profits and that the income in both categories exceeds average wages in Hungary (otherwise why would they so jealously guard their position on the labour market) although the relatively high income must be seen in the light of substantial costs incurred and the great monthly (and even weekly) variations therein.

In sum taxi drivers are of vulture character, on the one hand, because their work is of independent and of individualistic nature, their business strategy is entrepreneurial. There is neither hierarchical difference nor specialization among them. On the other hand, a taxi driver is not entirely isolated from his colleagues. On the contrary, there is a strong communication system among them, they have well developed cooperation patterns on the labour market, there are dense personal networks among them. Finally, there is also the Taxi-Driver-Image, a subcultural phenomenon which gives way to maintain a sort of "We-consciousness", a kind of common self-identity, which support cooperation without any formal organization strongly.

As to the question, what are the reasons that made the taxi driver occupation organized in a vulturelike fashion, the answer could be a simple organizational one and a brief sociohistorical one.

As to the former:

a, neither the wolf, nor the donkey organization would fit a bit to the independent and mobile work pattern of the taxi driver;

b, due to the hazardous nature of the job and that to increase income a central communication system is needed the total isolation of the hawk would have been also disadvantageous.

In addition to the organizational reasons there were special sociohistorical reasons also which made possible and even encouraged the emergence of the vulturelike structure e.g. it was relatively cheap to install the cellular radio system, the newly born small entrepreneurs in the legalized second economy in the early 1980ies were ready to modernization both in cultural sense and financially, there was no pressure on behalf of governmental authorities to set up a more formal bureaucracy, etc..

### **Resentment among taxi drivers**

The reason for resentment among taxi drivers is purely financial. For quite some time, due to the decreasing solvent demand and the increasing costs, their profit have been decreasing. I would describe the taxi drivers' economic situation as a constant state of trouble i.e. for some years they operate in a milder version of a crisis.

Why do I consider the state of taxi drivers at the time of their rebellion merely that of trouble? I considered the increasing difficulties of taxi drivers only as trouble because they have been able so far to cope with raising prices by self-exploitation and by the cartel system. Undoubtedly, they are worse-off now than they were in the early 1980s, but they are by no means different in this sense from the general trend in Hungary. As another fact that hints at the

troubled, rather than critical, state of taxi drivers, is that their number has not dropped significantly. If the business were in a crisis, the number of taxi drivers would be falling - partly because small-entrepreneurs who are worst off (driving gas guzzlers or incurring high maintenance costs) would be forced to leave the market and partly because relatively wealthy and venturesome small-entrepreneurs and double-dipper wage earners would seek other more promising investment opportunities to rescue their capital and to profit from their skills. But instead of any decrease the number of taxi drivers in Budapest is about 20 000, according some expert's estimation five times more than in Wien and four times more then in New York.

There were the taxi drivers' troubled by the diminishing number of customers, worrying about the rumors about increasing automobile and spare part prices when they were slapped in the face by a sudden and drastic rise of gasoline prices introduced by the Government. I might even say, the Government presented them a calamity.

Of course, it was not the fact of the price increase itself that caught them by surprise. Although the Government tried its best to hide its plans from the public, Hungarians tend to have such sophisticated networks and sensors that everybody was certain about the upcoming price increase despite (or just because of) the staunch denial on the part of the Government. However, a gasoline price increase alone would not have caused a crisis, it would only have been yet another nuisance adding to the trouble. What was too much to bear was the rate of the increase. This rate was so steep that taxi drivers would have been unable to shift such a high rate of gasoline price increase on to their customers, transport companies or even foreigners and nightlifers by simply raising their fares.

In essence, taxi drivers represented perhaps the very group of small-entrepreneurs and wage earners who were affected by the gasoline price increase not as consumers but mainly as service providers. Or, putting it differently, the gasoline price increase threatened them with a more miserable future than it did ordinary people as it meant not only doubled prices all across the board but also a risk of losing their daily bread. And it was also quite obvious for all of them that they cannot cope with this problem using their regular defense means.

### **Vultures on the defensive**

To be sure, the gasoline price increase was in fact a calamity taxi drivers would have been unable to fend off by their "normal" defense mechanisms (a cartel price increase, extending their working time furthermore, pressing the customer to give bigger tips, develop new informal activities in the "blacker" part of the second economy).

It does not follow, however, that they had to resort to rebellion. As possible alternatives, they:

- could follow standard economic textbooks and could simply and silently have gone bust without anybody noticing it as the Government might have expected on the basis of the economic theories of market adjustment;
- could have been engaged in internal fights (abandoning the cartel and attacking the monopolies) so that a minority would have redistributed the reduced cake and seized control over the new market;
- could have sought assistance or deferral from the Government through appointed representatives and reduced the impact of the calamity by hidden or overt bargains; - - and finally, could have gone on strike.

Why none of these alternatives was chosen can be explained on the grounds of the features I have discussed so far.

Individual reactions (from quiet acceptance of bankruptcy to innovative adaptation) would be typical of isolated hawks. The redistribution of the labour market would fit to wolfs more than to vultures who are thwarted by the principle of solidarity and by the inertia of a successful cooperative strategy and also of a wide network. And perhaps more importantly, since the calamity hit many victims simultaneously, the "we are in the same boat" principle increase the likelihood of cooperation. Moreover, in a calamity there is no time to either desert solidarity or start redistributing the labour market since both reactions are of great time consuming character.

Bargaining would have been equally time-consuming, so it was unsuitable for mitigating the threat of the calamity. Moreover, taxi drivers could not have relied on the Government's willingness or ability to bargain. As one radical rebel put it:

"If we accept the 20 percent (gasoline price increase S.E.) now, they would top it with another 40 percent in two weeks. No, thanks. I am determined to stay here with this twenty-ton truck. The people are with us ... All revolutions failed because those who controlled the events failed to persist. They were contended with promises and gave up their positions without guarantees. Let's not do so this time." (Kovcs, Gy.: "Commonsense has prevailed?", Nepszabadsag, 29 October 1990).

Taxi drivers had already indicated their dislike about what the Government was cooking but all their protests, demonstrations and petitions had been ignored. Even on Friday, the second day of the rebellion, the Government refused to sit down with the taxi drivers. Finally, the incapacity of the taxi drivers' "chiefs of staff" for negotiations should also be noted as another argument against the bargaining strategy.

As to the strike, its impact would have been far less shocking on the public and thereby on the Government since not many people and not too often use taxis. In addition, taxi drivers did not have an effective union-like organization that could have ensured the success of a sustained action (or insurance funds to compensate for wage losses, a staff to keep the media alert, leaders to coordinate the action for a longer time□, etc).

So far I tried to enumerate the reasons why other reactions than the rebellion were not really possible for the taxi drivers. But what were the factors the made taxi drivers able to rebel? The fundamental reason for choosing rebellion lies in the "macho" nature of the subculture and in the vulture character of the organization of the taxi drivers.

"Macho" subcultures are always ready to immediate and violent reaction. The calamity was so great, so visible that each vulture shared the same motivation (and new well that all the others also feel the same way) - a great impetus to fighting what is the absolute condition for a rebellion. However, personal grievances do not give rise to rebellion. Another important condition is that such grievances add up and be manifested in an effective concerted action. All this, however, requires solidarity and organization. The former condition is provided by the common subculture, the latter by the "intervulture" network. These two conditions enabled them to have their recognized and shared dissatisfaction confirmed and to spread the proposed plan of action without delay and distortions.

The operation could be so effective first of all because the "intervulture" network is a very sophisticated tool. The cellular radio system technically is more developed than all the communication systems the Government has, and this network is well maintained psychologically by the sense of solidarity of its users and socially by organizational skills, capital and personal relations that had developed in the daily drudgery in the second economy.

The speed, the straightforwardness and unambiguousness offered by the cellular radio system and supported by the subculture had paramount importance when it came to large scale rebellion i.e. simultaneous actions at different places. Solidarity means more than a taxi driver turning on his radio - he must believe that others feel the same way and will act the way he himself is instructed by the radio, i.e. he must be able to act without hesitation. The 'elite squad' of taxi drivers, their mobility, knowledge of the 'terrain' and their skills to organize actions largely influenced the form of the rebellion. They had already shown signs of their ability to block traffic (they had staged a demonstration only a few weeks before) and they had previously threatened with blocking bridges in fear of a possible calamity.

Obviously, taxi drivers would not have embarked on such actions if they had not been certain of success (although the high degree of resentment, especially in a "macho" subculture and if it is strengthened by shared feelings, may reduce the need for such certainty). But this extreme self-confidence is not even justified by their machismo. It was possibly due to the awareness that they were fighting for the interests of the People even though in the beginning their action was free from political claims.

In the beginning, taxi drivers stood up for their own and purely economic interests. So much so that they claimed compensation for themselves rather than the restoration of gasoline prices in the public interest:

"The other party (i.e. taxi drivers E.S.) said, as long as they were not given an assurance that by ... Monday afternoon the latest it would be clear who, in what form and to what extent would be compensated by the Government, ... they could not guarantee to persuade their colleagues and supporters to stop the action.. ... The Government should not revoke the price measure. However, it should find ways to mitigate the situation of passenger transporters, freight carriers and generally all concerned within a definite period of time." (Nepszabadsag, 26 October 1990)

The argument that taxi drivers fought first of all for the interests of the People appeared only at a later phase. But even in the very end in an "official" communique - released by the Hungarian Press Agency - the taxi drivers' organizing committee announced that

"...our claims have been and will remain purely technical, free from political considerations."(Nepszabadsag, 31 October 1990)

Perhaps it was just a handy guise for what was essentially an effort to safeguard their economic position and as a platform in talking to the People (including the police) both in the mass media and on the bridges.

But the heroic stand-up for public interests fits in very well with the "elite squad" image of taxi drivers. It is different from the macho culture I have described. It essentially depicts taxi drivers as the most active and entrepreneurial members of Hungarian society. It is again a reflection of the fact that taxi drivers were the first large group in the strengthening quasi-legal

urban second economy in the 1980s. There are several examples when taxi drivers offered their help voluntarily to the public e.g. in great calamities (in snowdrifts), in accidents and

"passenger transporters and freight carriers were the first to offer assistance in the revolution in Rumania ..." (Nepszabadsag, 12 November 1990).

This image of the "elite squad" was jeopardized as the public grew increasingly hostile to the taxi drivers' rebellion over time while negotiations seemed nowhere near an end. And as the following report from a major Hungarian city suggest it was likely to happen as Monday crept closer:

"The man in the street still supported taxi drivers for the most part (it is about Friday morning E.S.). Some people even got a kick out of it. ... Early enthusiasm was only to increase when it was found out that a group of Yugoslav tourists on their way for shopping could not get through the blockade (the city is close to the Yugoslavian border E.S.) ... Public feeling started to turn on Saturday when taxi drivers having cleared the streets again blocked downtown streets. There were fewer and fewer people willing to accept that total strangers required them to present stamped slips of paper or else a bunch of flowers to pass through." (Havasi, J.: "The taximeter strikes" HVG, 3 November 1990)

Therefore, taxi drivers had to change the justification of their rebellion for their self-defense, knowing that the public would not see them as fallen heroes if they only fought in their own interest. Little by little the focusing on public interest became the main motivation for the rebellion in hindsight. All this was possible among else because political parties and trade unions were also inclined to adopt this kind of reinterpretation.

### **The vulture wins**

Taxi drivers have undoubtedly come out as winners. As a summary, let us consider what they gained with the rebellion - in the short run.

They gained pardon. The loser (the Government) forgave the winner of the rebellion. The President of the Hungarian Republic proposed the Parliament to pardon the taxi drivers for their rebellion under the pretext that they had been unaware of what they were doing, what impact would produce. And the vulture is ready for peaceful coexistence. In its communique, the "operative committee enjoying the confidence of all participants in the blockade" wished to thank everybody for everything. And as for the future, the communique read:

"For further interest reconciliation, the only possible way we see is within the boundaries of law and the constitution. We consider our already existing and future professional forums for safeguarding and representing our interests to be legitimate for the purpose. We wish to avoid any further discussions, arguments and debates. With this communique we wish to contribute to social consensus in the days still burdened with tension and bringing further economic hardships after the present agreement." (Nepszabadsag, 31 October 1990)

They gained time. Since after all gasoline prices did increase, and it will be felt in the prices of all other goods, it is assumed that the number of passengers will continue to fall. Although taxi drivers averted the calamity, their position has not improved. But in contemporary Hungary it is already an achievement if the rate of decline is a tiny bit slower. All

the more so as one may gain time and look for other opportunities to cushion future hardships. By the end of June 1991 the fuel price reached almost the level originally was intended by the state authorities before the blockade i.e. the rebellion postponed the ultimate(?) calamity by 8-10 months at least.

They gained relatively lower gasoline prices. In the short run their successful action enabled them even to increase their profit. As the November 17 issue of a Hungarian economic weekly reported, taxi companies not only raised or were about to raise their tariffs but two of them increased their fares from HUF 14.00 to as high as HUF 20.00 per km. This 43% rise was higher than the rate of gasoline price increase and much higher than the state run taxi company's estimated 13-15% which would offset the cost effects of increased gasoline prices.

They gained organization. The rebellion proved the old premise of labour movements - unity is power. Here, of course, I am not referring to a nationwide or international mass movement which the classical class theory preached and what perhaps existed only in textbooks□, nevertheless organization gives great power to relatively small groups. An organization may be powerful in various ways. The analysis of taxi drivers gives evidence that looseness does not necessarily mean weak organization. Taxi drivers will obviously maintain this form of organization which turned out to be quite useful in coping with a calamity. In other words, taxi drivers should remain vultures.

However, there are certain functions that would require a more formal and stable organization that could concentrate technical expertise more effectively i.e. a bureaucracy. Perhaps this is the reason for the formation of the Budapest Chamber of Taxi Drivers almost immediately after the successful end of the rebellion. A chamber is probably a more effective channel for representing interests in the negotiations with the Government and other agencies than the "intervulture" network was. But "external politics" will not be the only function of the taxi drivers' chamber. As it is shown in Footnote 18, the Chamber has already been involved in organizing the price cartel, in a way insitutionalizing what has been an informal practice. The Chamber will also have functions which the "intervulture" network is unable to perform effectively:

"An internal charter will be prepared, setting forth strict conditions for obtaining license for passenger transport ... it will define the taxi drivers' code of work ethics and will monitor compliance. The committee overseeing work ethics will rule on passenger complaints and may decide to withdraw the defaulting taxi driver's license in qualified cases pursuant to the Code." (Nepszabadsag, 10 November 1990)

The objective is clearly to control the supply by ensuring that only worthy drivers provide service. This process can be seen as the closure of the labour market by the "insiders□" setting up guild barriers. The resulting labour market segment is the best form to safeguard high profits (e.g. lawyers' and physicians' craft market in the US or artisans in the Middle Ages, etc.)

They gained a strengthened "macho" and "elite squad" image and a reinforced "intervulture" network. The institutionalized organization leading to labour market closure does not preclude the subcultural spirit or the informal network among taxi drivers. On the contrary, all this is absolutely essential for the management and control of the Chamber. Their victory, just as the subsequent Government pardon and public glory have rightfully boosted the taxi drivers' ego (machismo, solidarity and representative excellence) and their commitment to the inter-vulture network□.

## Some conclusions

Being the first violent action of masses in the course of the transformation Hungary from Damned PartyState (nowadays this is the semi-official solution to label the final stage of East European Socialism) into ??? (my semi-official label of the current and would-be society) - it is quite obvious that there are a great deal of possibilities how to interpret the events.

Just to mention a few:

- For journalists and mass media experts the rebellion offered an excellent case study to analyse the operation of the current communication system. In a day-long conference on the role of mass media in the taxi drivers' blockade experts analyzed the contents of the messages circulated by the cellular radio system, of the news in the Hungarian radio and TV, made thorough content analysis how the different parties appeared in the media.
- For legal experts the basic problem was to define the events from constitutional point of view. Was it a special form of strike or a public disobedience movement? Which elements of the story and to what extent hurt the Constitution?
- For political scientists the role different political actors played in the events was the central issue i.e. to what extent is the Government responsible for the whole rebellion and whether the Government could have done differently, whether the whole topic is about the growing disappointedness of the citizens of party politics, whether the corporatist "round-table" was only a temporary solution or could be an institutionalized forum to negotiate fundamental issues in the future.

Obviously the rebellion offers several challenging starting points also for me, a sociologist in love with institutional economics and economic anthropology.

The story, for example, is a perfect example of the vulnerability of modern society. It is sufficient to clot the arteries at a few points, and the thrombosis will block all communication channels necessary for everyday life overnight. Even the sequence of the paralyse can be simulate; the bridges and the main roads fail first only to be followed by the airport and the border crosspoints and later the overloaded telephone network collapse.

To put the taxi driver occupation into a crosscultural and crossoccupational context there have been several cases suggesting that modern transportation occupations, including taxi drivers, have the power in every modern society to assert their interests by rebellion. Just a few examples, in Chile transporters and drivers were the Praetorian Guards in destroying Allende's regime, in Bratislava some weeks ago taxi drivers blockaded the Parliament to give emphasis to a nationalistic parade; in the last year peasants in Burgenland blockaded the roads between Hungary and Austria to articulate their unhappiness towards the Austrian government; Italian trucks drivers blocked the Brenner Pass to criticize the Austrian environmental policy which would limit their capacity; in Ottawa truck drivers blockaded the main streets close to the Parliament to demonstrate against the rising license fees and taxi drivers plan a similar action at the Toronto Airport in the beginning of summer - the peak holiday season. I would note, however, that there are other relatively small occupations with the same power. Perhaps modern

societies are on their way to be at the mercy of small "key" occupations (e.g. nuclear plant engineers!), more than to political parties or to the police or the army.

From the network analysis point of view, the taxi drivers' rebellion proves that "weak ties" can be very powerful tools in an emergency, that non hierarchical organization can be the best solution in special contexts, that personal networks are not separated but very much intertwine with policy networks, that the unlike its textbook version the market is far from being an anonymous phenomenon.

For a dedicated follower of A.O. Hirschmann this story is the first voice of the vulture. There have been attempts to describe the second economy of the East European socialist countries as the "soft" exit for those who considered it to be a better alternative than to remain loyal to the first economy or to raise their voice (or exit once and for all i.e. to emigrate). Granted that there was some truth in this interpretation, the taxi drivers' rebellion is the first attempt to use voice instead of exit or loyalty to cope with the new central power.

But the taxi drivers' rebellion can be conceptualized also as the utmost importance of culture. And not only the individuals' or the local communities' traditional cultural patterns but the role of organization specific culture (be this organization a firm, an occupation, a peer group or an ethno-national stratum). Moreover, this case study is also a strong argument showing that do to specific cultural and organizational the structural elements cooperative action could become more appropriate compared to "normal" societal solutions (e.g. individual adaptive reaction, monopolisation of the market, corporative negotiations or etatist-bureaucratic action).

Finally, the taxi drivers' blockade is a lucid example how a submarket of the former second economy can influence the transition towards a new formal economy. In this respect I would emphasise the multifacedness of the influence i.e. the 'positive' legacy can have negative and positive impact on the transition, simultaneously.

No question, the second used to be a very characteristics feature of the "Hungarian experiment". As coping means both for the masses and for the policy makers, the second economy should be counted as one of the most important "positive legacy" in Hungary. The spreading of illegal transportation for some decades used to be the only market in this segment of the economy. The existence of this "hidden but visible" market socialized the both buyer and seller to the market transactions (bargaining, calculation of costs and benefits etc). The seller was also socialized to a distorted sort of entrepreneurial behaviour i.e. profit seeking behaviour in a shortage economy, lacking any modern fiscal (banking, taxation, credit etc) system, under perpetual surveillance of the police one cannot expect the birth of a long term investment interested entrepreneur stratum. Then in the late 1980ies, as perhaps the last effort to use second economy as a tool to reform the first economy, the appearance of the taxi drivers as small entrepreneurs on the "whitened" second economy added further characteristics to their socialization, self-organization, cartel building and maintenance ability, quasi-corporate networking practice etc.

Obviously, these features did not disappear in the course of political changes in 1989. Why would they? Just because the political regime change in the short run the institutional structure and the operation of the "lower economy" (i.e. those segments of the economy which produces low-tech goods and services, well-being and cheap or non monetarized consumption goods) hardly changes. Therefore all the practices, networks, wheelings-and-deelings developed as coping means remain valuable assets. Besides, in the course of transition at least temporarily

growing uncertainty and severing economic conditions are also likely, circumstances that give further initiative to stick to already developed trouble-shooting mechanisms.

But the distorted entrepreneurial socialization and the barter-corruption-cartel-ridden organization and network mean both an advantage and a disadvantage for the society. It is perhaps better in developing a market economy to have entrepreneurs around than if there were only wage labourers, bureaucrats, cadres and unskilled workers. But this market will be lastingly distorted by the deeply socialized behavioural features of the vultures and the high inertia of their networks and organizations.