

THE ELITE AND SOCIAL SENSITIVITY*

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1.

It is common judgment that *social sensitivity* is the most important merit of the *social elite*, the leading stratum. It is particularly heard in the form suggesting that the new generation, the future elite, the prospective leaders are to be educated to have more social sensitivity than the quantity the old leading stratum used to possess. In general what is meant is that it is the greater social sensitivity of the leading stratum that is the precondition of, as well as suitable instrument for the proper and successful solution of social problems and crises. The thesis sounds so simple and taken for granted that its truth can hardly be challenged at first sight. If those people are understood under the term 'elite' in whom the aims of the community are consciously shaped, and social sensitivity stands for the proper sense of the life and interests of the community, then it can hardly be doubted that social sensitivity is truly the most important merit of the elite. It is, however, not only the proper meaning of a common judgment that is of great significance, but its mistaken one as well. Therefore it is worth studying what society rightly or wrongly understands under the statement, when it is heard or voiced.

When the public understanding of the elite's social tasks is studied it should be noted at first sight that neither the elite, nor social sensitivity refers to the same notions called elite and social sensitivity in the above brief, but theoretically well-considered wording. Common understanding, when it refers to the social sensitivity of the elite, does not consider the elite as a collection of the most valuable members of the society, but simply those who obviously belong to the leading stratum of the society as a result of their social position in the given social order. The same common understanding does not mean a sensitivity towards the order, life and interests of the community, an ability to properly coordinate social action, to recognize phenomena violating social order, harmony and justice, an inclination towards setting an example for the community, making sacrifices and taking up roles, in brief and simply: not sociability, but a far narrower phenomenon. According to this common understanding social sensibility is not manifest in relation to the society as a whole, but towards individuals who have got into a disadvantageous position in the distribution of social opportunities, who have got to the bottom, or at least below us in the specific cases, who are 'in poverty', 'in need', who are 'poor', of 'lowly position' first and foremost.

* Published in Bibó, I. (1986[1942]): *Válogatott tanulmányok. 1. kötet, 1935–1944.* [Selected Studies. Vol. 1. 1935–1944.] Budapest: Magvető, 221–241.

It is a sign of social sensitivity, if someone looks after his workers, if he treats his employees humanely, if he has the inclination to make the situation of those in poverty more tolerable and less distressing, if he avoids humiliatingly stressing wealth, social superiority and social differences, if he does not look down upon anyone, honors all kinds of work in its own place, and constantly remembers that it is ultimately the hard work of our associates in the community who are in a low, less appreciated position that supports the life, existence, and opportunities of the leading stratum as well. The aspect of 'social injustices' is undoubtedly there beyond this wording of 'social sensitivity', namely the idea of struggle against situations that do not correspond to the order of social values, moreover, a broader outlook of state social policy and of the literature on the so-called social policy includes to some extent even the objective of changing the power relations of the society. This element, however, is totally missing from 'social sensitivity' as used in common parlance. It simply stresses that it is the social sensitivity of the leading stratum that is supposed to hinder the sharpening of social conflicts and upsetting social order. It is then this practical aim to which the moral assessment of social sensitivity is linked: this is the common understanding that nothing is so lovely, so noble and elevated than the sign of social sensitivity shown by those in an outstanding social position; the loftiest and morally most demanding members of the social elite best utilize their qualities when they devote their work, or at least part of it expressly to social work, and it is the best schooling of the future elite as well, if they participate in such social work as much as they can. Today those members of the leading stratum of the society who are not forced to do permanent work by society or by their family, but wish to avert being blamed for frivolity and idleness, would, in nine cases out of ten start some kind of so-called social activity, and not self-education, teaching, improving fruit, or any kind of research work, which would not lag behind so-called social work in respect of moral elevation or social usefulness.

Next it is intended to take a closer look at the real content and meaning of the common judgment on the elite's social sensitivity and social work, and an answer would be sought to the question what explains the moral assessment of the elite's social sensitivity and social work, and what its real meaning is dominant in public understanding.

2.

First of all an attempt should be made to clarify *what is the place of the elite in society?* It is beyond doubt that so far not any part of humanity has created culture and social organization without some kind of elite. It is almost a commonplace that the role of the elite is to lead society. Society, however, does not primarily need elites to have someone to lead it, volunteers emerge for the purpose even if there is no elite. There were societies where the selection of the leader was governed without any particular order by the most primitive and most primary human abilities and emotions: that person became the leader who could terrorize the community by some physical and intellectual ability, or could subdue it by his suggestiveness, and remained the leader until a stronger one did not turn him out of the saddle. The task of the elite, however, is

more and broader than to *manage* the enterprises and actions of society. The major role of the elite is to offer patterns and examples to *living*, to *moral behavior* in human situations, to *deepen, refine, and enrich human needs*, in other words, to create *culture*. For this role it is only some kind of elite, a group of people chosen according to some order of assessment that is suited: it is the order of assessment that is able to ensure the validity and obligatory force of the examples and patterns given by the elite.

The considerations by which a society selects its elite may vary by people and ages, depending on the conviction of the given society concerning the criteria of human value. Distinctions may be made by birth, by wealth and the institution of inheritance, or both combined. Undergoing some special system of education, passing trials and examinations may be a device, or membership in a religious organization, community of worldview, in an initiated society, or political party. Whatever may be the criterion of selection it is the primary precondition of the peaceful and fruitful activity of any elite that there should be a living social consensus behind the order of assessment justifying the selection of the elite that would accept this evaluation and would wholly acknowledge the chosen nature of the elite. Another precondition of the peaceful and fruitful operation of the elite is that the real organization of the society may fully correspond to the accepted order of evaluation and the members of the elite may occupy such places in the social organization from where they are really able to govern the society, to influence it and to evoke a high degree of probable following behind their leadership activity.

It is this dual rear-guard of the world of values and of the real social situation that is always needed to the elite performing its own role with undisturbed self-confidence, with a vocation without meditation and with an intact social sense. A social stratum may possess the positions necessary to the governance of the society by the force of tradition, habit and actual situation, if society does not acknowledge the mode of assessment any more on the basis of which the given order of the society had emerged, and does not accept those value considerations on the basis of which the elite supplements itself. On such occasions the accusation suddenly emerges that it is not 'merit' and 'talent' that is asserted when the most important positions are filled. In fact what happens is that the leading stratum and the society have different assessments, and when this case emerges then *that* leading stratum is not any more the elite of *that* given society in a moral sense. On the other hand, one or another group of people may have the self-consciousness of being called for leading the society by the 'real' and 'proper' order of values in vain, if the possession of the key posts of society and the readiness of the members of the society to follow are not behind that self-conscience: on such occasions the qualification for being the elite may mature and strengthen in the course of time at the most, but it does not yet mean a real governing role in the life of the society. The self-consciousness of some intellectually eminent people that they are the 'true', 'intellectual' elite of the society, or the solid faith of self-conscious proletarians that 'they are charged with the future' often turns into mere and barren demand because they consider important from the aspect of the real values of the society only the events inside their own group, by anticipating their role that only exists in theory or in their hopes. In the condition of complacency the abilities necessary to the fruitful governance of the society cannot at all develop.

Therefore to the performance of the elite's task both factors are equally needed: namely to the justifying force of the valid order of social values and to the undisturbed possession of the real situations of social leadership. The two factors are intertwined in the life of the society, and it is mediated by those social phenomena that generally make it possible for the values and realities to have a joint and mutually corroborating effect in the society: they are the social *procedures* and *methods*, the *conventions* that have evolved for the solution of social problems, and *behavioral patterns* moderating social conflicts and strengthening co-operation.

It is the task of the elite of the time to preserve, handle, spread and develop them. In order to have the machinery of the society work they have to be acknowledged, practiced and taken for granted in the society. The operation of the elite and the obvious nature of the procedures maintaining the society are in interrelationship: the better the elite functions, the more obvious those procedures are, and the more the leading stratum of the society is capable of operation. It is important that the social conventions and procedures, and particularly the methods, titles and considerations that regulate the selection of the elite should have sufficient disciplinary force, yet they should be sufficiently free and flexible: they should not excessively burden either the followers or the leaders beyond their strength. The followers are burdened by the excessive democratization of the procedure serving the selection of the elite: if they have to participate too intensively in the elite-selecting procedure. It is natural that every elite has access to leadership role somehow by the followers' confidence, and it is rather necessary that this trust should also be manifest in the real social procedures (elections, responsibility, etc.). There is, however, a limit of burdening in the democratization of the elite-selecting procedure, and any such method that trespasses it harms itself, and ultimately leads to the weakening, internal corruption or fall of democracy. The building of the elite actually serves the economy of the society in the first place, namely that the followers may not have to live in doubt concerning the questions of the social patterns to be followed and of the valid social roles: and it cannot be accomplished by a method of elite selection that, instead of facilitating the life of the society, would constantly involve it in the process of appointing the elite, and would keep it in the excitement of the permanent changes of leadership positions. The elite itself should not be burdened either by the procedures evolving the order of the society beyond measure. Naturally, in order to enable the elite to maintain itself as a whole and that its members may remain members of the elite, continuous efforts and constant readiness are required which cannot be ensured without some kind of discipline and selection. The ordeals that identify and supervise the entitlement to belonging to the elite must not burden the person's total activity, and overstepping the purpose may provoke the mental state of anxiety instead of readiness.

The *unprejudiced nature of the elite*, one of the major preconditions of the good and fruitful operation of every elite, unfolds from the solid public conviction about the set of social values, from the safe possession of the leading positions of society, and from the obvious nature of social conventions, and further on from the flexibility of social procedures and methods. It is particularly important to enable the elite to perform its cultural task: namely that it may offer examples to the proper conduct of human life, to deepening and refining human needs. It is not possible to live nicely,

nobly and tastefully in the condition of self-satisfaction and arrogance, of pushiness and attack, or of anxiety and fear from being taken to task, or in the condition of self-defense and self-justification.

The requirement of the unprejudiced nature of the elite has been totally pushed into the background in our current thinking. It is understandable if we consider that the entire European social crisis of today is essentially nothing else but the process of the elimination of the ascriptive elites. The ascriptive elites do not only include the nobility, but also the elite of inherited wealth, and even the estate of officials supplemented within family framework, and they are characterized partly by the greatest possible degree of impartiality due to their selection once and for ever, and partly, and for this reason, by the lack of sufficient community discipline and by the high degree of arbitrariness of their selection. Since all of us have been living in the counter-effect that was launched in Europe against the ascriptive society in the 18th century, it is understandable that we have lost our sense of objectivity, a requirement that has been primarily the merit of the ascriptive elite in the perspective of our experience. Therefore in our effort to establish disciplined elites under strong control from the angle of value, the most typical examples of which are the unity parties of dictatorships based on worldview, we totally forget that it is not enough for the new elite to be disciplined in order to operate fruitfully, because in that case its entire activity may hardly go beyond the conduct of the external social events, of the mere exercise and demonstration of power without objectivity.

It would be a great mistake, however, to imagine that it is always the historical elite in a given case that is less prejudiced than the new elite emerging on the basis of new value considerations. It is just the faltering of objectivity that can be noticed first as a sign of the shaken set of values behind the existing elite. In the following we wish to study the symptoms of this faltering and to prove that ultimately they lead to the total paralysis of the creativity of the elite and the society's readiness to work.

3.

How can it be noticed that the self-confidence, self-consciousness and *objectivity of the elite have been broken?*

The first, not at all conspicuous breakage of objectivity is when the leading stratum itself and the other parts of the society begin to interpret the task of the leading stratum too subtly, in a too refined manner, with too many colors and external requirements. In the case of the ascriptive elite for instance, it is refinement and inbreeding, in the case of a priestly elite it is the holiness of life and the merits of transcendence that are excessively put into the foreground to the detriment of other elite merits: the countesses and bishops of the related novels necessarily begin to be slim, airy and not of this world. Whereas the elite in its prime consists of people who are primarily of flesh and blood, thinking rather realistically and with both feet firmly put on the earth, who do not at all represent the values they are charged with in the permanent state of floating above the earth. 'People not of this world' have always been in minority within the elite, and this is right. Beyond stressing refinement it is always turning away

from reality that is found, and it is explained by such a change of the world of reality as a result of which reality begins to keep rejections, resistance and grievances in stock for the elite.

The weakening elite is increasingly becoming prisoner of those external rules by which the extraordinary features, refinement, good manners, tastefulness, culture, etc. are supposed to be manifest according to common understanding. Nothing illustrates this change more characteristically than Balzac's description of the external features of the lady of the world, of the *comme il faut* woman, about her tasteful behavior, harmless addictions, fashionable garments, elegant home, etc., confronted to the grand dames of the *ancien régime*: "Formerly a woman might have had the voice of a fish-seller, the walk of a grenadier, the face of an impudent courtesan, her hair too high on her forehead, a large foot, a thick hand - she was a great lady in spite of it all; but in these days, even if she were a Montmorency - if a Montmorency would ever be such a creature - she would not be a lady."¹ That, however, only indicates that he was also part of the snobbery he had described. What is important from the entire description is how the possibilities of a rich and full life gradually close for a leading stratum being weakened in its strength and objectivity in proportion to the growing dominance of the feeling that they have to stand their ground *in front of the people* first and foremost, and have to adjust their behavior primarily to those requirements that are set by the changing public mood of the people. For every elite is under strong community control, yet until its potential is unbroken it feels that first of all it has to be in readiness for those values and has to report to them that are represented by it and not for the people.

It is a sign of a more serious crisis when the elite start to falsely evaluate the values hidden in the average, simple, 'common' people. The elite, aware of its own strength and the values it is in charge of, is always clear about the elemental social fact that it is either the elite that guards the most important values of society, or no one else. It is true that the high culture of the society may be refreshed by going back to the less articulated and simpler cultural conditions and to their lessons, but a lively and potent elite would lift, organize and incorporate every value and talent, it would implement the recognized lessons of simpler cultural conditions in its own life, and would be refreshed by them. It is only true under faltering social conditions that the values of the nation, the community and the society are hidden in the masses of the 'simple' people. In a society it may be true that it is only the simple people who speak a flavourful and uncorrupted language, that the people are the depositories of political wisdom and sobriety more than other strata, that dignified patriarchs and the sculpted species of wisdom are seated in the village informal councils. It may also be true that all this is *naďve* or pretentious legend. These statements, either they are true or not, mean the bankruptcy of the elite: or that they squeeze the real values of the society into petty conditions, and undeservingly occupy their place; or it may mean that they have lost their self-confidence and bravery and would rather spend values for locations where

1 The author quoted from the Hungarian edition of Balzac, H. (1913): *Az elegáns élet fiziológiája*. Budapest: Világkönyvtár, 16: 119–144. Translation from Honoré de Balzac: Another study of woman. Translated By Ellen Marriage and Clara Bell. Project Gutenberg eBook. <http://www.gutenberg.net/dirs/etext99/nswmn10h/htm>

there are none but they are unable to believe in their own value. In a well arranged society and in a well-balanced society it is the elite that speak most nicely, they are the depositories of political wisdom and such people sit in the village informal councils whose abilities meet the needs of the village community. And if it occurs to people of great wisdom to pull back to simple conditions, a well-arranged community would keep them on record as members of the elite, and whenever they are needed the community can call and put them in its service even if from the plough as any number of *Cincinnati*.

It is a sign of decadence if a blurred and intangible nostalgia emerges or is voiced by the elite towards the way of life of the simple, primitive and happy 'people', if they make a cult out of the uneducated 'original talents', if the leading class speaks about the barrenness of the way of life of the rich, of the gentlemen and of the urban people without remembering, wishing to or being able to adjust its own way of life to the stressed values of simple life. In this situation the praise of simplicity, if it is sincere, means helplessness and inability to be creative, if it is insincere, it means the betrayal of the values it is charged with and the male fide rejection of the leading role while the advantages of leadership are accepted, and it definitely means the end of the self-consciousness, bravery and objectivity of the elite.

A breakage of the elite's objectivity is also manifest in the *personal relationship* between leaders and followers as well. There is hardly anything more pitiable when an increasing number of the members of the leading stratum start to complain against the lack of respect of the common people, the servants and household helpers. And it is bluntly repulsive when the elite react upon decreasing respect by punishments and repressive means. The real elite are capable of behaving that commands respect, they know what they can demand and the lack of respect towards them can only be sporadic cases. 'Disrespect' becoming general means that the self-assessment of the elite is different from that of the society.

The obverse of this behavior is not less pathetic: when some members of the elite make efforts not to appear haughty, arrogant in communication with the 'common people', and when such communication with those of 'lower' rank becomes a special problem and a source of tension for them.

These phenomena lead to the more serious symptoms of crisis and to a decisive break in objectivity, which appears when the position of the elite consciously becomes a *problem of conscience* for itself.

It begins with the increasingly voiced conviction in the society, or even within the elite circles that the position, role and privileges of the elite are due to the work of the people, of the poor and of the workers. No matter how far this thesis sounds like a commonplace, it is a big mistake to believe that it is taken for granted under any circumstances. Even if it is true that the agreement, following and voluntary submission of those that are led are the sources and preconditions of every leadership role and power, yet this voluntary submission becomes *lastingly* only the source of power if the followers accept a certain *order* of social *evaluation*, and make that person or persons leaders in the name of this order who correspond to that very evaluation and who embody those values. Therefore the elite primarily owe their privileges to their own capabilities: to the fact that they meet certain moral and practical value

requirements set against them by the society. Until an elite is alive and creative it is clear that it does not receive its privileged position from the masses, but it is the masses that may thank their peace, order and work to the elite. Until the elites are alive and creative it is true that the poor serf may thank the good landlord for his ability to peacefully cultivate his land, and the poor coolie owes it to the valiant mandarin to be able to safely make his living in a well-administered country, the worker may thank the factory owner's enterprise that he has a job, the Soviet citizen thanks the communist party for his life progressing towards the socialist ideal day by day, the German compatriot thanks the National Socialist Party that he has an even personal share in the unparalleled elevation of the power of Germans and in the great experiences of the national collectivity. As soon as the self-consciousness of the elite is shaken, and the rightfulness of their objectives becomes uncertain, their capabilities are weakened, it is suddenly revealed that the haughty landlord lives on the sweat of the diligent serf, the arrogant mandarin sucks the poor coolie's blood, the idle fat factory owner pockets the benefit of the worker's assiduousness, and the huge party organization is but an army of useless parasites pushing the entire community into destruction and poverty. It is wrong to believe that the former outlook is but a void illusion, a clever cheating of the world, whereas the latter one is the *true* face of things. Both kinds of outlook may be equally true depending on whether the elite perform their calling or not. Exploitation is a highly relative concept, and in any given situation the issue of who lives on the other entirely depends on who gives more and more real things to the other of two interdependent persons. And there is hardly any output of higher value than what may be offered by the good elite to the society, and the latter one senses it very well. Whereas when people begin to sense the privileges of the elite as exploitation and parasitism it is already a serious symptom of the fact that the elite have begun to perform their role badly or not at all. And it is even a thousand times more serious symptom when the elites themselves begin to sense their own role as living on others, or feel it necessary to protect themselves against such accusation; for it means that the crisis has reached the most sensitive point, namely the conscience of the elite.

4.

The symptoms of the *crisis of conscience* have been manifest in the European elite, even if at different times by countries, since the strikes of the French Revolution, and next the ideological attacks of socialism have shaken the foundations of the thousand-year old society based on birth. The European elites of the nobility and bourgeoisie have been occupying an increasingly passive, withdrawing and defensive stand in proportion to the attacks. Meanwhile the world wars were fought; social revolutions and counter-revolutions took place, and the leading strata of Europe found themselves still to possess the leading posts of the European society with a reduced self-consciousness, a halting sense of calling and a disturbed ideological armoury even after attacks suffered for a hundred years, thanks to the lack of intellectual, moral and ideological harmony of the attackers and attacks. They had to face that express, or tacit accusation of growing strength that they did not deserve their privileges, and their

extraordinary opportunities were due to the work and benevolence of the poor, of the people, the masses and of the proletarians, and they are not suited for the task they claim for themselves. There may be three kinds of reactions to such a conscience in the state of crisis. One may firmly confront the accusation and undertake, live up to and strengthen the order and the selection that is based on birth, inheritance and wealth. There had been such concepts of social policy that essentially wanted to do it, for instance the so-called consolidation between 1924 and 1931 had such a background in Hungary. Nothing proves better how hopeless and inapplicable this program, consistent by itself, was, and how weakened and faded the ideas of values behind it had been, that even the most 'feudal' system could not stand by itself without making more or less concessions to the ideas of the age, and if nothing else, at least it did not dare to openly place itself on the theoretical foundation of social organization on the basis of an ascriptive order. And this already contains the bankruptcy of any such attempt: even if it sounds rather unusual, any difference between reality and the principles, between the actual aims and the slogans would, with the passage of time, inevitably lead to crisis and breakage in the society and in politics.

The second possibility is when the existing elite try to justify themselves by word and deed and to soothe their conscience in the face of the accusations directed against them. Self-justification and the moral condition of false self-satisfaction deriving from it leads to the paralysis of creativity in the life of the individuals as well as of the communities. A leading stratum that, for any reason is forced to raise, stress and prove its entitlement for leadership is just as much incapable of leading the society as such a person is unable to create anything who constantly puts the question to himself whether he is talented or not. The moment when the justifiable or unjustifiable nature of the elite's privileges is questioned, when the merited or unmerited quality of the elite as a whole is started to be disputed in a society, it already forces that group of people which actually plays a governing role in the historically evolved position of the society, to *defend* its role, its entitlement, and its own *qualification as the elite*, hence draining its forces from its specific role, namely from leading and governing the society and offering examples. At a first sight it may sound unusual for those who consider the relationships of a society primarily as power situations, in which the *government* of the society by the elite and the *self-defense* of the leading stratum are one and the same. What is evident in this outlook is that the rest of the society would constantly attack the governing position of the leading elite and of its qualification as such, whereas the only essential or at least the most essential activity of the leading stratum is just to defend its leadership positions. This outlook, however, is already the outlook of those who have not known and seen elites in their prime, living their own life without prejudices, but have known only the elite that have been attacked and forced into the defensive. If the activities of the elite are restricted only to the defence of their own situation the society profits little from it and it would be immediately sensed by the society without fail.

The desire for self-justification leads to a refusal by the attacked leading stratum to face the signs of crisis, and it would try to *mitigate the symptoms of crisis first and foremost*. Such a symptomatic treatment is that interpretation of social work made permanent and of social sensitivity that had been presented above. Social work and

social sensitivity understood in this sense would incorrigibly distract the elite from their calling, and would attack their creativity in its roots. The true elite - be it the priesthood, the nobility, a class elite, a professional elite or the elite of a worldview - are alive and creative, they pass laws, guard social rules, live a public life, wages war, concludes peace treaties, distributes social work and social opportunities, organize the country, build roads, canals, houses and cities, construct machines, organize expeditions, cure people, drain marchlands, fell forests, improve plants, crossbreed animal species, invent new processes of craftsmanship, write books, create works of art, travel, look for amusements, collect books for libraries and pictures for galleries, govern offices, mete out justice, make peace and punish, preach, hear confessions of penitents, console, teach and educate, think, do research and experiments: all that they do is *social work*, all that they do is done with a *social sensitivity*, all is done with a sense of the conditions of social life and of the interests of the community. It is a waste of strength if instead of all this the elite are forced to do *extra* social work for the restoration of social balance. It is natural that there is need for occasional help and welfare activities, for the so-called social work in the literal sense of the term in times of sudden social or economic crises, as well as in the case of earthquakes or floods. Woeful is the help, however, that wishes constantly to support crumbling houses instead of building dams, and when it sees that crisis is becoming permanent the elite are not looking for the causes hidden in the structure of the society and are not trying to eliminate them but would make 'social' work permanent, and would develop a permanent readiness for symptomatically treating evil under the title of 'social sensitivity'. The elite, just because they are the elite, are responsible for the structural faults of the society whether they have caused them or not, therefore they are trying to mend it with social work what has been damaged by their other work. The fault is not lying with the inevitably necessary and demanded social work but with the institutional consolidation of symptomatic treatment and with the false overestimation of readiness to do that kind of work, which leads to a dangerous psychological deformation of the entire society. It produces anti-selection in the leading stratum because it promotes elements inclined towards pseudo-work, pseudo achievements and false moral self-satisfaction. In addition it would extinguish solidarity with a badly functioning community and an inclination to work for it in the other members of the society; at the same time it makes the feeling dominant in them that they only have demands towards the community.

Linkages to Christian affection, to the idea of charity and to the charitable work of the Churches have greatly contributed to the false assessment of social sensitivity and social work. Naturally, social work demanded by the momentary situations is the command Christian affection. Making symptomatic treatment permanent and institutionalized, however, does not derive from affection but from a wrongly understood self-defense and from insistence on a false claim. And for this situation Christianity has a very simple command: "And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee" [Matt. 5.30].

The process that begins with the appearance of a separate social sensitivity and social work would, in the end, inevitably lead to a vicious circle. The representatives of the order of social values that have got into crisis, namely the elite, in order to restore

the disturbed order of social needs, or to strengthen the shaken value bases of the social order, set themselves to mitigate the symptoms of crisis, and naturally it would help provided the crisis is a superficial one. In the case of a deeper crisis symptomatic treatment, the so-called social work is forced to become a permanent one, while its permanence would paralyze the elite's creativity and the inclination of the entire society to work. A reduction of the value of social work deepens crisis, which, in its turn, requires the enhancement of 'social' activities. This vicious circle may turn around for a very long time, but the process as a whole would once inevitably reach a point where it would make that social order void and barren for the protection of which it had evolved.

Therefore neither the hardening of conscience nor its silencing by repeatedly stressing social sensitivity and social work would help in the crisis of the elite's conscience: the solution, just as in the case of any crisis of conscience, may be brought about only by the third alternative, namely facing facts.

The vicious circle can be dissolved only at one point, at its starting one. The elite have to give up the protection of those privileges they themselves do not believe in anymore, and have to internally liquidate their demands that have become untenable. This is much more significant than transferring concrete leadership positions. Whoever is faced with the demand of transferring concrete positions may always raise the issue, and often rightfully, whether those claiming to take over leadership would be better and more suited for the job than their predecessors? The present leading stratum of Hungarians, if confronted with such demands, may say that all those other strata to whom it may occur to demand leadership for themselves have already proven their inability of leading on specific historical occasions. This, however, does not relieve anyone of a heart-searching, nor of giving up false self-satisfaction, or of the elimination of untenable demands, for the regeneration of the world of social values is a hundred times more important than the 'transfer of power'. We, Hungarians, have a historical example for the dignified performance of community rearrangement, it is our noble tradition based on the example of the legislation of 1848. At that time there was hardly any other stratum or class besides the Hungarian nobility that would have been capable of taking over the task of the national elite. This, however, did not hinder either an internal taking to account or preparing for social transformation.²

2 The gesture exercised by the Hungarian nobility in 1848 has a romantic and a materialist interpretation, both are around that totally meaningless and uninteresting issue whether this step had been selfless or not. According to the romantic interpretation this act was an unparalleled manifestation of generosity and ability for voluntary sacrifices. Whereas, according to the materialist interpretation the entire gesture originated partly from fear, and partly from a well-considered economic interest. Both interpretations are narrow and inhuman: they do not explain what had made an entire social class so very ready to make sacrifices that it gave up its privileges without resistance; neither why that social class could consider so well its own interests what disappearing classes are rarely able to do. One would properly grasp the role of the Hungarian nobility in the Reform Age and the meaning of their action in 1848 if it is assessed as the sign of the bravery and clear vision of the Hungarian elite of those days. The abolition of serfdom itself could be inevitable and could not have been postponed for long, but it could have taken place upon a foreign initiative, under external pressure, while the Hungarian nobility malevolently resisted it and it could have taken place in an atmosphere of vengeance nurtured by both sides and of a bitter quest for revenge. The historical merit of the Hungarian elite of the Reform Age is that they did not only recognise the untenable nature of the social organization of estates, but it had the courage to draw the proper conclusions as well.

The Hungarian elite of the day had the courage to think over the tasks of rearrangement within the framework of the reform movement, and they themselves transformed the solutions prepared into political reality. In contrast the elite, not in command of their own destiny and waiting for being put aside by violence or by the events offer a sad sight, and next they would be sulking, sabotaging and would be brooding on their unsatisfied demands. This is an unpardonable waste of community forces.

5.

Strong criticism has been repeatedly expressed against asserting social sensitivity, the glorification of social work and against making social policy a constant one. They have primarily come from the socialists behind which it has always been the demand for the elimination of every privilege and for total social equality and not the bankruptcy of the old elite and the problem of developing a new one. What has been exposed above wished to prove that an understanding which is clear about the necessity of the existence of the social elite should condemn more strongly than any socialist social self-satisfaction based on the repeated voicing of social sensitivity, the institutionalization of social work and on charitable social policy. Once again and finally, it should be stressed that this judgment does not concern the specific manifestation of social sensitivity and the actually performed social work, but *false assessment* deriving from a desire for self-justification and a *social self-satisfaction* based on it. The elite, if the need be, should do social work as well, but they should be aware that if the society they are in charge of reaches a point when it is unable to exist lastingly without separate social work then the elite should not spend their best forces on making social work permanent, organized and extended, but on the clarification of the roots of the crisis and on the elimination of its cause. If it is revealed that the cause of the crisis is the faltering of the order of assessment behind the elite and the decrease of the capabilities of the elite, they should not develop and stress a separate *social sensitivity* for postponing the abandonment of their role, but should seek out those new points of social assessment with a true social sense and primarily apply those points to themselves that correspond to the changing public conviction of the society and suit the restoration of the disturbed harmony of the community.