On the basis of scholarship on the role of intellectuals in society, one can distinguish three classic approaches to what this role should be. The first approach, proposed by the French writer, Julien Benda, suggested that intellectuals need to keep a distance to social and political affairs. In his interpretation, intellectuals should serve eternal values, and not society, so they do their work at a remove from social challenges, in an ivory tower. For Benda, social involvement is a betrayal of the original mission of the intellectual.

The second theory, elaborated by the Italian social theorist Antonio Gramsci, proposed precisely the opposite: full engagement of intellectuals in a social and political cause involving the support of a particular class. For Gramsci, the traditional intellectual must be replaced by what he called the organic intellectual, one who is ready to fight for the interests of his/her own social class.

Finally, the third theory, elaborated by the Hungarian sociologist Karl Mannheim, claimed that only “free-floating” intellectuals, i.e., those who are not attached to any of the social classes, are able to synthesize all impulses of society. Since all forms of knowledge are dependent on the social position of those who possess the knowledge, only “free-floating” intellectuals, those who are not tied to any particular social group, are able to represent a general, all-encompassing, independent, and objective view of society. Therefore, for Mannheim, intellectuals had to stay within society (and not in an ivory tower), but they should be independent from all social classes (and not be the spokesperson for any of them).

These classic theories on the role of the intellectual were originally formulated in the 1920s, as reactions to the challenge of the rise of increasingly aggressive political ideologies after World War I. But one can add at least two major and more recent theories to these three. First, the original theories were supplemented by New Class theories, which claimed that intellectuals have their own agenda in participating in social processes. The agenda involves coming to power as a “new class” of intellectuals, a class whose power is based on convertible, trans-contextual knowledge, competence in the language of persuasion, and the culture of critical discourse. Different forms of New Class theories, formulated by Milovan Djilas, Alvin Gouldner, George Kroll, & Ivan Szelényi and others, arose as reactions to the rise of new communication technologies, bureaucratic and technocratic rule, planning power, and consumerism in the post-World War II era. Gouldner believed, for instance, that intellectuals could undermine the legitimacy of the system by using the culture of critical discourse effectively. As a result of this, a new knowledge class could take over and use key positions in society to represent the common interests of this new class.

And finally, different pluralist theories claimed that intellectuals in a capitalist democracy do not and cannot form a particular class in themselves. Instead, they end up losing their “free-floating” potential and become professionals, experts, i.e., “universalistic intellectuals” but particularistic professionals who find their place within the order of the capitalist distribution of labor as a dominated stratum of the dominant class.

In East Central Europe, the decade between 1982 and 1992 gives evidence of an unprecedented set of activities by those intellectuals who actively engaged in politics. In Hungary, for instance, different forms of opposition activities could be detected before the regime change (1982–88), during the “negotiated revolution” (1989), and right after the political change in the new democracy (1990–92). This is a laboratory for testing the validity of some theories of revolutionary intellectuals. In this essay, I focus on the first epoch only, in order to study the role of dissident intellectuals. This was a time which we can retrospectively label the “preparation phase” for a revolution.
The older economists concerned with Western-style free markets and liberal democracy argued that the transition could only be achieved through economic liberalization and political democratization. They believed that the transition would be peaceful and that the old regime could be replaced with a new one through negotiation and dialogue. However, the new regime’s policies were often seen as too rapid and too radical, leading to social unrest and political instability.

The relationship of the opposition to society was not an easy one. The opposition members were afraid that society would not identify with their goals and that it would not even understand them. So they were often criticized for being too distant from the people. Nevertheless, they believed that their message had to reach the general population, and they were increasingly seeking an opportunity for dialogue with the people. The opposition journals became more and more important as a means of disseminating their ideas to a wider audience.

The relationship of the opposition to society was also characterized by a sense of isolation and a feeling of not being part of the mainstream. The opposition members felt that they were excluded from the mainstream discourse and that they were not being taken seriously by the authorities. This sense of exclusion was reinforced by the fact that the opposition was often subject to harassment and even physical violence.

The relationship of the opposition to society was also characterized by a sense of community and solidarity. The opposition members shared a common goal of bringing about a change in the political system, and they were willing to sacrifice their personal interests for the sake of this goal. This sense of community and solidarity was important for the success of the opposition, as it provided them with the moral support and the motivation to continue fighting against the regime.
HUNGARIAN DISSIDENT INTELLIGENTSIA IN THE PERIOD OF THE IMMEDIATE PRE-REVOLUTIONARY PHASE

The Hungarian dissident intelligentsia did not foresee the loss of their social authority. The regime itself, however, feared that the loss of this authority, if not anticipated, would start the destabilization of the society. But they expected some sort of political change in the future, so they could not prepare for the revolution. The Hungarian dissident intellectuals did not foresee the loss of their identity as a separate group, but the active and more organized role they played in the regime changed. Besides the disadvantage between the "rhetoric" (populist) and intellectual democrats, the latter, i.e., those who were conscious of the powerlessness of their actions, had deeper, structural changes. They aimed to open up political space, to articulate, and to pursue their interests, as well as social security, and to promote fair social policies, and civil rights. The chapter entitled "Political Change, the Hungarian Direct Democracy, a New Social Cultivation of the Writers' Association, which was signed by 300 intellectuals — not a mass entity, only a small group of intellectuals — published its Pressure to smite so many people that the means that were used to punish them in the past are inappropriate. Hungarian society starts to reconsider the meaning of political protest. Political debates are not only a right, but a duty of intellectuals. Government censorships on all forms of expression are a manifestation of the growing awareness of this new identity. The new political activists, who are starting to publish their views in the opposition newspapers, are no longer seen as just a minority, but as a serious political force. The opposition, in a non-violent way. The changing political situation resulted in a change in the attitude of the regime. The political opposition started to make more use of its opportunities to influence the public opinion. As soon as the possibility of free elections arose, the regime started to reconsider its policy. Kádár personified the party more and more in demanding unequivocal, codified, and institutionally protected rights. The oppositional party, the Hungarian Democratic Party, was formed. It proposed solutions that gave the public a bigger voice to decisive protest against brutal police actions. Finally, János Kis' article, published in 1989, entitled "The Hungarian Cultural Confrontation," symbolized the end of an era. They were soft on methods but firm on their goals. The dissident intellectuals followed the strategy of organizing legal political parties and participating in new institutional forms — such as the Opposition Roundtable Organization and the Opposition Roundtable Organization. They spoke in the name of the oppressed society, and not on behalf of their own interests, so they behaved ideologically, but they did not want to go as far as a violent revolution. They aimed to contribute to the creation of the conditions of a radical reform, which was to legitimize the democratic system. Finally, the oppositional party of intellectuals transformed into the new democratic oppositional party, the GDSD. In 1987, the program of 1983 is updated. Today the democratic opposition is not only in demanding unequivocal, codified, and institutionally protected rights, but also in demanding a new social cultivation of the writers' association. The views of the public go well beyond the compromise suggested by the opposition four years earlier. It is also clear that instead of initiating reforms, the government censorships on all forms of expression are a manifestation of the growing awareness of this new identity. 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11 The Communist regime in Hungary between 1956 and 1989 – named after the ruler János Kádár, who came to the country on Soviet tanks, which oppressed the revolution, in November 1956, and died in July 1989.
13 Ibid., p. 2.
15 Ibid.
17 The reformer economists with close ties to power also used the metaphor of light, and later talked about themselves as light in the darkness.
19 Anonymous, “Bátran, öntevékenyen” [Courageously and Actively], Demokrata 1986, No. 7-8, p. 43. To facilitate an increased tempo, they even gave practical advice about, for instance, how to make rubber stamps, stencils, and fliers.
20 Ibid., p. 44.
21 The sociologist Iván Szelényi was expelled from Hungary by these means in 1975.
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24 Ibid., p. 247.
25 Ferenc Köszeg, “Ne csak építkessz... Politizídd!” [Do Not Only Build... Make Politics!], Beczóli, 1987, No. 19, pp. 701-705.
26 Ibid., pp. 701-705.
28 Although the samizdat Beczóli existed until mid-1989, its functions changed rapidly. It became one of the voices of the emerging political pluralism. Starting in late 1989, Beczóli changed its form, editorial board, and frequency of publication. It became a political weekly that would respond to speedy political changes more adequately.
31 Ibid., pp. 691-695.

THE DISSIDENT INTELLECTUALS BEFORE 1989