



This Joke Is Getting Seri



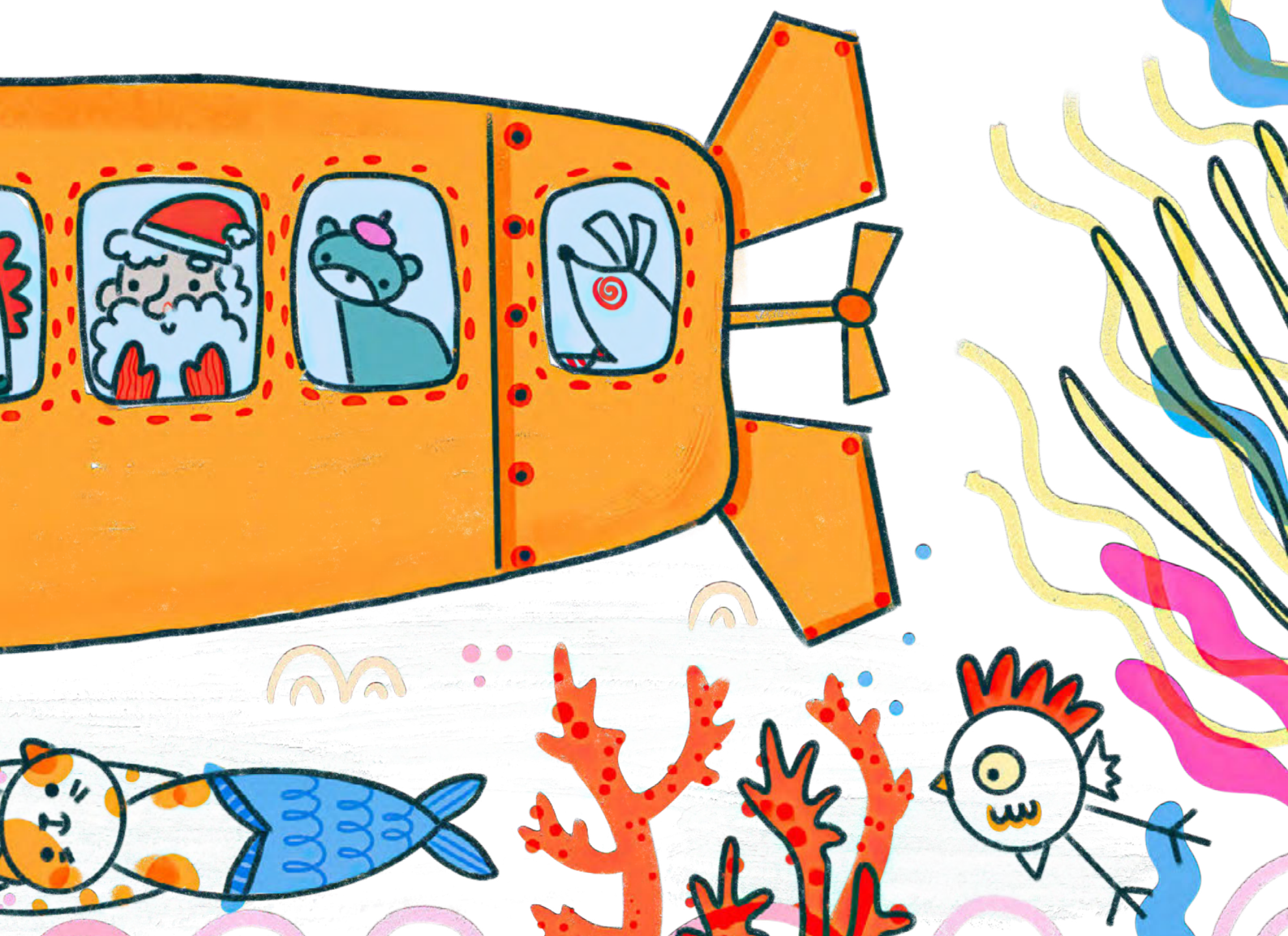
Counter-Hegemonic Humour as Anti-Authoritarian Resistance:

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The Curious Case of the Hungarian Two-Tailed Dog Party



Would you trust a chicken dressed up as a politician on national television? Would you feel safer meeting Jedi knights over the police on the streets? Would you ever vote for a gorilla? If the answer is yes, then you should get to know the Hungarian Two-Tailed Dog Party: *Magyar Kétfarkú Kutya Párt* (MKKP).

MKKP's story starts in the early 2000s in a shared apartment in Szeged – a southern Hungarian university town near the Serbian border – and a gang of young students gathered together to have fun and goof around, typical for a group of friends in their twenties. They used to organize pranks and stunts, and they were as happy as a dog with two tails. This image of a non-existent species was so accurate in describing the group's mood, it soon became its logo. Although the party definition was already in the name, at the start the MKKP took the form of an informal association of creative minds, who wanted to come together and vent, while having a good time. The goal has always been to laugh at something together, instead of indulging in contempt and despair.

As a satirical group, the MKKP aims to parody the political élite, make fun of Hungarian mainstream party representatives, denounce the authoritarian turn of Fidesz,¹ and subvert the government's propaganda with subtle and sharp irony. However, MKKP's counter-hegemonic actions do not crystallize into critical information campaigns, full of reliable data delivered in a formal tone; rather they consist of pleasant, funny, and useful activities to draw attention to social problems simultaneously, make people laugh to a heart from

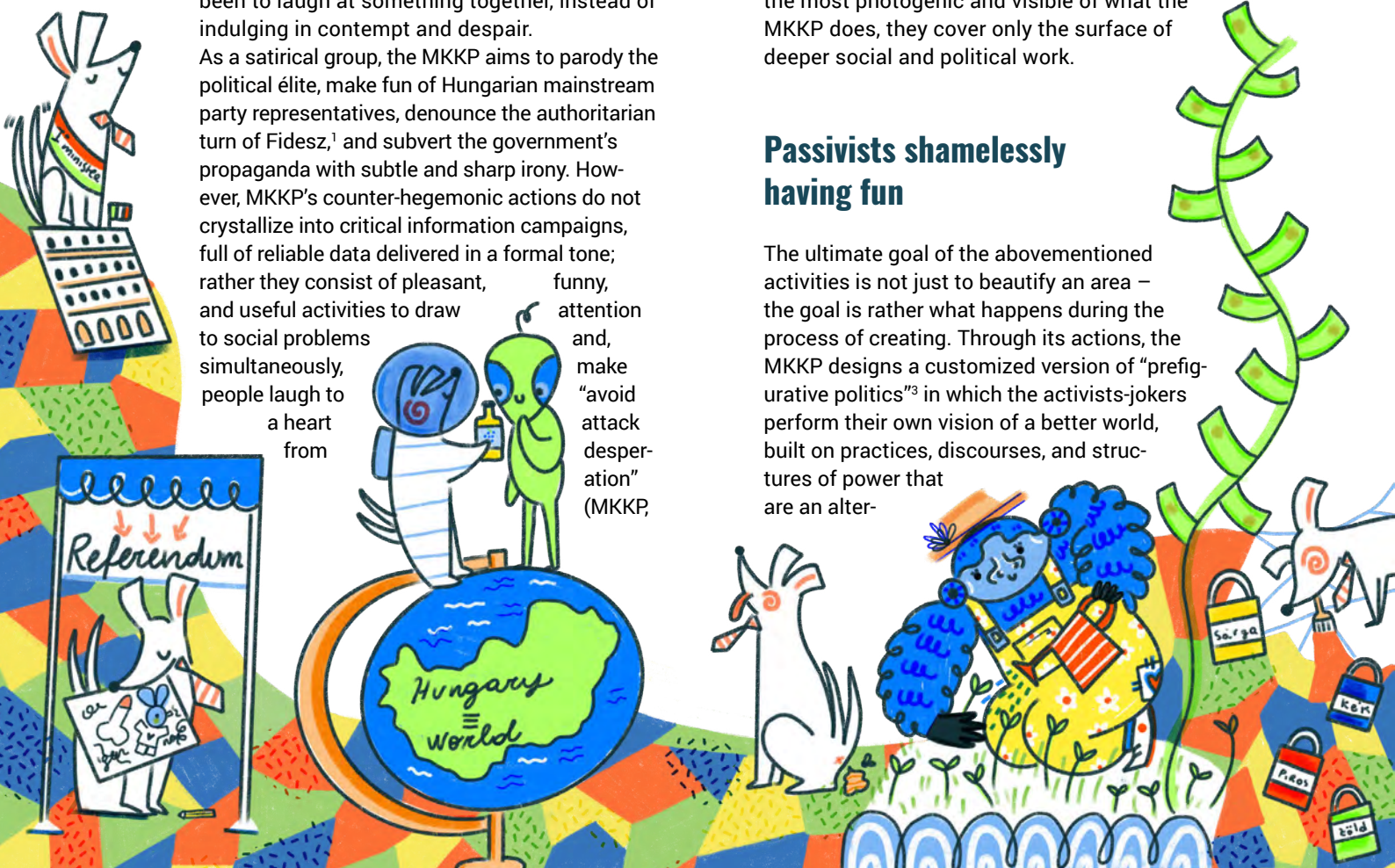
funny, attention and, make "avoid attack desperation" (MKKP,

n.d.). The Two-Tailed Dog Party aims to mobilize citizens by turning them into *passivists*;² to establish meaningful political dialogue in opposition to the dominant rhetoric of competition and harsh antagonism; to take over the neglected work of local authorities and encourage them to act; to build a citizen-based approach for efficiently solving concrete problems and addressing social disconnections, while defying the emotive mainstream politics of fear and division.

To do so, the MKKP uses a variety of methods, often organizing actions held in public spaces, which include graffiti, stencils, posters, stickers, billboards, street art and street theatre, "guerrilla-gardening", decorations of bus stops, subways, or cracks in the tarmac. They always use consistent colour patterns and their logo, both of which enable them to be easily recognizable and identified. Such operations are aesthetically attractive and facilitate immediate complicity between the creators and their audience. However, although these actions are the most photogenic and visible of what the MKKP does, they cover only the surface of deeper social and political work.

Passivists shamelessly having fun

The ultimate goal of the abovementioned activities is not just to beautify an area – the goal is rather what happens during the process of creating. Through its actions, the MKKP designs a customized version of "prefigurative politics"³ in which the activists-jokers perform their own vision of a better world, built on practices, discourses, and structures of power that are an alter-



native – if not the opposite – to the dominant. At the same time, they are shamelessly having fun and proudly embracing unproductiveness, challenging the neoliberal understanding of this term. The MKKP contributes to the forging of new meanings and systems of knowledge, while obviously mocking mainstream politics – and putting everyone (except for politicians!) in a cheerful mood.

In addition to this, the Two-Tailed Dog Party stages flash counter-(re)actions and mock campaigns whenever the government implements policies led by hate. For every action that comes out of institutional politics, there is a corresponding grassroots, spontaneous prank-reaction from the MKKP. For instance, as a response to hundreds of xenophobic billboards put up by Viktor Orbán's government in 2015, the MKKP launched a crowdfunding campaign to buy billboard space, substitute Orbán's posters with anti-anti-immigration rhetoric, directly satirizing the original slogans. Eventually, the Two-Tailed Dog Party collected enough money to cover the same number of billboards that had previously been bought by the government. For example, to the government's message "Did you know that nearly one million immigrants want to come to Europe from Libya alone?", the MKKP replied with "Did you know one million Hungarians want to emigrate to Europe?".⁴ In the wake of this, when Fidesz launched the "national consultation on immigration and terrorism" in 2016,⁵ the MKKP confronted it, encouraging voters to invalidate ballot papers by ticking both "yes" and "no", or by drawing penises, elephants, or batman – to propose "a stupid answer to a stupid question". The list



MKKP Sticker: Tax reduction, eternal life, free beer

of MKKP's counter-attacks is too long to be accurately recounted, but some of them are definitely worthy of mention, such as realization and distribution of a satirical edition of Magyar Hírlap, the Hungarian Gazette used to spread the government's propaganda; organization of counter-demonstrations – the "Alternative Peace Marches"⁶ – parallel to marches organized by Fidesz; and printing fake money to highlight the numerous cases of corruption within the Hungarian political system.

Giving other species a chance for office

However, the MKKP has not limited itself to the performance of humorous, contentious actions and jokes. In 2016 it registered as an official political party. This official label did not lead to shifts neither in its grassroots nature nor in working methods. Nevertheless, when a movement or an informal group acquires the status of a political party, one meaningful change occurs: it is formally entitled to run for political office. The MKKP did just that at every possible electoral opportunity: namely at local, national, and

European levels, organizing campaigns that were “pleasant for voters and annoying for politicians”.

The MKKP gained momentum and major visibility through their electoral campaigns based on absurdity and hilarity. By making impossible promises, which included eternal life, free beer, two sunsets per day in different colours, a one-day work week, or mandatory siesta, the MKKP mocked politicians who often make unrealistic pledges. Likewise, the party’s campaign slogans are all expressed as imperatives or exclamations, and are full of freakish (or visionary?) demands such as “Let everything be better!”, “Money without work!”, “Tomorrow should be yesterday!”, “You will be happy!”, “More everything, less nothing!”. The MKKP’s electoral programs are a product of a collective blue-sky thinking, which include: trade relations with extra-terrestrial life forms to strengthen foreign policy, the creation of new species to balance those threatened by climate change, the flooding of the main roads of Budapest with water on weekdays and beer on holidays to fight traffic and pollution.

The Two-Tailed Dog Party presents itself to voters as “the only party that makes sense”, asking Hungarians to “give another species a chance”. In fact, their candidates come from human as well as from animal and fantasy realms. Some of them have appeared as a gorilla, chicken, horse, T-rex, an acid-spiting ferret, Santa Claus, and an invisible man. Quoting Gergely Kovács, one of the MKKP’s co-founders, “as a dog party, they welcome animals”, convinced that people have lost their trust in human politicians. Even though it might seem like a frivolous candidacy, the Two-Tailed Dog Party takes elections seriously, considering them as the gateway to begin working on real structural problems. The struggle often pays off and the MKKP obtained 1.73% of the vote in the 2018 Parliamentary elections, 2.62% in 2019 European Parliamentary elections (the highest percentage for a satirical party in EU history), and four of its representatives were elected in different districts of Budapest in the aftermath of the 2019 local elections.

There are many ways and arenas for confronting hegemonic power. The MKKP has the ability to be confrontational in its presence, merry in its mood, and highly receptive to social needs. Its satire works both as comic relief for like-minded people who feel politically disillusioned, as well as a critique of injustices and authoritarian trends. In fact, by adopting tools of humour and absurdity, the Two-Tailed Dog Party builds conditions of conviviality⁷ and shapes an alternative normality, all the while raising awareness and mobilizing an increasing number of first-time *passivists*. Laughter has a significant transformative power: firstly, because without it there cannot be any harmo-

nious human community, and secondly because it always carries social significance. As Henri-Louis Bergson pointed out, “our laughter is always laughter of a group”, implying complicity with other laughs, might they be real or imaginary⁸. Indeed, laughter is a compelling antidote to sad passions, a method for enforcing collective fortitude, and a picklock to access progressive futures. To paraphrase one of the most famous lines from the “Communist Manifesto”: all that is solid melts into giggles. To challenge the status quo you might need some serotonin.



Endnotes

- 1 Fidesz is a right-wing national-conservative political party, led by Viktor Orbán, who has served as Prime Minister continuously since 2010. During the last parliamentary term, the government consolidated control over the country's independent institutions through constitutional and legal means. Additionally, critical operations of opposition groups, journalists, universities, and NGOs have been hampered by hostile policies. Due to this, Hungary has been defined as a 'partly free' country and an 'illiberal democracy' by several NGOs that investigate and evaluate the quality of democracy, the level of political freedom, and the respect for human rights.
- 2 The Two-Tailed Dog Party usually refers to activists as *passivists*, subverting the system of meaning.
- 3 Dan Swain, "Not not but not yet: Present and future in prefigurative politics". *Political Studies*, 67(1) 2019, pp. 47-62.
- 4 The MKKP mocked the government's messages in both style and content. There are more than 20 versions of the "Did you know" campaign. One of the most notable was: "Did you know? A Hungarian has seen more UFOs than migrants during his life."
- 5 The question asked of voters was: "Do you want the European Union to be able to mandate the obligatory resettlement of non-Hungarian citizens into Hungary even without the approval of the National Assembly?"
- 6 During the Alternative Peace March, the Two-Tailed Dog Party carried banners with ironic slogans, such as "down with freedom, up with the government," or banners that demanded "freedom of censorship and the abolition of the press".
- 7 The word 'conviviality' has latin origins and comes from *con-* 'with' + *vivere* 'live', so it literally means 'living with'. Here we interpret conviviality according to Illich's definition, namely as "individual freedom realized in personal interdependence", which stands in direct opposition to the feeling of automatization and alienation induced by industrial production. See Ivan Illich, *Tools for conviviality*, New York: Harper & Row, 1973.
- 8 Bergson, Henri-Louis, *Le rire: Essai sur la signification du comique*, Paris: Felix Alcan, 1900.