

**Aniko Kovacs-Bertrand.** *Der ungarische Revisionismus nach dem Ersten Weltkrieg: Der publizistische Kampf gegen den Friedensvertrag von Trianon (1918-1931).* Munich: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 1997. 293 pp. DM 98.00, cloth, ISBN 978-3-486-56289-7.



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Discussing the Treaty of Trianon may have been avoided during Hungary's communist period, but the dismemberment of Hungary has returned as a subject of conversation. Jozsef Antall, the late prime minister of Hungary, said that Trianon is something one should always think about but never talk about, but people are talking. In an interview with *Nepszava* on 10 November 1997, Sandor Kavassy, an Independent Smallholder deputy who is now deputy speaker of the parliament, argued that the 1920 Trianon peace treaty should be amended. He said "ethnic borders and political borders must be brought into harmony sooner or later." [1] Not only has Trianon returned as a topic of political discussion, but it is once again becoming a topic of historical analysis.

The word "Trianon" is well known to historians of interwar east central Europe, as is the famous saying "nem, nem, soha" (no, no, never), which refers to the Hungarians' attitude toward their peace treaty. According to the Treaty of Trianon, which was signed on 4 June 1920 between the Allied Powers and Hungary, Hungary lost approximately seventy percent of its territory and

more than half of its population. The treaty also made one-third of the Magyars into citizens of foreign states. Hungary would get some of this territory back in the two Vienna Awards of 1938 and 1940, but would lose it again in 1947.

Aniko Kovacs-Bertrand has written a fascinating study of the Hungarians' journalistic struggle after World War I against their peace treaty. There are numerous studies of Hungary between the wars, but not of Hungarian revisionism and of propaganda against Trianon. Kovacs-Bertrand has filled this lacuna. She also lets us see a more nuanced picture of what Trianon meant during the interwar years.

Her story is a story of propaganda: "the influencing of the public for or against something" (p. 12). Kovacs-Bertrand points out that "propaganda" is not only a difficult concept to define but also to study. Other examinations of propaganda often focus on particular persons or on questions tied to a specific event, whereas she examines an attempt to change the way people viewed a country that had a more long-term impact.

According to Kovacs-Bertrand, propaganda became the central issue in Hungary. It was the most important societal and political expression of the Hungarian policy of revisionism. Propaganda also became the "reflection of the development of the way Hungarians saw themselves after Trianon" (p. 13). She sees propaganda as an expression of international politics, Hungarian domestic politics, and Hungarian national identity.

Her study begins in 1918 and ends in 1931. The first date is obvious (the end of the war), the second is also clear for historians of Hungary. In 1931 the period of consolidation ended when Istvan Bethlen resigned after serving ten years as prime minister. After Gyula Gombos became prime minister in 1932, Hungary followed very different policies.

A rich collection of documents has aided Kovacs-Bertrand's work. She has used the files of the *Sajto es Kulturális Osztály* (the department of press and culture) in the foreign ministry, which until now had not been examined. She looked at everything connected to the press, including the reports from various embassies about their relations to the press. Kovacs-Bertrand admits that not all files were available, and some were in bad condition. She also analyzed the documents of the *Társadalmi Szervezetek Központja* (central office of societal organizations), and many other brochures, books, and press releases.

In the introduction, Kovacs-Bertrand explains that her study is divided into five sections, but there are seven chapters, many of them with numerous sub-chapters. It is not clear how these sections and chapters are connected. If one looks only at her chapters, the study is a very clear story. She begins with "prehistory" (the nineteenth century) and chronologically works her way to 1931.

The story of the journalistic struggle of propaganda against the treaty of Trianon closely parallels the international politics of east central Europe. The context in which the various stages of

propaganda were implemented has been clearly explained, which helps the reader make connections to other events in Europe.

The first chapter, which is based solely on secondary material, is a picture of the nationality question in the Kingdom of Hungary during the nineteenth century. Kovacs-Bertrand points out that even in the discussions over the Compromise of 1867 Hungarian politicians could not come to a consensus on the nationality question. There was much debate in the nineteenth century regarding the Magyars' relations to the other nationalities under their rule. According to the 1880 census the Magyars made up only 41.2 percent of the population of the Kingdom of Hungary.

Kovacs-Bertrand looks at the image of Hungary on the eve of World War I. Whereas the French and Germans were critical of Hungary at the end of the nineteenth century, the British public had a certain liking for Hungary. But by the early twentieth century, the positive picture of Hungary in Britain had been destroyed. The work of the two journalists, Henry Wickham Steed and Robert William Seton-Watson, helped change the image of Hungary in the minds of the British. Historians of the region are well aware that Seton-Watson's negative attitude toward Hungary greatly influenced the British Foreign Office. Seton-Watson's *Racial Problems in Hungary*[2] became the handbook for the British delegation at the Paris peace conference.

Chapter Two looks at the situation at the end of the war. After their defeat in the war, the Hungarians realized that they had also failed in the field of propaganda. It was decided that the press would now take on a more important role in order to improve the image of Hungary abroad. During the regime of Mihály Károlyi, the *Országos Propaganda Bizottság* (National Committee on Propaganda) was created and began distributing leaflets and other printed matter in many languages. The goal was to create foreign support for Oszkar Jaszi's plan of a federal Hungary. Károlyi

also sent journalists abroad in order to influence foreign opinion.

After the war, propaganda was created not only by official organs, but also by various patriotic organizations, the most important being TEVEL, the league for the protection of the territorial unity of Hungary. More right-wing extremist organizations such as MOVE and EME were also involved in influencing people against Trianon. Many of their publications appeared in foreign languages, especially in English and French.

In Chapter Three, Kovacs-Bertrand analyzes Hungary's role at the peace conference. Albert Apponyi, the head of the Hungarian delegation, made an impact at Paris because of his ability to give his famous speech of 16 January 1920 in three languages. But despite everyone's hope, many Hungarian politicians knew that they had little chance of influencing the other delegates at the conference. Therefore, during the conference the Hungarians undertook action in order to influence the foreign public. Various Hungarian politicians made contact with politicians in Britain, France, and Switzerland. Yet the peace treaty was signed at the Palais Trianon on 4 June 1920, and the dismemberment of Hungary became official.

Chapter Four looks at the situation between the signing of the treaty and its ratification. After the signing, Hungarian propaganda remained direct, that is mainly in brochures and the press. This direct method of propaganda was called "gravaminale" propaganda, the recipients of which were the League of Nations and the west European politicians and journalists. There were also attempts at this time with indirect propaganda by both official organizations and societal groups.

In the next chapter Kovacs-Bertrand examines "the last hopes" after the ratification of the peace treaty on 26 July 1921. After 1921 Hungarian domestic politics became consolidated under the direction of Istvan Bethlen; both foreign and

domestic propaganda also came more under the direction of the government. Foreign propaganda fell clearly under the leadership of the Foreign Ministry. The "gravaminale" propaganda (brochures and the press) of the earlier period was continued.

In Chapter Six, Kovacs-Bertrand explains that by 1923 Hungarian politicians became more pragmatic and realized that they had to "live with the realities," especially if they were going to receive the international credit which they so desperately needed. During a meeting in March 1923 of various politicians, including Bethlen, the prime minister, and Kalman Kanya, the foreign minister, it was concluded that "gravaminale" propaganda had failed and the next course was to spread "economic" propaganda.

"Economic" propaganda was to create a positive picture of Hungary: Hungary as a *Rechtsstaat*, which had successfully rehabilitated its economy and rebuilt its political system. "Economic" propaganda was also supposed to emphasize Hungary's attachment to Europe and only indirectly criticize the peace treaty. After 1923 the question of revisions was avoided, at least officially. But nobody forgot. Kovacs-Bertrand points out that at this time the Hungarians adopted the French saying "always think about it, sometimes speak about it," a variant of which Jozsef Antall recently repeated.

In her final chapter, Kovacs-Bertrand looks at the changes in Hungarian politics and Hungarian propaganda after 1927. Hungary was able to break out of its diplomatic isolation with the conclusion of the friendship treaty with Italy, 4 April 1927. Istvan Bethlen began to reformulate his policies, and between 1927 and 1930 he often spoke of revising the borders.

Hungarian propaganda was aided after 1927 by the work of non-Hungarians, especially the owner of the *Daily Mail* in Great Britain, Lord Rothermere. Rothermere's article "Hungary's Place in the Sun" appeared in his paper on 21 June

1927. In the article he criticized the "arbitrary" borders in central Europe, which he saw as a continued threat to the peace of Europe, and he wrote: "Hungary is the natural ally of Britain and France. She has a right to a place in the sun" (p. 204).

After 1927 Hungarian propaganda took on a more active role, and because of Hungary's economic and political consolidation the international opinion of Hungary had improved. By the early 1930s the question of revisions actually became a "topic of the salons" and "worth discussing." (p. 247). Hungarian propaganda continued to emphasize economics and the fact that Hungary was a *Kulturland* and guarantor of peace. And thanks to the changed political situation in Europe in the 1930s, Gombos's alignment with Nazi Germany would result in the revisions of the borders in 1938 and 1940.

Kovacs-Bertrand has done an excellent job of describing the role of "propaganda" in the Hungarian struggle against the Trianon peace treaty. She has shown that propaganda was spread not only by the government but also by various patriotic organizations, even though the government often was involved in all activity against Trianon. Kovacs-Bertrand demonstrates that during and after World War I the Hungarians learned the importance of propaganda, especially since the work of Wickham Steed and Seton-Watson against Hungary had been so influential. After the war, the Hungarians tried to use propaganda to improve the image of Hungary abroad. There was some success, especially in the 1930s when the international political environment changed.

*Der ungarische Revisionismus nach dem Ersten Weltkrieg* is a welcome addition to the work on interwar Hungarian history. It may be seen as another study of Trianon, but it is more than that. Kovacs-Bertrand has written a fascinating study of the role of propaganda in the political life of interwar Hungary.

The primary and secondary material used for this study is impressive. There is one obvious omission: the three volume collection of documents on Hungarian foreign policy published after World War I by Francis Deak and Dezso Ujvary.[3] In this collection documents written in French and German were left in their original language and documents in Hungarian were translated into English. This is an excellent collection, but it was clearly meant as a form of propaganda; it was to prove to the western powers that the peace of Trianon had been too harsh. Despite this oversight, Kovacs-Bertrand's book is highly recommended.

Notes:

[1]. *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Newslines* No. 156, Part II, 10 (November 1997).

[2]. R.W. Seton-Watson, *Racial Problems in Hungary* (London: A.Constable & Co., Ltd., 1908).

[3]. Francis Deak and Dezso Ujvary, eds., *Papers and Documents Relating to the Foreign Relations of Hungary* vol. 1, 1919-1920. (Budapest: Royal Hungarian Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Royal Hungarian University Press, 1939); Dezso Ujvary, ed., *Papers and Documents Relating to the Foreign Relations of Hungary* vol. 2, January to August 1921. (Budapest, s.n., 1946.) The third volume, which covers September to December 1921, only exists in manuscript form in the Hungarian National Archives.

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