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László Eörsi. *The Hungarian Revolution of 1956: Myths and Realities.* Translated by Mario D. Fenyo. Boulder: East European Monographs, 2006. Illustrations, maps. 200 pp. $40.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-88033-591-1.

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It Is a Fine Line between Myth and Reality

Previously appearing as a series of articles and publications between 1994 and 2002, László Eörsi's *The Hungarian Revolution of 1956* represents an attempt to refute "far fetched" and "ill-intentional fabrications" that have emerged surrounding the 1956 revolution in Hungary (p. x). Exploring the key individuals who took part in the revolution, Eörsi's work examines the "record of interrogations, the confessions, the testimonies, [and] the signed denunciations," as these allow the author to "reconstruct particular events" and deconstruct the myths (p. x).

The book is divided into five chapters, but has no conclusion *per se*. The first chapter deals with the Siege of Budapest, while the remaining chapters focus on an individual or group around whom myths have been created since 1956: Jósef Dudás, Ilona Tóth, Péter Mansfeld, and the "Bástya" group.

The first chapter provides contextualization to the piece with breakneck exploration into the historical and institutional landscape that preceded the revolution, the involvement of Soviet forces, and the "principal fighting units" focusing on the insurgents in different sectors of Budapest. The last part of the chapter reflects Eörsi's previous publications and obvious knowledge, but paradoxically also provides the best and worst parts of the chapter. On the one hand, the reader is bombarded with significant numbers of abbreviations, names, and information (which, to the lay reader, could be confusing); yet, on the other hand, the reader is engulfed by the sheer pace of the narrative, making the first chapter compelling reading. Due to the pace, however, the first chapter is best read twice to extract the most information. Interestingly, and apart from the generic subject, the first chapter shares no specific links to the remainder of the book. There is no attempt at this initial stage to "demythify" the revolution; in fact, the epilogue to the first chapter merely presents a list of casualties suffered by both sides (p. 23).

The core contention of the book begins in the second chapter. Focusing on "Jósef Dudás as Revolutionary," the chapter aims at refuting Dudás's role in the revolution: "Stories about Dudás rose into the foggy realm of legends already at the time of the revolution, and the picture has not become any clearer since" (p. 33). After providing a brief biographical account of Dudás, the chapter explores, with the same breakneck pace as the first chapter, Dudás's involvement in 1956. In his evaluation of statements focusing on Dudás, Eörsi presents an alternate view and therefore demythifies Dudás to a degree. The most interesting rebuttal surrounds the use of the Dudás myth by the Smallholders Party in 1989-90, and probably sums up the confusion that still surrounds Dudás's motivation. The Smallholders made Dudás their main hero as he had had connections with the party at various points of his life.They "appreciated his rhetoric regarding 'commitment to the nation. [But] they tried to alter his political ideology and role increasingly in a rightist direction" (p. 79). The aim of the Smallholders was to portray Dudás as wishing to topple the system, while Eörsi's chapter demonstrates that Dudás's role was to reform the system: a point supported by his reformist political program and articles in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

The third chapter on Tóth is arguably the best chapter of the book: not only in terms of clarity and style but also in terms of the argument put forward. The main contention surrounding Tóth was the nature of her trial: was it a show trial, as reported in 1956 and subsequently mythicized, or was it, as Eörsi claims, a fair trial? Eörsi admits that he is in continuous discussion over the matter, with "no resolution in sight"; but, despite this note of caution, his argument is more convincing than most publications glorifying Tóth (p. x). Along with two others, Tóth was accused of and executed for the murder of András Kollár. The trial, conducted in 1957, according

to Eörsi, did not have the characteristics of the previous show trials of the Stalinist period. Despite the confessions and court statements of the defendants, several myths emerged, including that Tóth was pregnant and forcibly had the fetus removed; that all defendants were drugged or hypnotized to give false confessions; and that Kollár had not actually been murdered, rather he died in 1981.

Although Eörsi presents a strong case against the show trial myths, he ignores one factor that could bring into doubt his argument: Even if Tóth did kill Kollár, or at least contributed to his death by injecting him and stabbing him in the heart, these actions were done under extraordinary circumstances, under duress, and against a man mistakenly believed to be working for state security. The fact that for much of the revolution Tóth had existed on caffeine injections to perform such long hours, given the nature of the crime, the extenuating circumstance, and the fair trial that she received, how was the death penalty logically arrived upon? Arguably, the charge should have been manslaughter (a point Eörsi briefly mentions), *unless* the court wished to send out a political message. It is from this conclusion, rather than from the many fantasies, and one that Eörsi does not consider, that a more believable accusation of a show trial could be based.

The final two chapters are remarkably short, but they do refute the myths that have grown up surrounding the subjects. Eörsi paints Mansfeld as a somewhat youthful delinquent, fond of stealing cars and boasting, who in 1959 was executed for counterrevolutionary activity, despite the positive evidence given by one of his "victims" (p. 157). The myth surrounding Mansfeld is completely undermined by the fact that, while he was imprisoned for a year for his activities in 1956, he was executed for crimes committed two years *after* the 1956 revolution. The fine line between myth and reality collapsed Mansfeld of 1956 and Mansfeld of 1958 to create Mansfeld *the myth*.

The final chapter again is short and concise. It is aimed at the myth that the Minister of Defense Pál Maléter led active resistance against the Soviets in the mountains of Bakony. Eörsi presents the Bástya group as one of many groups that emerged before, during, or after the Soviet invasion. Yet the key aspect is that one member of the group, János Karászy, who had fought with Maléter in the Partisans in 1945, believed that Maléter was fighting with his troops in the Bakony Mountains. In fact, however, Soviet forces at Tököl had arrested Maléter, apparently without the Bástya group being aware.

In conclusion, the book refutes some myths that have developed surrounding the Hungarian Revolution of 1956. In choosing a few specific examples, the book has the feel of five separate essays of a common theme that offer a challenge to the myths, rather than a coherent volume. If we heed Eörsi's comments on why certain topics were chosen and others rejected, this should come as no surprise: "Of course, this choice of topics must be accepted as some kind of excuse, for a number of other events from 1956 could have been included in this study, on the basis of the parameters we have set. The simple, pedestrian explanation of their omission is that the documents are in the process of being revealed, or research has not yet begun. Thus this volume may be considered the first in a series" (p. xi). If the work is approached with this originality in mind, readers will not be disappointed: they may even be inspired to continue Eörsi's attempt to untangle and demystify the myths and realities of the Hungarian Revolution of 1956?

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