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Thomas Lorman. *Counter-Revolutionary Hungary, 1920-1925: István Bethlen and the Politics of Consolidation.* Boulder: East European Monographs, 2007. 280 pp. $50.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-88033-594-2.

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An Imperfect Solution: Bethlen and the Reconstruction of the Hungarian Nation

In his work, *Counter-Revolutionary Hungary, 1920-1925*, Thomas Lorman examines this short but formative period during which the foundation of the post-World War I Hungarian political system was established. In so doing, he challenges the assessment of years of Hungarian historical research over the formation of the counterrevolutionary regime and the Unified Party by Count István Bethlen. He asserts that it was not ideology but practical politics that determined the shape of the regime, which was to endure, little changed, until the end of World War II. With meticulous research, Lorman substantiates his argument through extensive documentation, drawing on archival research at both the national and county levels, as well as consulting daily newspapers, minutes of cabinet meetings, diaries, speeches, and private papers of the key figures involved. He makes frequent reference to the views of Hungarian historians to substantiate his thesis.

From being part of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, the largest state in Europe in the early twentieth century, Hungary had become a small nation in Central Europe in 1918, isolated politically and surrounded by enemy countries. After the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, the thousand-year-old Hungarian kingdom disintegrated and Hungary's neighbors occupied much of the country. The Habsburg monarch abdicated in favor of a republic under Count Mihály Károlyi, and after only a few months, a Bolshevik regime headed by Béla Kun took control, which also proved to be short-lived. As a final blow, the Peace Treaty signed at the Trianon Palace confirmed the loss of two-thirds of Hungary's territory and three-fifths of its people. Impoverished, flooded by refugees, and forced to pay war indemnities, the country struggled to come to terms with the new economic situation.

Lorman argues that no work yet published takes into account the complex nature of developments during which Bethlen created the Unified Party and consolidated the counterrevolutionary regime, pointing out that the period has frequently been passed over with "broad generalizations and simplistic characterizations" (p. xii). The lack of analysis he attributes to a Marxist analytical framework which has long influenced Hungarian historians. Even after the regime change in 1989-90 freed Hungarian historians to make their own interpretations of developments during the interwar period, Lorman finds that new research continues to be influenced by a Marxist analytical framework. Hungarian historians fail to realize that ideology is not always the driving force in politics and continue to focus on attributing the shaping of policies of the new regime to ideological currents, examining and reexamining what occurred rather than exploring the reasons why. Marxist influenced scholarship with its emphasis on ideology and its descriptive nature has downplayed or even disregarded complex dynamics that shaped the policies and political system established under Bethlen.

Lorman seeks to fill the gap, examining the consolidation of the counterrevolution. He argues that the "regime that took power after collapse of the Bolshevik dictatorship had no clearly thought out ideology and that no single ideological platform determined the policies by which the regime eventually consolidated its position" (pp. xiii-xiv). It was practical politics rather than ideology that determined the consolidation of the counterrevolutionary regime.

In his preface, Lorman outlines developments over this five-year period during which Hungary, traumatized by the catastrophe at the end of World War I, progressed from a fragmented nation torn by violence and factional strife, facing uncertainty over how the country was to be governed, to a regime that had consolidated its powers, weakened the opposition parties, established the rule of law, and to a great extent returned the rights of its citi-

zens. Through examination of how Bethlen created a new governing party and overcame challenges from internal party critics and opposition parties, he concludes that it was Bethlen's use of policy formation as a political tactic that succeeded in bolstering the authority of his government, provided the needed political stability, and consolidated the power of the counterrevolutionary regime. But these achievements came at great cost–a government that had alienated large sections of Hungarian society, a legal framework becoming increasingly anachronistic, and no acceptance by the population of Hungary's reduced state as one of the smaller states of Eastern Europe: problems that would continue to fester and grow throughout the interwar period.

In chapter 1, "Revolution and Counter-Revolution," he outlines the tremendous difficulties that Hungary faced in attempting the reconstruction of the country. No one had anticipated the complete collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy in November 1918. Since the Kingdom of Hungary had been a constituent part of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy it lacked the basic features of an independent country. In addition, the country had experienced the huge loss of its former lands and influx of refugees from the territories annexed by neighboring countries. Following the Bolshevik regime and a Red Terror, counterrevolutionary armed units carried out revenge on all those–Bolsheviks, Socialists, the trades unions, Freemasons, and Jews–who had played a role in the Károlyi and Kun revolutions, making them scapegoats for the revolutions and loss of Hungary's territories. These groups were then excluded from political power for the remainder of the interwar period. The groups that were spared took part in the formation of the regime; he labels them collectively the "counterrevolutionaries."

The serious issues to be faced by the new government included establishing the legitimacy of a new government of the truncated isolated state. In a parliament fraught with division and uncertainty over how the country was to be governed, the major political parties were made up of loose coalitions of different, often competing, interest groups–the Smallholder Party, a coalition of both large and small landholders; and the Christian National Union (KNEP), a broadly legitimist group–composed of all the other counterrevolutionary groups. Each issue produced deep divisions. The weakness of the government coalition led a group of representatives to form a dissident fraction, which espoused the idea of a Unified Party, similar to the governing party of the prewar years. By incorporating all the various factions, it would end the factionalism and force through legislation necessary for the reconstruction of the country. Lorman concludes that it was due above else, to skills of one of Hungary's greatest politicians, István Bethlen, that the old governing party would be recreated and would complete the successful reconstruction of country.

In chapter 2, "The Formation of the Unified Party," Lorman emphasizes the central role played by Bethlen, who began the process of consolidation in a politically divided country. A scion of an old Transylvanian family, strongly conservative, highly intelligent, Bethlen was a statesman with vision, an excellent tactician, and a true diplomat. Bethlen was determined to reconstruct the old governing party, believing that the key cause of the crisis was lack of national unity; he aimed to build unity by offering something to all the important political factions. It was only Bethlen's patient diplomacy, skill at maneuvering, and willingness to compromise that enabled him to face the mass of competing parties and factions, overcome the complications, and finally come to an agreement with the Smallholder Party. By February 1922, Bethen had succeeded in creating a new Unified Party, maneuvering the Smallholders to support his electoral reform, even though they were fundamentally opposed to some of the key clauses. But still the model of the former party able to resolve divisions among counterrevolutionaries had not been fully reconstructed.

It is noteworthy that of his six main chapters, Lorman devotes two to Bethlen's relationship with the Hungarian Social Democratic Party. Chapter 3 is titled "Bethlen and the MSZDP." Before 1918 the Social Democrats had never been represented in Parliament, but during the revolutions of 1918 and 1919 they played a major, at times a dominant, role in politics. This made the question of how to deal with the movement a central issue shaping the counterrevolution. The Social Democrats had been a prime target of the White Terror armed units and were purged from the counterrevolution, but the party was reconstituted in 1919 by the trades unions. The continuing popularity of the movement and its trade union support suggested that it would be a powerful opposition party capable of undermining the legitimacy of the entire regime. Yet in early 1920, there was a question whether the party would even play a political role. The regime was suspicious of all workers and considered the Social Democrats close to Bolshevism, while the Social Democrats resented the multiple repressive measures instituted by the army, which was in control of security.

But there were factors that suggested there could be a rapprochement. The Socialist movement was known

for its support of parliamentary government, respect for the rule of law, and a fair system of justice. The party had never rejected participation in the political process; thus there was an implicit willingness to negotiate. In his opening speech to Parliament after his appointment as prime minister on April 15, 1921, Bethlen indicated he was preparing for reform. With growing Social Democrat support and government moderation an agreement was finally reached. Bethlen exploited the weakness of the Social Democrats in order to further his interests in forming the Unified Party. He won a short-term victory by seeming to accede to the Social Democratic demand for a secret ballot, but then imposed an open ballot in the countryside with a much restricted franchise. The price paid was a lost opportunity for a lasting accommodation.

In chapter 4, "The 1922 Elections," Lorman points out that by the time of the 1922 elections significant progress had been made in the formation of an all-powerful Unified Party. The Social Democrats had decided to end their boycott of elections. It was now necessary to ensure that through the elections a legitimate party would be formed with a parliamentary majority, capable of providing stable government and restructuring the country. This required electoral reform and the inclusion of opposition parties. In the end, the Unified Party was victorious in the elections, having used the advantage of its organizational strength and tactical skill, but also its genuine popularity. Despite underlying divisions within the party, it presented itself as unified. The electoral process continued the process of political consolidation and marginalized rival conservatives and the liberal opposition parties. The Social Democratic Party had now become the leading opponent.

Chapter 5, "The Unified Party Crisis of 1922-1923," explains that despite the electoral victory the Unified Party continued to be affected by divisions among the counterrevolutionaries. This chapter examines how divisions led to an internal party crisis, culminating in the departure from the party of Gyula Gömbös and five of his supporters. The Right radicals, led by Gömbös, had been energized by the electoral victory and were now determined to be the driving force behind the party. Their aim, to use anti-semitism as an instrument of social change, was rejected by Bethlen. Making use of his diplomatic skills he was able to weaken support for the Right radicals and for Gömbös, using the crisis to strengthen party unity and minimize the disruptive potential of ideological divisions within the party.

In the long–and perhaps overly detailed–final chapter ("Bethlen and the MSZDP, 1922-1925"), Lorman displays the weaknesses and poor leadership that reduced the Social Democratic Party to ineffectiveness. After their initial agreement with Bethlen in 1922, they had begun to attack the government for failing to implement substantial reforms. Although they had finally achieved parliamentary representation, they denied that Parliament had any legitimacy since the elections were not entirely democratic. The relationship between the party and the government continued to worsen. Finally in December of 1924, the Social Democrats chose again to engage in a disastrous parliamentary boycott, which collapsed in May 1925, having achieved no gains. The boycott undermined their popularity and confirmed that they were an increasingly marginalized force. With precise documentation, Lorman traces the process by which this occurred, ending with the conclusions that the Social Democrats were naïve, divided, and politically inept.

In the conclusion, "Policy as Political Tactic," Lorman makes it clear that Bethlen was largely responsible for the consolidation of the counterrevolution. Bethlen secured for the new regime a measure of domestic and international legitimacy, reimposed the rule of law, restored the health of the country's finances, and pieced together much of the constitutional framework within which Hungary would operate for the remainder of the interwar period. Lorman then lists the negative aspects of his regime, although he demonstrates that Bethlen had little choice to make different choices within the framework in which he had to operate. It was Bethlen who presided over the continuing polarization of Hungarian politics; governed through a constitutional and legal framework that was extremely anachronistic; supplemented laws of the land with decrees and circulars; and failed to place the rights of the citizen on a clearly defined, fairly administered legal basis. The right of association, of assembly, and to strike, and to a large extent even church and state relations were left under administrative control. He also ensured that ministries and local officials remained part of an excessively centralized, overtly politicized administration. He resisted efforts to put the administration and lower and upper houses of Parliament on a properly democratic basis, sabotaged hopes for major land reform, and failed to produce a safety net–pensions, health, and unemployment insurance.

It should be noted though that Bethlen carried out social welfare measures in 1927-28. The next step should have come in 1929 with health and accident insurance for agricultural workers, but it was abandoned because of the impact of the Great Depression, felt in Hungary already in 1929. Also, later in his term he did ensure the restora-

tion of the Upper House of Parliament, much reformed from the aristocratic dominated prewar house; the upper house played a significant role during World War II in restraining the Right radicalism of the lower house.

The detrimental features of the counterrevolutionary system were to extend throughout the whole interwar period and World War II, resulting in a failure to achieve democratic reform of the political system and preventing the rise of a radical Right in the late 1930s. Failure to carry through a long overdue and much-needed land reform contributed to the continued existence of a large impoverished landless and land-poor peasantry. Also the belief encouraged among the population that all their country's problems were the result of the Treaty of Trianon–and the demand of getting everything back–was to lead to Hungary's indebtedness to Nazi Germany for the return of some territories and its disastrous participation in World War II.

Throughout the book, Lorman dispels some widely held views about the interwar regime.The Bethlen regime is often criticized for restoring the open ballot to rural areas, with the charge that it prevented citizens from being able to vote freely for opposition candidates, but Lorman asserts that the impact has been much exaggerated. It seems that voters were quite willing to attend most public demonstrations to support opposition candidates, and that even in open-ballot districts a third of the electorate voted against the government.

Another example is a clause in Bethlen's agreement with the Social Democratic Party in 1921 that they would not use the restored freedom of association to extend agitation to the agricultural workers, as they had done in the autumn of 1918. Communist historians have argued that by accepting the clause the Social Democrats were accepting exclusion from organizing in the countryside. But since only a particular form of agitation was being banned, the measure suggests the right to organize in rural areas. In truth, the Social Democratic Party was not popular in the countryside because of its emphasis on representing the interests of the workers.

This work will be greatly appreciated by experts in the field of Hungarian history and political science. The well-documented coverage of issues and events, the frequent reference to the views of Hungarian historians and of individuals involved in debates and ideological questions, the translation of certain terms into Hungarian to ensure the precision of meaning, and the new interpretation of many issues make this book an extremely valuable contribution. It will also be of value to all those interested in twentieth-century Hungarian history, particularly the formation of the counterrevolutionary system.

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