



Laszlo Szarka. *Szlovak Nemzeti Fejlodes–Magyar Nemzetisegi Politika 1867-1918*. Pozsony: Kalligram Konyvkiado, 1995. 340 pp. HUF 400, Sk 80 (cloth), ISBN 978-80-7149-087-6.

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## Slovaks in Hungary during the Dualist Era

Laszlo Szarka is a researcher at the Hungarian Academy's Institute of History, and responsible editor of a journal on nationality affairs entitled *Regio*. His book *Slovak National Development–Hungarian Nationality Policy, 1867-1918* presents a segment of the Slovaks' history, for which he provided a general account in a previous work, *A szlovakok tortenete* [1]. Unlike others who have written on the subject, Szarka contextualizes the dualist era in Slovak history through the perspective of the nationalities issue in Hungary, state and local policy toward the nationalities, the process of the formation of the Czechoslovak state, and the Trianon peace settlement.

Generally speaking, the writings on the national histories and the comparative approach [2] to the national movements emphasize the particularities of each national group in the multinational regions (which is logical) but almost put aside the problems of national integration and assimilation. In the Hungarian-Slovak case, the history of both nations has been mainly presented as the history of discrete entities developing within themselves [3]. The enormous literature on Hungarian-Slovak economical, political, and cultural relations can hardly compensate for the lack of attention to inter-ethnic processes. Szarka solves the problem of moving the Hungarian context closer to the Slovak national movement by paying much attention to local policy, which simultaneously enables him to bring new content to the notion "Hungarian national policy," which has been treated by both Slovak and Hungarian scholars mainly as the central government's policy. Szarka's book is important if one takes into consideration the fact that works on the

Slovak issue as the subject of Hungarian policies are not very numerous.

Without an over-indulgence in theory but with allusions to Miroslav Hroch and Oszkar Jaszi, Szarka views the contest of middle class-based nationalisms as one of the center and the periphery, which took place in the periphery; his analysis presents a picture of the active interaction of the two national movements on the local level. Examining the emerging Slovak economic and political structures within the rigid Hungarian framework, Szarka argues that its impact on the Slovaks was far more complex than simple linguistic Magyarization. The book could also be considered a history of Slovak-Hungarian mutual perceptions, and the author shows the remarkable consistency of the arguments in Hungarian-Slovak debates, the vitality of myths, and the distorted Hungarian image of the Slovak national movement during the Dualist era. Szarka bases his findings on wide research in published and unpublished documents from an impressive list of Hungarian and Slovakian archives, and buttresses his conclusions with maps and tables illustrating the nationalities' assimilation, migration, and plans for the solution of the Slovak national question.

The book contains chapters discussing the ideological basis of Hungarian national policy and of the nationalities' counter-arguments, the development and political organisation of Slovak society, the Hungarian treatment of the Slovak question, the motives of Slovak separatism, and the Paris peace conference's solution of the Slovak question.

Hungarian politicians based their arguments concerning the nationalities on the traditional concept of an indivisible Hungarian political nation, which implied the linguistic unity of the country. This concept restricted a possible solution of the national problem through concessions in the use of local languages, for it made no allowance for the autonomy demanded by the nationalities and that Lajos Kossuth considered crucial for the country's survival. Certain rights to use the national languages were granted by the liberal Nationality Law of 1868, but its effect was substantially restricted by the laws 1879:XXVIII, 1883:XXX, 1891:XI, and especially by the Apponyi Law, 1907:XXVII, which displayed "the contradictions of the distributive character of Hungarian legal norms and the discriminative character of political practices" (p. 49). In general, the author states that "the concept of the political nation, elevated to the ideal of the Hungarian national state, together with the real and imagined results of political and linguistic assimilation, did not jeopardize the existence of the nationalities during the decades of dualism, but proved to be a regressive force in the democratization of the country's political life" (p. 43).

The elites of the ethnic minorities in the Hungarian kingdom emphasized the Hungarian but not the Magyar character of the state, and tried to prove they had contributed equally to Hungarian statebuilding. Therefore they believed the state should consist of equal national constituencies, especially since the Compromise had established a model for the redistribution of power. The Hungarian practice of centralization made ethnic elites receptive to ideas of autonomy and to the forms of local autonomy practised in Switzerland and England. Centralization also conditioned the route the nationalities would eventually choose for their emancipation: they finally turned to the radical alternative of creating small national states rather than to the federalization of the larger state unit. As for Slovaks, the validity of their arguments and their ability to present the national program at the state level were weakened from the start by the fact that Upper Hungary (*Felvidek, Slovensko*) did not have a special administrative status in the Hungarian kingdom, so that the Slovak national issue proved to be primarily a matter for the local authorities. Consequently, Slovak national ideology was an amalgam of regionalism, loyalty to the Hungarian state, the idea of Czech-Slovak unity, and Pan-Slavic Russophilia. Slovaks' desire for autonomy did not contradict the integrity of the Hungarian state; nonetheless, Szarka argues it was a coincidence of two processes—state integration paralleled and

attended by linguistic assimilation and ethno-regional integration—that was the main source of national conflict in Hungary.

According to Szarka, assimilation displays the level of the nationalities' integration into the state and reflects the positive social and economic processes connected with it. The author indicates several patterns of assimilation that depended upon the social structure of an ethnic group. Among the Hungarian nationalities, the Germans had the highest rate of assimilation (21% of the population was assimilated between 1880-1910); and Ruthenians and Romanians, losing 2.8% and 1.4% of their population respectively as a result of assimilation, had the lowest rate (p. 254, table 7). Szarka estimates the number of assimilated Slovaks at 300,000-400,000 during 1880-1910, or 14.8% of the Slovak population of two million (pp. 65, 254, table 7). The erosion of the middle landowners' stratum and the growth in the number of petty landowners (both predominantly Slovak), industrialization, urbanization, the construction of the railroad system, and the Hungarian education system greatly promoted Slovaks' assimilation and the assimilation of their national elite. Thus, in 1910 there were only 3,304 intellectuals whose native language was Slovak (pp. 187-188).

The degree of success of state integration and Magyarization has been the subject of much discussion in the recent literature. Szarka argues that Slovaks demonstrated a rather low level of state integration among all compactly living nationalities. One of the reasons for this is the ambiguous effect of the factors of assimilation mentioned above: they also nurtured the Slovak regional integration tendencies. The other obstacle to assimilation and integration can be seen in cultural mechanisms, since the national cultures were rather self-confined, and the national elites tried to reject Hungarian cultural supremacy by all means. Yet the Hungarian cultural pattern seems to have been attractive to the elites, especially if one considers the high rate of their assimilation.

The book, however, leaves open the question of the process of regional integration in Northern Hungary. It would appear to the reviewer that the weak institutionalization of the Slovak national movement and insufficient regional integration were responsible for the low level of the Slovaks' integration into the Hungarian state. Slovaks themselves presented a splintered object for the application of the state's policy, especially as the true character of the movement was distorted by the frightening veil of Pan-Slavism.

Discussing the political organization of Slovak society, Szarka identifies as its key problems the representation of specific ethnic interests and the participation in the political life of the Hungarian kingdom. This tendency was expressed first by cultural institutions, for instance the *Matica slovenska*, although its program did not contain a word about a Slovak political party. The national party, Slovak National Party (SNP), emerged in 1871 but its political debut in the parliamentary elections of 1875 failed and was followed by almost twenty years of passivity. Szarka examines two forms of SNP's integration into the Hungarian political system: the cooperation with the non-Hungarian national parties, and the support for the Hungarian parties that could have represented Slovak interests. As a result, the elements of the Hungarian political structure were developed within the SNP's party structure, which embraced too many heterogeneous elements (including geographic groupings and the traditional Catholic-Protestant division) to be a cohesive structure and to provide for the national political representation, integration, and mobilization of the Slovak elite. In this respect, the collaboration with the Czechs appears to be a compensation for the weakness of Slovak political institutions.

The Czechs were the most active party in this process of rapprochement, establishing financial institutions, providing educational possibilities, and raising Slovak issues in the *Reichsrat*. Yet Czech-Slovak contacts could not smooth over the economic and political contradictions between the two national movements. Therefore a solution to the Slovak problem by means of the Czech connection, and especially by a common Czech-Slovak state, was illusory, although the SNP gravitated to this option during World War I. The Slovaks' uncertainty about the Czech scenario is thus one of the explanations for the lack of Slovak initiative and for their hesitation in 1918.

Szarka distinguishes several persistent elements in Hungarian nationality policy. The first of these is the problem of linguistic unification. The state's means to this end was the unification of the heterogeneous school system, placing it under state control, since it was the church that dominated the educational structure. In order to achieve this goal, an ambitious program of establishing one thousand new public schools to commemorate the millennium was initiated by Banffy's government. The number of non-Hungarian national schools fell dramatically, especially while the Apponyi Law of 1907 was in effect. Thus, 148 Slovak schools closed between 1907 and 1912 (p. 172).

The state sought to influence policy in the counties by sponsoring the creation of the Upper Hungarian Cultural Association, FEMKE (1882), which used the Hungarian language, and the Hungarian Slovak Cultural Association (1885), which used Slovak. Both sought to spread the Hungarian value system, culture, literature, and certain forms of social and economic life. The effect of these organizations was minimal, since they did not enjoy broad support from either the Hungarian or the Slovak side. FEMKE's leadership saw the inauspicious economic situation in Northern Hungary as a stimulus for Slovak nationalism, and formulated a complex program of action in 1913; the plan never materialized, for the Magyarizing trend remained intact.

The Szapary government made some effort to coordinate the counties' policies. It initiated a discussion of Slovak problems with the heads of the county administration in 1890 in preparation for a conference on the Slovak problem. The discussion showed that local authorities adhered very much to the myth of Pan-Slavism, fed to a certain extent by the growing Czech-Slovak cooperation. A special institution to deal with the nationality problem was created by Banffy's government, the Nationalities and Socialist Affairs Department, which employed representatives of the ethnic elites, but did not influence seriously the governmental decision-making. The government attempted to create an information network in the northern counties, requiring data on the character of the national movement, on the social strata involved, and on the Slovak national leaders' activities. The reports from the counties were not very informative, however, because the local authorities' vision of the problem was obscured by the myth of a Pan-Slav conspiracy.

Beginning in the 1880s, Hungarian governments had to face the problem of mass emigration. Overall it amounted to two million, of which there were 482,613 persons from Upper Hungary [4], and the government tried to solve the problem by social relief for the most "dangerous" regions and for returning former emigrants (e.g., the relief measures initiated by the Coalition Government in 1907-1908), and by initiatives abroad. An example of the latter is the attempt of Kalman Szell to influence Slovaks in America, and their parishes, through priests and newspapers. Szell shared the strong belief that it was the emigrants and returning former emigrants who presented an important source of funding for the Slovak national movement, so he sought to counterbalance Slovak financial institutions, first of all the Tatra Bank that was closely connected with the SNP, with Hungarian banks.

Hungarian policy toward the Slovaks, especially in the counties, actually a policy based on a position of strength, and a struggle against the more imagined than real peril of Pan-Slavism, was aimed at the highest possible level of control over the Slovak national movement. Yet the Hungarian political elite felt constrained to work for positive achievements in this area. The clearest expression of this occurred in the period of the Coalition government of 1906-1910, and of the limited compromise that Istvan Tisza reached with the nationalities through personal contacts. Both were a deviation from the policy of Magyarization and repression that was dominant in the 1890s and earlier. Jaszi and the program of his party could have signified a new dimension in the settlement of the nationality question and a new alternative for the Slovaks: he thought that they should be granted the right to use their national language and be educated in it. But he did not recognize the Slovaks' demand for autonomy and did not take the Czecho-Slovak movement seriously.

Discussing the solution of the Slovak problem in the autumn of 1918, Szarka concentrates mainly on the Prague-Budapest-Turocszentmarton (Slovak: Turcansky Svaty Martin) "triangle," putting aside the efforts of the American Slovaks. It seems that the Slovaks' disorganization, their general attitude of waiting until the peace conference for a settlement, and unreliable information were the three most significant factors in this period. Slovak self-determination could be achieved either with the assistance of the great powers or through negotiations with the neighboring states. The choices within these two opportunities were rather broad, beginning with Slovak autonomy in Hungary, Slovak autonomy in a Czechoslovak state, a united Czechoslovakia under Czech hegemony, and an independent Slovak state. The second of these was the most attractive, but hardly attainable given the Czechs' plans, including a military occupation of Slovakia. The solution to the Slovak problem was achieved in three stages, and came as a result of the energetic maneuvers of the Czechs, the failure of

Hungarian autonomy proposals despite the fact that they were fixed by the Law XXX:1919, and Slovak oscillations between Prague and Budapest. The idea of Slovak autonomy, championed by Andrej Hlinka, seems to be the only remnant of Slovaks' Hungarian past. Slovaks vigorously rejected it and substituted the Czechoslovak version of their history at the Paris peace conference.

One may disagree with some of Szarka's conclusions, and one may be puzzled by the intricacy of his style. But his book is a meticulous scholarly work that raises new research perspectives and encourages discussion among scholars in the field.

#### NOTES:

1. Laszlo Szarka, *A szlovakok tortenete* (Budapest: [Beremenyi Konyvkiado, 1994]). 2. As an example of the comparative approach to the national movements, Russian scholarship can be mentioned; see *Formirovanie natsii v tsentral'noi i iugo-vostochnoi Evrope* (collection of essays, in Russian). (Moscow: Nauka, 1981). 3. See *Magyarország története* (Budapest: Akadémiai kiado, 1987); v. 6 (1848-1890), v. 7 (1890-1918), especially the chapters by Laszlo Katus, as examples of the Hungarian approach to the problem, and his widely cited article in *Die nationale Frage in der Oesterreichisch-Ungarische Monarchie. 1900-1918*, ed. Peter Hanak [Budapest: Akademia, 1967], pp. 149-216); *Dejiny Slovenska* (ed. Samuel Cambel), v. 3-4 (Bratislava: Veda, 1986-1992), and the recent work of Stanislav J. Kirschbaum, *A history of Slovakia* (New York: St. Martin's Press/London: Macmillan, 1995) for general accounts of Slovak history; and Milan Podrimavsky's book *Slovenska narodna strana v druhej polovici XIX storocia* (Bratislava: Veda, 1983) on the problem of Slovak politics. 4. Szarka, op. cit., p. 135.

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