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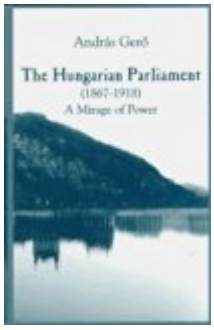
Andras Gero. *The Hungarian Parliament (1867-1918): A Mirage of Power.* New York: Columbia University Press, 1997. vii + 228 pp. $33.50 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-88033-367-2.

András Gerő. *Modern Hungarian Society in the Making: The Unfinished Experience.* Budapest: Central European University Press, 1995. xii + 276 pp. $51.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-85866-023-3; $25.95 (paper), ISBN 978-1-85866-024-0.



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Bourgeois Values in Nineteenth-Century Hungary

The Hungarian Parliament (1867-1918)[1] is part of a long series of publications from Atlantic Studies on Society in Change, much of which bears on Hungarian society and history. While Hungarians tend to think of themselves as forming an ethnically, linguistically, and politically isolated nation amidst at times unfriendly Slavic neighbors, or between the German and Russian giants, it would seem this mindset no longer holds: the isolation has been overcome, at least partly. As a result of these publications Hungarian history has become more accessible, and in greater detail, to the English-reading public than the history of any other nation in East-Central Europe, save perhaps Austria. It should be added that I mean history in its scholarly form, since most volumes in this series are of a high standard.

The Central European University Press published *Modern Hungarian Society in the Making*.[2] While the preface of each book acknowledges, as authors are expected to do, certain debts of gratitude, no foundation or grant is mentioned in either. Without any documentary evidence, however, I suspect that both publications may be counted among the many good deeds we owe to the deep pockets of the Soros Foundation that include the Central European University itself.

Gero's work on the Hungarian parliament under the Dual Monarchy certainly lives up to the standard set by the Atlantic Studies. It is hard to determine exact to what extent this monograph represents a contribution to specialized knowledge in the field of Hungarian parliamentary history, for while there are copious footnotes, the author has neglected to provide a bibliography. The same applies to *Modern Hungarian Society in the Making*; perhaps with better justification, since the essays in this collection span the nineteenth century, both in terms of years and range of topics. Still, it is a pity that, in addition to the primary sources, the footnotes in both books refer only to secondary works published in Hungary. In other words, the scholarship of Hungarians abroad, and of non-Hungarians writing about Hungary, has once again been overlooked.

The sources used for both works include the most obvious ones–parliamentary proceedings and contemporary dailies. Entirely to his credit, Gero also makes ample use of literary sources, as a consequence of which possibly dry topics, such as institutional history, become rather interesting reading. The use of literary works is most appropriate: after all, some of the outstanding writers of the period were also politicians or members of parliament –e.g. Ferenc Kolcsey, Jozsef Eotvos, Mor Jokai, Kalman Mikszath. Others quoted by Gero may not have been professional politicians, but were nevertheless acute observers and advocates, in the East European tradition of *litterature engage*–especially Mihaly

Vorosmarty, Endre Ady, but also Gyula Krudy and others. Their portrayal of parliament and its members is sensitive and perceptive, often biting in its sarcasm, rather than fictional or impressionistic.

As regards the Hungarian parliament, no other work covers the entire period of the monarchy in Gero's manner. His approach is more sociological and topical than historical or chronological. The topics include a discussion of the suffrage and of electoral procedures, a portrait of some of the more typical members of parliament, the construction of the Parliament building, completed in 1904 and now Budapest's most prominent landmark, and less tangible issues such as the loss of dignity (including the fashion of dueling) and of a sense of ethics.

The overall impression projected here is that corruption and the bribery of voters were rampant and growing. Gero's work demonstrates once again that it would be a mockery to refer to Hungarian politics during the period of the Dual Monarchy as "democratic,"[3] when only six or seven percent of the population could exercise suffrage, when there was no effort to equalize electoral districts and "rotten boroughs" remained common, and when the minority populations, except for the Saxons, were underrepresented.

In all fairness, it might be noted that in the 1860s, at the beginning of the period, universal or even general male suffrage was not the norm in any country. Moreover, in Hungary the issue of women's suffrage was introduced, by male MPs, already in 1871 (pp. 42-43). Suffrage in Hungary, however, was stagnating or heading in the wrong direction. Apathy, too, was widespread; much as in the United States nowadays, less than one third of those eligible to vote actually voted (p. 58).

Modern Hungarian Society in the Making is a collection of essays (two of which can also be read in Gero's other book), written by Gero over the past ten or fifteen years, strung together by a logic that is partly thematic, partly chronological. The broad scope of this work acquires a degree of unity because most chapters relate to the theme of a rising bourgeoisie and the process of modernization or, as Gero prefers to call it, the creation of a civil society. The Jews are credited with playing an "outstanding" role in the creation of this bourgeoisie (for instance, p. xi), although the most prominent figures in the process, Istvan Szechenyi, Lajos Kossuth, Ferenc Deak, the two Tiszas–all of whom figure as illustrations in the book–were in no sense Jewish.

Gero's arguments are sound throughout; nevertheless, they are a product of their times, the present period. *Modern Hungarian Society in the Making* amounts to a glorification of the bourgeoisie and of bourgeois modernization, something that could not have been written (or even conceived) either under the semi-feudal conditions that prevailed before 1945 or under state socialism. Whether this glorification is truly deserved as applied to the late nineteenth century, and to the late twentieth as well–as the subtitle to the book indicates–is another issue. If modernization means more than just industrialization, the equivalent of constructing a "civil society" where democratic, human and civil rights prevail, it is clear that the second half of the nineteenth century does not qualify. Certainly, there was industrialization and there were industrialists who deserve praise for promoting it; but if we argue that a bourgeoisie-dominated society and economy are the best there can be, we are leaving ourselves wide open to further revisions in the coming century. Indeed, can Hungary build "bourgeois" capitalism with a human face? Gero's book on the Hungarian parliament is more nuanced and surely will stand the test of time.

While *The Hungarian Parliament* can be read and understood as a self-contained account of an institution in a given period, *Modern Hungarian Society* assumes a rather detailed knowledge of certain aspects of Hungarian history. To give just one example, there is a reference to the "infamous deed" (alleged ritual murder) at Tiszaeszlar in the 1880s (p. 190), but no description of the deed or the trials is provided for the benefit of the non-specialist, not even in a footnote. Hence this work is of limited use to the general reader, or even to the professional historian of other than Hungarian persuasion; chances are, the latter already reads Hungarian, and does not need to resort to a translation.

As a translator, I cannot refrain from commenting on the work of other translators. Somewhat grudgingly, I must admit that the work of the translators Patterson and Koncz, in the case of both books, is outstanding. Not only have I found almost no errors of syntax or improper English usage, but the English is highly readable. All the more surprising that the author has not seen fit to thank the translators in the case of *The Hungarian Parliament.*

Having recognized the excellence of the translations, some of the discrepancies need to be noted. The following is merely a small sampling of some of these discrepancies taken from the monograph on the Hungarian parliament. Whereas in *Modern Hungarian Society* the orthography is consistently British, in *The Hungarian*

Parliament it is sometimes British, sometimes American. Names are spelled inconsistently (e.g. Fuzeressy–spelled twice one way, twice another–we read three times about Otto Herman, four times about Otto Hermann, etc.). Clergymen are not necessarily priests (p. 31). As regards dueling, so and so did not "cross swords with the minister of the interior in Parliament," since obviously pistols were used (p. 156)! Although in the dictionary, terms like "publicist" (for journalist, editorialist) and "unfolding" (for developing or evolving) are "Hungarianisms." The translation of quotations from great writers, including the poet Ady, is not worthy of the authors. For instance, the term Balkanization does not mean "backward," yet that was what Ady had in mind (pp. 158-59). "Ninecomepoop" should be nincompoop, and "attornies" should be "attorneys" (p. 110), whereas *pogacsa* is a scone. The biographic (or "biographical") index accompanying both works is quite disconcerting, as regards its English as well as its content, which seldom reveals the true significance of the subject; the translators might have taken the trouble to point out these weaknesses to the author and editors.

On the whole, the two works by Gero make instructive and interesting reading. While Gero asserts in *Modern Hungarian Society* that he has "included comparisons with other countries wherever possible" (p. 3), and there is an essay on the impact of the Polish uprising of 1830-1 on Hungary, these other countries are seldom those that share the space with Hungary (granted, most of these were not yet nation-states). Theoretically, Gero recognizes the issue: he states in his preface to the same book that he has "tried to avoid concentrating exclusively on Hungary in view of the fact that the past, present and future of all the nations of the region are so closely related" (p. xii).

Notes:

[1]. The original, Hungarian edition was _Az elsopro kisebbseg: nepkepviselet a Monarchia Magyarorszagan (Budapest: Gondolat, 1988).

[2]. Originally published in Hungarian under the title *Magyar polgarosodas* (Budapest: Atlantisz, 1993).

[3]. Compare Gyorgy Csepeli, *Nemzet altal homalyosan* (Budapest: Szazadveg, 1992), p. 183, and Sandor Biro, *Nationalities Problem in Transylvania,1867-1940: A Social History of the Romanian Minority under Hungarian Rule, 1867-1918 and the Hungarian Minority under Romanian rule, 1918-1940* Boulder, Colo.: Highland Lakes, NJ: Social Science Monographs; Atlantic Research and Publications, 1992.

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