

Power Struggle in Hungary: Analysis in Post-war Domestic Politics August–November 1919

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In the history of nations there are times which can truly be called watersheds. The one brief year between October 1918 and November 1919 is a case in point in the history of modern Hungary. Within a year after the lost war Hungary's situation changed drastically: from monarchy to republic; from old-fashioned liberalism to white terror; from sham parliamentarianism, through brief periods of precarious democracy and bolshevism, to no recognized government at all—and all this against the backdrop of foreign invasions and the ultimate loss of two-thirds of the country's former territories. By August 1919, the revolutionary period was ostensibly over, but there was no political consolidation in sight. For almost four months a bitter power struggle took place in Budapest in which all the old and new parties participated and in which the Allies, eager to conclude peace with a representative government, also had a hand.

The political crisis of 1919, central to an understanding of Hungary's inter-war development, has not received sufficient attention in the hands of those few historians who have studied the period in any depth. Early conservatives saw the fierce political struggle as simple "personal jostling" for power among selfish and petty political upstarts.¹ Marxist critics have been apt to dismiss the party struggle altogether as a mere camouflage for the united effort of "the Hungarian ruling classes" to introduce white terror, stamp out bolshevism, and punish the working class for its support of the Hungarian Soviet Republic.² Recent American studies also brush aside the political crisis of 1919 as irrelevant. They either claim that "the fierceness of the struggle that ensued between factions [was] misleading" since "in reality, no sharp [ideological] difference existed between the groups"³ or they ignore the crisis on the grounds that the "political sub-structures" were neither important nor influential in the face of the growing power of the military.⁴

This paper, by contrast, views the party struggle of 1919 not as the

beginning of Hungary's counterrevolutionary era but rather as the end of her unfinished revolution of 1918. In this light, the power struggle ceases to be a squabble among petty politicians or a useless exercise of like-minded counterrevolutionaries; instead, it takes on the dimensions of the final agony of the makers of the October revolution.

Outwardly, the October revolution of 1918 seemed to mark the peaceful transition of Hungarian political life into modernity. There was only one minor armed clash and one assassination: István Tisza, the embodiment of the old order, was murdered on the night of October 31. Beneath this calm exterior, however, lay the seeds of political turbulence. Although the new revolutionary regime was genuinely committed to the purest democratic principles, the three-party coalition of Mihály Károlyi was hardly representative of the Hungarian people. The Social Democratic party, the most powerful component of the coalition, could rely on organized labor, but the working class in agricultural Hungary was inherently weak. The other two parties, the Radical party of Oszkár Jászi and the Party of Independence of Mihály Károlyi, appealing as they did to the democratic segments of the middle classes, were in an even weaker position. In spite of the country's long parliamentary tradition, true supporters of democracy were few and far between in Hungary.

Revolutionary governments are apt to be created overnight, but they are rarely able to withstand the test of time. The coalition, hastily formed on October 31, 1918, was no exception. It is true, the Hungarian people greeted the formation of the new government with great enthusiasm, but their outbursts of joy were as much due to the arrival of peace and independence as they were to the passing of the old regime. Soon enough, the population would become disenchanted. The first stirrings, however, came from within the government itself; the Social Democrats, who had been given two ministerial posts in the original coalition, demanded a larger share of power. They were successful in their demands; by January, the Social Democratic party was the strongest in the coalition. Other groups were not so successful in gaining a voice in the government. In the October coalition, for example, the largest segment of Hungarian society, namely the peasantry, was entirely ignored. It was not until January that István Nagyatádi Szabó, the peasant leader of the Smallholders' party, was offered a portfolio in the government.

Another group which found itself outside of the coalition both in October and in January comprised the conservative middle classes, the petit bourgeoisie, and the unorganized and unattached blue collar

workers of the cities. The spokesman for this amorphous group was the Christian Social People's party. The rise of the Christian Socials had been rapid. In 1910 they had sent only a handful of representatives to Parliament; by January 1919, they were regarded as a serious electoral threat to the survival of the Károlyi regime.⁵ Nor was their strength overestimated. In the first post-war elections of 1920, they ran shoulder to shoulder with the Smallholders' party, the single largest party in the country.

While the Christian Social People's party was the most important oppositional party to the left-dominated coalition, it was not the only one. The large and middle-size landowners, in anticipation of the proposed land reform, established a party of their own, ironically called the National Peasant party. The large industrialists followed suit and created the Hungarian Bourgeois party. The conservative politicians of the old regime, after a few months of hibernation, founded the Party of National Unity. The right-wing members of Károlyi's Party of Independence abandoned their party leader and organized their own Party of Independence. The former Democratic party, the party of the Budapest middle classes (especially the Jews), re-emerged as the Bourgeois Democratic party. Although the organization of these parties was only in an embryonic state in January 1919 and although their following was small, their very creation was indicative of the unsettled political conditions which characterized the period. It was becoming evident that only elections could put an end to the chaos which was developing in Budapest.

However desirable elections had become by early 1919, they were not to take place. On March 21, the Social Democrats and a handful of Communists, burying their differences, united and declared the establishment of the Hungarian Soviet Republic. The Soviet Republic, which speedily introduced a one-party system on the Bolshevik model, lasted only 133 days, but its effects on Hungarian politics were devastating. It thoroughly discredited the Social Democrats without whom, it was charged with some justice, the ill-fated dictatorship of the proletariat could never have been introduced. It also further undermined the already battered reputation of the Károlyi coalition which, it was widely held, was either unable or unwilling to check the unwarranted ambitions of the Social Democrats and the reckless, subversive activities of the Communists. The shift in public opinion towards the right, gradual between October 1918 and March 1919, took a violent turn after the fall of the Soviet regime.

Given the violently anti-Communist and anti-Socialist sentiments of

the population by late July 1919, the formation of an all-Socialist government on August 1 was clearly ill-conceived. From its inception, the new government was faced with a distrustful, sometimes hostile population and a disobedient civil service corps. Moreover, the Allies made it clear to the Social Democrats that they would not recognize any Hungarian government which was not representative. Reluctant but hard-pressed, Gyula Peidl, prime minister for six brief days, did initiate conversations with select party leaders. It was evident, however, that, even after the fiasco of the Soviet Republic, the Socialists did not envisage a coalition in which they held a subordinate position. By all indications, their concessions were meager. They tentatively agreed to allot two cabinet posts to the counterrevolutionary government of Szeged, a group formed during the Soviet period outside of Communist-dominated Hungary. In addition, they offered one portfolio to Nagyatádi Szabó of the Smallholders' party and another to Sándor Giesswein, a Christian Social whose ideological outlook, quite democratic and progressive, appealed to the Social Democrats but by no means reflected the views of his party as a whole.⁶

Social Democratic plans to dominate the projected coalition government came to an abrupt end on August 6 when a group of counter-revolutionaries, sensing the Socialists' determination to retain political leadership, staged a *coup d'état* and arrested the whole cabinet. If nothing else, the *coup*, which was executed expeditiously and which met with widespread approval within Hungary, should have convinced the Social Democrats that their opponents were determined and that they themselves were defenseless and without support. Yet they were not so easily discouraged. Due to the Allies' insistence on a coalition government, the Social Democrats still had a chance to wield some political power. Perhaps, they thought, the clock could still be turned back to the final days of the Károlyi period when their political strength was at its height and their power supreme.

István Friedrich, the new prime minister, had no intention of excluding the Social Democratic party from his government. Yet, as a conservative member of the former Károlyi party, he was determined to revert to the *status quo* of the early phase of the democratic revolution when the Social Democrats played only a subordinate role in the coalition.⁷ Accordingly, Friedrich's first plan for a coalition government included only one portfolio for the Social Democrats. Otherwise, he planned to resign the premiership in favor of Márton Lovászy, a disaffected Károlyi man who had gathered the majority of the Party of Independence members, including István Friedrich, under his banner in

January 1919. Friedrich, most likely, had his eye on the post of minister of war since he had served as undersecretary of war in the Károlyi government between November 1918 and January 1919, when he had resigned as a protest over the government's steady shift to the left. Friedrich asked Gusztáv Gratz, an old-time liberal, to be foreign minister and Lóránt Hegedüs, a banking expert and a member of the Hungarian Bourgeois party, to be minister of finance. In addition, the Smallholders would have been given two ministerial seats and the Szeged government one or two portfolios. As during the Károlyi period, the Christian Social People's party was ignored.⁸

Both the Social Democrats and Friedrich were unrealistic in their political strategy. Turning the clock back to March 1919 was as illusory a goal as returning to the *status quo* of October 1918. No longer were the Social Democrats the only target of public wrath; all politicians who had participated in the October revolution, including Friedrich himself, were suspect. Lovászy's proposed premiership was immediately vetoed by the other politicians because he was "compromised" by his role in the democratic revolution of 1918.⁹ István Nagyatádi Szabó, who in January 1919 had been quite happy to join the Socialist-dominated coalition government, now refused to participate in a government in which the Social Democrats had even one portfolio.¹⁰

As Friedrich's plans for a coalition government were crumbling, the extreme right made its first bid for power. On August 7, the radical wing of the Christian Social People's party, under the leadership of István Haller, a former member of parliament and editor of a Catholic newspaper, and János Anka, a right radical journalist, formed a new party: the National Christian Socialist party.¹¹ According to participants, the actual organization of the party had already begun during the Soviet period, and the party leaders claimed that by the end of the Kun regime they had 15,000 followers. This number may have been an exaggeration, but the Christian Socialist party's determination was real. On August 14, István Haller and János Anka led a twelve-member delegation to the prime minister¹² "to demonstrate that their party was the strongest political base in Hungary" and to demand an all-Christian—i.e., anti-liberal, right radical, and anti-Socialist—cabinet. Moreover, the party barraged the prime minister's office with "hundreds of delegations" in order to convince Friedrich that no government could survive without its active participation.¹³ Friedrich, who had originally planned to exclude even the conservative faction of the Christian Social People's party, was now confronted with a vocal and well-organized group of a truly radical composition which claimed wide public support for its ideology.

Friedrich, hard pressed by the right radicals, received no assistance from the Social Democrats. He soon decided to give three portfolios to the Social Democratic party—one more than they had had in the first Károlyi cabinet, but Ernő Garami, the real authority of the decimated party, flatly refused the new offer.¹⁴ The ostensible reason behind the refusal was the presence of the Archduke Joseph, a Habsburg, as governor of Hungary. However, as later developments proved, Garami's real objection was much more fundamental; he simply refused to participate in a government which was not dominated by his own party and the radical democrats of the Károlyi period. In fact, he was seriously thinking in terms of his own premiership.¹⁵ Under these circumstances, the organization of a moderate coalition government was unlikely.

Laboring under unusually difficult conditions, Friedrich showed himself to be a master of political manipulation. On August 15, he was able to announce the formation of a coalition government which, if it had ever been allowed to function, might have formed the basis of a moderate administration. He managed to overcome Nagyatádi Szabó's objections to Social Democratic participation in the government, and the Smallholders received two portfolios in the coalition. Lovászy, in a generous spirit, accepted the post of foreign minister. Friedrich courageously withstood the right radicals' demand for a purely Christian government and persuaded their leaders to join a coalition in which they would be in the minority. One portfolio was given to Károly Huszár, a man of the conservative faction, and one to István Haller, the spokesman of the radicals. Three ministerial posts were reserved for the Social Democratic party. Thus in the sixteen-member cabinet only four men belonged to the conservative or right-wing parties, while seven ministers were drawn from the Party of Independence, the Smallholders, and the Social Democratic party. The rest of the posts were filled with non-political experts. It seemed that Friedrich and Lovászy were determined to keep a balance between the extreme right and the extreme left. Lovászy announced that the new government was resolute in its struggle "not only against Bolshevism but also against reaction."¹⁶ Time proved, however, that this was a very difficult proposition in post-war Hungary.

The survival of Friedrich's coalition government required the active support of the Social Democratic party. In the first place, the Allies refused to recognize a government which did not include Socialist representatives. Moreover, the democratic bourgeois parties were far too weak, without Socialist support, to withstand the formidable attack on their ranks from the right. Lovászy therefore announced that the

government laid "great stress" on the good will of the Social Democrats, who would "surely agree to join" the coalition once the government demonstrated its democratic convictions.¹⁷ Lovászy's hopes were dashed. Garami showed no inclination to cooperate with the government, claiming that the presence of the Archduke Joseph precluded participation, regardless of the composition of the government. In addition, it was rumored that the Social Democrats were not satisfied with three cabinet posts; they demanded five.¹⁸ That demand, if met, would have wrecked the formation of a cabinet since the animosities between Socialists and non-Socialists had only intensified since August 6.

The readiness of Lovászy and Nagyatádi Szabó to make common cause with István Friedrich was a blow to the Social Democratic leadership. Their party had been abandoned by the very people on whom Garami had counted in his "struggle against Friedrich,"¹⁹ whom he disliked and mistrusted. Indeed, the Social Democratic party seemed to be totally isolated. In this situation, the only hope for the party was the intervention of the Great Powers. Therefore, a day after the formation of the new cabinet, Garami departed for Vienna to sound out and to influence the Allied representatives.²⁰ His aim was twofold: to prevent a possible Habsburg restoration and, with the removal of Joseph as the head of state, to cause the fall of Friedrich's coalition. Garami's mission was successful. Under pressure from members of the American Relief Administration and its director, Herbert Hoover, the Supreme Council forced Joseph out of office on August 22, 1919.²¹ The Hungarian Social Democratic party seemed victorious.

But the Socialist triumph at the time of Joseph's departure from office was hollow. What followed was a rapid shift to the right both in public opinion and in Friedrich's outlook. Realizing that the Social Democrats had been instrumental in the removal of the Archduke Joseph from office and, consequently, in the fall of his government, Friedrich—never very warm towards the Socialists—became openly antagonistic. He made dark references to "politicians" who were trying to influence the Entente missions against his government and to "in-trigues" which would never stop regardless of the composition of the cabinet.²² He reconsidered his original offer of three posts to the Social Democratic party, claiming that "the Socialists were not entitled to a larger field of action than their numbers warranted,"²³ and on August 24 announced that he was willing to grant the Socialists only two portfolios.²⁴ The Social Democratic party answered in kind. On the day of Friedrich's announcement, the Executive Committee of the party voted against participation in any government headed by István Friedrich.²⁵

Friedrich's reaction was violent. He warned that although he had had to sacrifice "the symbol of Christian Hungary in the person of the Archduke Joseph" to the ambitions of the Social Democratic party, he would "yield no further."²⁶ For good measure, he added that he would not leave office "to gratify the personal aspirations of other parties."²⁷ The archduke's forced resignation and the fall of the coalition was a watershed; from this point on, Friedrich began to court right-wing political elements.²⁸

The new government which Friedrich formed on August 28 reflected the extreme political polarization of post-revolutionary Hungary. Lovász and Nagyatádi Szabó, duly impressed with Garami's success in winning Allied support, hurriedly abandoned what looked like Friedrich's sinking ship. Desperate to form a government, Friedrich turned to the National Peasant party, the party of the all-powerful landowning class. No longer did he attempt to draw the Social Democrats into the combination; on the contrary, he filled the cabinet posts which had been reserved for them with members of the Christian Socialist party, which had begun a campaign to build a powerful Christian trade union movement.

Public opinion overwhelmingly favored the *de facto* government of Friedrich. An Italian newspaperman observed that the prime minister's popularity had soared in the previous few weeks "owing to his bold and energetic attitude."²⁹ Vilmos Vázsonyi, a Jewish liberal politician and head of the Bourgeois Democratic party, had to admit that at least three-fourths of the population supported the existing government, which represented "the real true general opinion of Hungary."³⁰ István Bethlen, a conservative aristocrat and no friend of Friedrich, confessed that, contrary to his earlier opinion, he no longer believed that a coalition government was a prerequisite to the political consolidation of the country. In his view, "the socialist party . . . [had] lost considerable ground even among the industrial and working classes" while the "Government of Mr. Friedrich [had] succeeded in gaining a crushing majority of public opinion."³¹

Their influence greatly diminished, the liberal and Social Democratic parties sought ways in which to re-establish themselves. After abandoning a wild scheme by Lovász and "other prominent men" to overthrow Friedrich's government by force,³² the liberals made serious attempts to organize a bloc which would include all parties left of center. In spite of protracted negotiations, no liberal bloc ever emerged; the left was far too disorganized and ideologically divided. The first man to dissent was Vázsonyi, whose party had an important following in Budapest. Upon

hearing that Lovász had been contemplating a *coup d'état*, Vázsonyi began negotiations with Friedrich.³³ The prime minister, always eager to receive support from the liberals, welcomed Vázsonyi with open arms, but he was soon forced to retreat when members of his cabinet and the newspapers of the Christian parties violently objected to the Jewish Vázsonyi joining the cabinet.³⁴ Although Vázsonyi's attempt to cooperate with Friedrich was frustrated, his very willingness to abandon the cause of Lovász and Garami showed the fragile nature of the proposed liberal bloc. The next problem the leftist forces encountered was the attitude of István Nagyatádi Szabó, whose cooperation was vital to the liberal cause. In fact, Nagyatádi Szabó could make or break any political grouping in the immediate post-war period. Sensing the Smallholders' growing importance and always eager to be on the winning side, Nagyatádi Szabó refused to "give up [his] party's independence"³⁵ and preferred to sit on the fence until the political alignments gave a clearer indication of the relative strength of the right and the left.

The liberal bloc did not materialize, but the extensive reporting of the preparations for the formation of such a bloc immediately spurred the Christian and national parties into action. Fearing a concentration of the opposition parties, the leaders of the rightist parties began to consolidate their ranks. Unlike the liberals, the Christian and national groups managed to bring about a Christian bloc within weeks. Negotiations began on October 4 when the Christian National party, headed by Pál Teleki, merged with the Christian Social party.³⁶ A few days later, further negotiations took place with other Christian parties, and on October 25, 1919, the establishment of the Party of Christian Unity was announced.³⁷ Moreover, negotiations with other parties such as the still uncommitted Smallholders' and Peasant parties continued with a view to establishing a massive Christian bloc.³⁸

Once the Social Democratic leadership realized that the liberals could not organize a strong bloc, they decided to seek Allied help abroad once again. On October 8, Ernő Garami and Manó Buchinger left for Vienna, ostensibly to negotiate with the representative of the Czechoslovak government in the Austrian capital on the question of Czechoslovakia's supply of coal for impoverished Hungary. Their real goal, however, was not Czech coal, although they did get that;³⁹ rather, Garami and Buchinger spent their time in Vienna negotiating with Entente and Czech representatives in an attempt "to get rid of Friedrich."⁴⁰ Their original plan called for the retention of Romanian troops in Budapest, under whose protection a coalition government, composed predominantly of the parties of the left, could be established.⁴¹

The Allied representatives were not enthusiastic; after all, the Supreme Council had been trying to dislodge the Romanians from the Hungarian capital for months.⁴² The Socialists' next move, therefore, was to approach the Czechoslovak government. On October 15, Foreign Minister Edward Beneš received a copy of the Hungarian plan, the result of cooperation between the Social Democrats and émigré politicians of the Károlyi era. Their memorandum proposed that an international gendarmerie of 15,000 to 20,000 troops should be created and sent to Hungary in order to pacify the country. Furthermore, the memorandum envisaged a new coalition government in which one-third of the cabinet posts would be allocated to the Social Democrats, one-third to the liberal bourgeois parties, and one-third to the growing Christian bloc. It was not a modest political plan, considering the strength of the left-of-center parties, and it could have been achieved only by the employment of an international force.⁴³ But Beneš liked the plan and, although he could not "promise them any active intervention . . . without the concurrence of the Great Allied Powers," he was ready to support it in its general outline. Accordingly, with minor alterations, Beneš sent the memorandum to the Quai d'Orsay where, again, it was favorably received.⁴⁴ In the hands of the Supreme Council, however, it met its death; in spite of French support, the British, American, and Italian representatives violently opposed it.⁴⁵

In the meantime, in the absence of the Social Democratic top leadership, the bourgeois liberal parties began to consolidate their ranks. Realizing that the formation of a massive oppositional bloc was hopeless, they concentrated their efforts on the creation of a single liberal party. Even this modest goal, however, was beyond the reach of the party leaders. From the long negotiations two liberal parties eventually emerged. On October 12, Vázsonyi joined forces with the small, newly-created National Liberal party, establishing the National Democratic Bourgeois party.⁴⁶ On October 15, Márton Lovászy and Ferenc Heinrich agreed to merge their parties, the Party of Independence and the Hungarian Bourgeois party, calling their combination the All-Hungarian National party.⁴⁷ Both groups sensed their inherent political weakness. Vázsonyi anxiously awaited the arrival of Count Gyula Andrassy, Jr., the monarchy's last foreign minister, and Count Albert Apponyi, the doyen of Hungary's pre-war political life; perhaps they could assist him in his negotiations with the other parties.⁴⁸ Lovászy, once a very close friend of Károlyi, turned to the politicians of the former Party of National Work, that is the followers of István Tisza, Károlyi's archenemy.⁴⁹ At the same time, both parties worked hard to

induce Nagyatádi Szabó to stand behind their combinations, thereby hoping to gain the sympathy and support of the Hungarian peasant class. The Smallholders, however, refused to commit themselves; Nagyatádi Szabó announced that his party was "Christian, liberal, and democratic and therefore destined to be a bridge between the Christian bloc and the liberal parties."⁵⁰

The fruitless negotiations among the opposition parties, their inability to gain the active support of the Smallholders, and their realization that the Christian bloc was rapidly gaining ground put considerable stress on the formally united but ideologically divided liberal parties. The All-Hungarian National party was the first to show the signs of strain. Lovászy and Heinrich could not agree on immediate strategy. In the former's opinion, negotiations with Friedrich would be in vain, especially since the liberals could not organize a united bloc. Heinrich, on the other hand, was quite willing to negotiate with Friedrich. Heinrich, having a stronger position in the party, emerged victorious from this argument. In the second half of October, to the annoyance of the other liberal politicians, the National party, represented by Lovászy and Heinrich, undertook negotiations with the prime minister. The basis of the conversations was a list of demands prepared by Lovászy: the formation of a non-partisan government, an effective check on the growing class and religious hatred, the granting of all political rights, and the restoration of social tranquility. In return, the All-Hungarian National party was ready to join the government. Friedrich, riding high on his popularity and being aware of the weakness of the National party, assumed a rather high-handed attitude. In theory, he agreed with all of Lovászy's demands, but he made it clear to the National party delegation that while he believed that Vázsonyi's Democratic party had a substantial following in Budapest, he was less sure of the National party's strength and constituency.⁵¹ The conversations, not surprisingly, broke down without Friedrich formally answering the demands of the National party or making any promises concerning participation in the government.

The failure of the All-Hungarian National party's negotiations with Friedrich coincided with the arrival in Budapest of Sir George Clerk, the special representative of the Supreme Council, who delivered the Allies' demand for the immediate organization of a coalition government, with or without István Friedrich.⁵² Clerk's presence in Budapest indicated that the Great Powers were growing increasingly impatient with the Hungarian political deadlock and were intent on ending it, even if this meant undisguised interference in the domestic affairs of a

vanquished nation. The importance of Clerk's mission was not wasted on Hungary's politicians. Immediately after the arrival of the special representative, there were signs of renewed willingness, at least in certain circles, to end the crisis without further Allied interference. The call for cooperation and unity came, as before, from the All-Hungarian National party in the form of a public appeal published on October 26.⁵³ This time, Friedrich, fully aware of Clerk's demands, eagerly seized the opportunity to show his conciliatory attitude and his willingness to compromise. The prime minister now readily accepted Lovászy's demands and indicated that he would be happy to negotiate directly with the other opposition parties, including the Social Democrats.⁵⁴

If Clerk's presence in Budapest had a mellowing effect on Friedrich, his disclosure that Social Democratic participation in the government was a prerequisite for recognition had exactly the opposite effect on Garami. The Social Democratic leader admitted that Clerk's revelation "naturally incredibly strengthened the position of the Social Democratic party."⁵⁵ In the light of this new information, they once again resolved not to negotiate with István Friedrich under any circumstances.⁵⁶ The bargaining position of the Socialists proved to be a powerful magnet which drew the hitherto uncommitted parties into the Social Democratic orbit. Vázsonyi, who had been eager in the past to make his peace with Friedrich, now found himself in perfect agreement with Garami.⁵⁷ The Smallholders, who had consistently refused to join either combination, now considered the Social Democratic and liberal parties the clear winners; accordingly, István Nagyatádi Szabó shifted his position and openly committed himself and his party to the anti-Friedrich forces of Garami and Vázsonyi.⁵⁸ Finally, the Social Democratic success split the All-Hungarian party. While Ferenc Heinrich, the co-chairman of the party, was negotiating with Friedrich, his colleague Lovászy sided with the leaders of the other opposition parties.⁵⁹ Clerk, confronted with what seemed to be united opposition to Friedrich's premiership, concluded that István Friedrich had to resign.⁶⁰ The news that Clerk was willing to sacrifice the prime minister for the sake of a workable coalition government spread like wildfire in Budapest.⁶¹

Friedrich's reaction to the news of his pending political demise was swift and "absolutely defiant."⁶² The prime minister took exactly the same position which Garami had taken all along. If the Allies insisted on his removal from the head of the government, the Party of Christian National Unity and the cabinet members would boycott the negotiations. The conservative bloc would thus not be represented in the cabinet, in spite of the fact that everyone knew that it had the majority of the public behind it.⁶³

The Allies threatened Friedrich's premiership but, ironically enough, they also contributed indirectly to his obdurate refusal to resign and to the Party of Christian Unity's steadfast support of his stance. At long last, the Allies forced the Romanian army to leave Budapest. The Hungarian National Army, hitherto confined to territories west of the Danube, would now be responsible for the maintenance of order in the Hungarian capital. This army had been created by the Szeged counter-revolutionary government during the Soviet period and, within a few months, it had become a notorious gathering place for *déclassé* elements who espoused a right radical ideology and who introduced a veritable white terror in the territories under their jurisdiction. The Friedrich government, having no independent military force behind it, had endeavored, on the one hand, to persuade Admiral Miklós Horthy, the supreme commander, to put an end to his army's illegal activities and, on the other, to convince him to support the *de facto* government in Budapest. Up to November, he had been unsuccessful in both of these endeavors; the atrocities continued unabated, and Horthy refused to subordinate his army to the government. In a power struggle between the right and the left, however, the likelihood of the National Army supporting the rightist forces seemed almost certain. Admittedly, Horthy was not entirely satisfied with the Friedrich government because "it was not explicitly Christian and national and it [was] still a transition from the Commune,"⁶⁴ but its opponents, the Social Democrats and the liberals, were clearly worse. In Horthy's opinion, they were solely responsible for all of Hungary's recent misfortunes. Thus the news of the National Army's arrival in Budapest raised high hopes in the ranks of the Party of Christian National Unity and sent chills down the spines of the Social Democrats and the liberals.

Clerk, fully aware of the army's importance in the political struggle and faced with a deadlock, began negotiations with Miklós Horthy. If he could convince the Supreme Commander to support a coalition government in which the Social Democrats and the liberal parties participated, his mission could easily be accomplished. A promise from Horthy that he would cooperate with such a coalition would lull the suspicions of the leftist parties, and it would, at the same time, break István Friedrich's resistance to his resignation. Once Friedrich left the cabinet, an agreement between the Christian parties and their opponents could be achieved quickly. After all, the politicians of the liberal camp repeatedly assured Clerk that the only obstacle to their participation in the government was the presence of the prime minister.

While Sir George Clerk's decision to employ Horthy in his negotia-

tions with the Hungarian parties was perfectly understandable and, from his own point of view, could be considered “a masterstroke,”⁶⁵ the willingness of the Social Democrats and the liberals to negotiate with Horthy seemed totally incomprehensible. Only a few weeks earlier, the Social Democratic party had energetically urged the Supreme Council to disarm the dangerous forces of the National Army.⁶⁶ But, though they feared the National Army, they were even more desperate to get rid of Prime Minister Friedrich.

When, on November 4, Clerk asked Horthy to a meeting with leftist politicians and when Vázsonyi, Garami, Lovászy, and Nagyatádi Szabó agreed to accept the Admiral’s assurances of his support for a coalition government in which their parties participated, it was clear to contemporary observers that Friedrich’s resignation was imminent. It was argued that “if Horthy [was] ready to sit down with Friedrich’s political opponents . . . he [left] M. Friedrich without support [so that Friedrich could not] any longer maintain his unbending *non possumus* attitude.”⁶⁷ The liberal camp was jubilant. Suddenly Horthy, whom they had consistently portrayed as a man of reaction, became a pillar of democracy and “a Hungarian Saint George.”⁶⁸

The agreement between the liberal camp and Horthy achieved one of the aims of the opposition, namely, the resignation of István Friedrich as prime minister of Hungary. However, it did not and could not help them to accomplish their main objective. As Garami admitted to Clerk, the Social Democratic party’s real desire was the establishment of “a coalition government in which the preponderance of the Christian Union” was broken.⁶⁹ The opposition parties pressed their cause in the ensuing negotiations. The Democratic party of Vázsonyi demanded one portfolio in the new government; the All-Hungarian National party of Lovászy, three portfolios, and the Social Democratic party, two.⁷⁰ In addition, the Smallholders laid claim to two ministerial posts. But the powerful Christian bloc, though ready to compromise on the person of the prime minister, had every intention of retaining their dominant position in Hungarian political life. They were prepared to admit one liberal, one Social Democrat, and one Smallholder to the cabinet, but they did not contemplate an entirely new political orientation.⁷¹ They found support for their stance in Sir George Clerk, who had made up his mind that the Christian bloc must be fully represented in the cabinet.⁷² In this decision, he diagnosed the political climate of the country correctly. At the same time, however, he exhibited a certain distaste for the “extreme Jewish and social democratic elements,” as he called the leftist leaders.⁷³

The liberals and Social Democrats not only lost Clerk's support in the renewed struggle over the composition of the government; Horthy also began to retreat from the position he had outlined at the November 4 meeting. On November 7, he made a public statement concerning the real meaning of the crucial word 'subordination' which had appeared in the published text of the document signed by the participants in the earlier meeting. Horthy now claimed that he did not mean "to subordinate the army to the government"; instead, he promised "to support the new government just as he had been supporting the Friedrich government."⁷⁴ Considering that Horthy had in no way supported the Friedrich government but had in fact worked against it, this announcement sounded most sinister. And if the Social Democrats still had any doubts about Horthy's intentions after November 7, they soon learned of his true feelings for their party. On November 12, Horthy, known for his indiscretions, was interviewed by the correspondent of the *Nemzeti Újság*, the official organ of the Christian bloc. During the interview Horthy announced that "as far as the Social Democrats are concerned, I do not 'negotiate' with them, just as the Romanian troops of occupation did not 'negotiate' with them. I order, and they obey."⁷⁵ Clerk's support withdrawn and Horthy's army on the march, the liberal camp had lost all of its trump cards.

The sudden reversal of the liberals' fortune was not wasted on István Nagyatádi Szabó. Initially an outspoken enemy of the Social Democratic party and a willing participant in Friedrich's government, Nagyatádi Szabó was not a firm supporter of the liberal cause. Once the Smallholders realized that neither Clerk nor Horthy stood squarely behind the liberals and the Social Democrats, they were quite ready to swing their support to the Christian bloc. On November 14, Nagyatádi Szabó made the startling announcement that he had left the liberal bloc and now intended to support the battered Friedrich government.⁷⁶ Nagyatádi's desertion was perhaps the harshest blow to Garami's political strategy since Lovászy had joined Friedrich's government on August 15. The constituency of the opposition had now shrunk to a very small minority indeed.

Garami, realizing the consequences that these developments would have on Hungary's political future, made one more desperate move. He now proposed that the Social Democratic party "use its favorable position due to the Entente's insistence on its participation in the government . . . and . . . decline to join the coalition and with this gesture . . . prevent the recognition of a government formed against it by the Entente."⁷⁷ This new strategy involved grave risks for Garami's party.

Clerk was on the verge of leaving Budapest if “within a few days no coalition government [was] formed which he [could] approve.” Garami, however, was optimistic about Clerk’s reaction to the new Social Democratic stance. He hoped that Clerk, in his eagerness to achieve a personal success, would put further pressure on the Christian bloc to accept a greater number of liberal and Social Democratic politicians in the cabinet. Moreover, even if Clerk refused to placate the Social Democrats and left the Hungarian capital without any tangible results, Garami was not pessimistic. After all, he argued, “everything would remain the same as before.”⁷⁸ In fact, Garami grossly miscalculated the situation, as the Executive Committee of the Social Democratic party recognized when they vetoed his plan. Clerk was siding more and more with the rightist forces, and his return to Paris with a report of Garami’s intransigence might have swayed the increasingly impatient Supreme Council to withdraw its support from the Social Democrats. Moreover, if Clerk had departed without either recognizing the Friedrich government or establishing a new coalition cabinet, nothing would have remained the same, as Garami supposed, because Horthy would have intervened. The admiral was becoming annoyed with the political game even during Clerk’s stay in the capital, and towards the end of the crisis he threatened “to arrest the whole company and to appoint a government which the Entente will recognize.”⁷⁹

On November 22, the newspapers announced the formation of a new coalition government under the Christian Social Károly Huszár, minister of education in the Friedrich government. The painfully slow negotiations under the watchful eyes of the Supreme Council brought meager results for the liberal forces in general and the Social Democratic party in particular. The Huszár government, which was hailed as a master stroke of Sir George Clerk’s diplomacy, hardly differed from the previous Friedrich governments in composition. With the exception of Károly Peyer, the new Social Democratic minister of labor relations, and István Bárczy, the National Democratic minister of justice, every cabinet member had served previously under Friedrich. Even Friedrich remained in the Huszár government as minister of defense. All in all, the months of governmental crisis achieved very little: Friedrich’s removal from the premiership and one seat for the Social Democrats.⁸⁰

The damage caused by Garami’s refusal to negotiate with Friedrich was almost incalculable, both to his own party and to Hungary’s democratic future. To be sure, the record of the two previous regimes was bound to lead to a considerably more conservative regime than that of Mihály Károlyi. However, the protracted political crisis only further

convinced the public that Hungary's misfortune was the result of immoral and injurious politics conducted by Hungary's political elite before, during, and immediately after the Soviet interlude. If the Social Democratic party had accepted the three ministerial posts offered to it in August, a viable coalition government in which the liberal elements predominated could have been established. Moreover, the Supreme Council would undoubtedly have immediately recognized this government. Such recognition would have given the government the prestige which Friedrich's government never had. It would also have put the government into a stronger position *vis à vis* the military. As it was, with one governmental crisis after another, the army soon came to be regarded as the only stable organization in the country. The liberal camp's willingness to draw Horthy and the National Army into political conversations also spurred the army's own ambitions; it allowed Horthy and his followers to view the army not as an apolitical force but as an organization with a political destiny. Without a doubt, the liberal camp's aim was the maintenance of democratic institutions in Hungary, but their tactics had exactly the opposite effect: the spectacular growth of the political right and the suppression of all remnants of Hungary's democratic revolution.

NOTES

1. Gusztáv Gratz, *A forradalmak kora: Magyarország története 1918-1920* (Budapest: Magyar Szemle Társaság, 1935), p. 249.
2. Dezső Nemes, *Az ellenforradalom története Magyarországon (1919-1921)* (Budapest: Akadémia, 1962), p. 35.
3. István Imre Mocsy, "Radicalization and Counterrevolution: Magyar Refugees from the Successor States and Their Role in Hungary, 1918-1921" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, 1973), p. 225.
4. William Michael Batkay, "The Origin and Role of the Unified Party in Hungary, 1919-1926" (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1972), p. 56.
5. Jenő Gergely, "Keresztényszocialisták az 1918-as magyarországi polgári demokratikus forradalomban," *Történelmi Szemle* 12 (1969): 47.
6. Mrs. Sándor Gábor, comp., "Böhm Vilmos, bécsi magyar követ jelentései a Peidl-kormányhoz és Ágoston Péter külügyminiszterhez," *Párttörténeti Közlemények* 6 (November 1960): 202, and *Népszava*, August 5, 1919. See also Gyula Peidl's speech in Parliament, August 2, 1919, in Jenő Kalmár, *Kik hozták be a románokat Budapestre, vagy hogy ütötték agyon Friedrich, Csilléry, Pekár úrék a magyarországi szociáldemokrata pártot?* (Budapest: Népszava, 1922), p. 121.
7. On István Friedrich and his political stance at the time of the *coup* see Eva S. Balogh, "István Friedrich and the Hungarian *Coup d'État* of 1919: A Re-evaluation," *Slavic Review* 35 (1976): 269-286.

8. The proposed composition of the government can be found in Thomas T. C. Gregory to the Supreme Council, August 6, 1919, United States, Department of State, *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States. The Paris Peace Conference 1919*, 13 vols. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1943–1947), 7: 604. Henceforth cited as *FRUS PPC*. On plans for Lovászy's premiership see *Nemzeti Újság*, October 9, 1919. On Lovászy's willingness to accept the post see Ernő Garami, *Forrongó Magyarország: Emlékezések és tanulságok* (Vienna: Pegazus, 1922), p. 156, and Albert Halstead to the American Commission to Negotiate Peace (henceforth cited as *CNP*), August 9, 1919, National Archives, Washington, D.C. (henceforth cited as *N.A.*), Record Group 59, M820/215/0278. On the ministerships of Hegedüs and Gratz see Halstead to *CNP*, August 13, 1919, American Relief Administration (henceforth cited as *ARA*)—Paris—H74, Hoover Institution, Stanford University.
9. Halstead to *CNP*, August 14, 1919, *ARA*—Paris—H74.
10. Garami, *Forrongó Magyarország*, p. 159; Manó Buchinger, *Küzdelem a szocializmusért: Emlékezések és élmények*, 2 vols. (Budapest: Népszava, 1946), 2: 95. Foreign newspapermen also reported on the Smallholders' objections to joining the Social Democrats in a coalition government. See Segrue to Hiatt Press, August 15, 1919, *ARA*—Paris—H74.
11. Jenő Gergely, "A Magyarországi Radikális Keresztényszocialista Párt (1919. szeptember – 1920. július)," *Századok* 106 (1972): 1051.
12. *Budapesti Közlöny*, August 14, 1919, evening.
13. Recollections of the Christian Social politicians in the first issue of their newspaper, *Nemzeti Újság*, September 28, 1919.
14. Archduke Joseph to Clemenceau, August 16, 1919, *FRUS PPC*, 7: 709, and Halstead to *CNP*, August 13, 1919, *ARA*—Paris—H74.
15. Vilmos Vázsonyi, a close associate of Garami, was convinced that Garami aspired to be the next prime minister of Hungary. *Beszédei és írásai*, 2 vols. (Budapest: Az Országos Vázsonyi-Emlékbizottság, 1927), 2: 255. Garami found support in Thomas T. C. Gregory, a member of the American Relief Administration; see Gregory to Logan, August 14, 1919, *ARA*—Paris—H74, and Garami, *Forrongó Magyarország*, p. 160.
16. *Budapesti Közlöny*, August 15, 1919, evening.
17. "Interview with Lovászy," Bing, United Press, August 15, 1919, *ARA*—Paris—H74.
18. Segrue to Hiatt Associated Press, August 15, 1919, *ARA*—Paris—H74.
19. Garami, *Forrongó Magyarország*, p. 162.
20. Atter to Isenmann, Reuter, August 15, 1919, *ARA*—Paris—H74.
21. *FRUS PPC*, 7: 803.
22. *Tag*, August 23, 1919, *N.A.*, Record Group 59, M820/215/0549.
23. *New York Times*, August 28, 1919.
24. *Budapesti Közlöny*, August 24, 1919.
25. András Fehér, *A magyarországi szociáldemokrata párt és az ellenforradalmi rendszer, 1919. augusztus – 1921* (Budapest: Akadémia, 1969), p. 36.
26. *New York Times*, August 28, 1919.
27. *Manchester Guardian*, September 1, 1919.
28. Ferenc Harrer, a liberal and a former follower of Mihály Károlyi, speculated that Garami's behavior "probably contributed to Friedrich's shift to the right." *Egy magyar polgár élete* (Budapest: Gondolat, 1968), p. 447.
29. *Daily Telegraph*, September 2, 1919.
30. Vázsonyi's disclosure to one of his Romanian friends in Switzerland. J. Schiopul to Herron, September 11, 1919, George D. Herron Papers, vol. 5, Hoover Institution, Stanford University.

31. Bethlen to Clemenceau, September 27, 1919, S. H. Bulletin No. 1036, October 10, 1919, Hoover Institution, Stanford University. Trade union membership dropped drastically in the second half of 1919 and in 1920. See Budapest, Statisztikai Hivatal, *Budapest székesfőváros statisztikai évkönyve, 1921–1924* (Budapest: Budapest székesfőváros statisztikai hivatala, 1925), p. 490. The Social Democratic party refused to participate in the 1920 elections, but on the basis of void ballots cast in Budapest an approximation of their strength can be made. In Budapest sixteen per cent of all votes, in adjusted figures, was cast for the Social Democratic party, while in the country as a whole the Social Democratic vote did not exceed six per cent. *Ibid.*, p. 566, and Hungary, Központi Statisztikai Hivatal, *Magyar statisztikai évkönyv*, new series, vols. 31–33 (1923–1925) (Budapest: Athenaeum, 1927), p. 274.
32. Causey to Gregory, September 12, 1919, Thomas T. C. Gregory Papers, Box 1, Hoover Institution, Stanford University.
33. *Nemzeti Újság*, September 28, 1919.
34. *Ibid.*
35. *Nemzeti Újság*, October 3, 1919, and *Az Est*, October 3, 1919.
36. *Nemzeti Újság*, October 4, 1919.
37. *Nemzeti Újság*, October 26, 1919.
38. *Ibid.*
39. *Népszava*, November 5, 1919.
40. Ágnes Szabó, ed., “Részletek Ágoston Péter naplójából,” *Párttörténeti Közlemények* 9 (May 1963): 177. The *Nemzeti Újság*, reporting from “a very reliable source,” announced that Garami’s final destination was Prague, although it was believed that he was to see not Beneš but Mihály Károlyi; October 13, 1919.
41. Fehér, *A magyarországi szociáldemokrata párt*, p. 43.
42. Halstead to Lansing, October 10, 1919, *FRUS PPC*, 12: 579.
43. “Entwerrungsplan für Ungarn,” October 15, 1919, N.A., Record Group 59, M708/3/0460-0465. Beneš met the Hungarian delegation on October 16, 1919, *Národní listy*, October 17, 1919, cited in Alena Gajanová, *ČSR a středoevropská politika velmocí (1918–1939)* (Prague: Academia, 1967), p. 54.
44. Beneš’s conversation with the British *chargé d’affaires* on the details of the memorandum is reported in Gosling to Curzon, October 23, 1919, Great Britain, Foreign Office, *Documents on British Foreign Policy 1919–1939*, 45 vols. (London: H.M. Stationery Office, 1946–1973), I: 6: 304. Henceforth cited as *DBFP*. The French proposal, based on the original memorandum and entitled “Note from the French Delegation: The Situation in Hungary,” can be found in *FRUS PPC*, 8: 918–920. The French were ready to participate in the proposed international force; see Minutes of the Heads of Delegations, November 4, 1919, *Ibid.*, pp. 939–940.
45. Great Britain and the United States did not want to send military contingents to Hungary and refused to consider using Romanian, Czechoslovak, and Yugoslav troops. Italy was afraid of the employment of Yugoslav troops, especially under French command. Great Britain’s representative put his finger on the real problem: Hungarian conditions were not yet conducive to democracy, and any Allied intervention for the establishment of a government not representative of popular feeling could achieve only temporary results. See Minutes of the Heads of Delegations, November 3, 1919, *FRUS PPC*, 8: 908–912.
46. *Az Est*, October 12, 1919.
47. *Az Est*, October 15, 1919.
48. *Az Est*, October 4, 1919.

49. *Nemzeti Újság*, October 4, 1919.
50. *Az Est*, October 18, 1919.
51. *Az Est*, October 21, 1919.
52. Draft telegram to Monsieur Friedrich, October 11, 1919, *FRUS PPC*, 8: 787.
53. *Az Est*, October 26, 1919.
54. *Pester Lloyd*, October 26, 1919, quoted in *Review of the Foreign Press: The Political Review* 1 (1919–1920): 13.
55. Garami, *Forongó Magyarország*, pp. 169–170.
56. *Az Est*, October 28, 1919. On the resolution of the party's Executive Committee to this effect, see Fehér, *A magyarországi szociáldemokrata párt*, pp. 44–45.
57. *Az Est*, October 29, 1919.
58. *Nemzeti Újság*, November 6, 1919, and *Az Est*, November 9, 1919.
59. For the controversy between Heinrich and Lovászy and for the separate negotiations see *Az Est*, November 1, 2, 8, and 9, 1919, and *Nemzeti Újság*, November 4 and 8, 1919.
60. Clerk to Supreme Council, November 1, 1919, Polk Papers, Yale University.
61. *Az Est*, October 29, 1919.
62. Clerk to Supreme Council, November 4, 1919, *FRUS PPC*, 9: 9.
63. *Az Est*, November 2, 1919.
64. György Borsányi, ed., *Páter Zadravec z titkos naplója* (Budapest: Kossuth, 1967), p. 243.
65. *Times*, November 8, 1919.
66. "Entwirrungsplan für Ungarn," October 15, 1919, N.A., Record Group 59, M708/3, 0460-0465.
67. *Times*, November 8, 1919.
68. *Az Est*, November 9, 1919.
69. Fehér, *A magyarországi szociáldemokrata párt*, p. 47.
70. *Az Est*, November 9, 1919.
71. *Az Est*, November 12, 1919.
72. Clerk to Supreme Council, November 1, 1919, *FRUS PPC*, 8: 947–948.
73. Clerk to Crowe, October 25, 1919, *DBFP*, 1: 6: 310.
74. *Népszava*, November 7, 1919.
75. *Nemzeti Újság*, November 12, 1919.
76. *Nemzeti Újság*, November 14, 1919.
77. Garami, *Forongó Magyarország*, p. 185.
78. *Ibid.*, p. 187.
79. Diary of Countess Gyula Andrássy, Jr., November 20, 1919, quoted in Elek Karsai, *A Sándor-palotában történt, 1919–1941* (Budapest: Táncsics, 1967), p. 27. See also Harry H. Bandholtz, *An Undiplomatic Diary* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1933), p. 235.
80. Although the liberals succeeded in having István Bárczy appointed minister of justice, they did not actually gain ground since Lovászy, a member of the Friedrich government formed on August 15, was missing from the combination.

Symbolist and Decadent Elements in Early Twentieth-Century Hungarian Drama*

Ivan Sanders

I

In his first major work of literary criticism, an ambitious history of modern drama, György Lukács devotes an entire chapter to a discussion of trends in the Hungarian theatre. Although he wrote this important, and still relatively little-known, synthesis originally in Hungarian (a rather inelegant, German-influenced Hungarian, one might add), Lukács does not hesitate to point out that Hungarian dramatists have not made an original contribution to Western dramatic literature, and what is more, predicts—in 1911—a rather bleak future for Hungarian drama.¹ As Lukács's other youthful works, this study of modern drama displays awesome erudition and keen insights into patterns of social and intellectual evolution implicit in literary development; yet the work's rigorously consistent theoretical framework is distressingly rigid, often betraying Lukács's cardinal and all-too-familiar weakness as a literary critic: his indifference to purely literary values.

In the *History of the Development of Modern Drama*, Friedrich Hebbel is seen as the father of modern drama and the Hebellian notion of the necessary coincidence of personal and historical tragedy as the only legitimate source of drama.² Lukács was not yet a Marxist when he wrote his treatise, but he had already been influenced by the modern sociological theories of Max Weber and Georg Simmel, which in turn incorporated some of the conclusions reached by students of *Geistesgeschichte*, the approach to intellectual history just then coming into its own.³ Thus, in examining nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Western drama, Lukács considers only those works dramatically valid that offer grand syntheses: characters that embody the spirit of the age, particularized conflicts that intimate larger upheavals — in short,

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