

REVIEW ARTICLES

The World of Hungarian Populism

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Der ungarische Populismus [Hungarian Populism]. By Gyula Borbándi. (Studia Historica. Schriften des Ungarischen Instituts München, No. 7). Munich: Aurora Bücher, 1976. 358 pp. *The Rise and Development in Hungary of the So-Called "Popular Movement" (1920-1956)*. By Emmerich András. (UKI Reports 1973/1-3). Vienna: Hungarian Institute for Sociology of Religion, 1974. 251 pp.

In the course of the past century or so, populism had swept through many lands, from Russia to France, from the United States to Hungary, from Roumania to Cambodia. As such, populism became almost a universal movement. Yet, it appeared in many different forms. In some instances it manifested itself simply as a literary or intellectual movement among a select group of the intelligentsia (e.g., Roumania and Czechoslovakia). At other times it appeared as a violence-prone revolutionary movement with the goal of overthrowing the existing political system, or even of remaking the whole of society at whatever human cost (e.g., Russia and Cambodia). At still other times it emerged in the form of a broad reform movement, which hoped to effect meaningful social transformation through literary propaganda and through legitimate political activity, with the primary aim of improving the lot of the economically and socially exploited masses, and of effecting also a qualitative change in society — as was the case in Hungary.

The roots of populism — like the roots of all reform and revolutionary movements — stemmed from basic dissatisfaction with the existing order of things. But in the populist movement, which generally styled itself as a third alternative between capitalism and communism, we also find elements of anti-urbanism, as well as a degree of "Volk

mythology.” For the populists did in fact display some distrust toward the urban-industrialized society, and they also attributed certain ethical and national “regenerative powers” to the allegedly morally and culturally “uncontaminated” agrarian masses. Populism, therefore, appeared as a strange mixture of the desire for social change, and a lesser or greater degree of *Volk*-worship or *Volk*-heroization — a phenomenon that also holds true for the Hungarian version of this movement.

While Hungarian populism has often been compared to its late nineteenth-century counterpart, the Russian *narodnik* movement (*narodnichestvo*), the two movements are in fact very dissimilar. Contrary to its Russian predecessor, Hungarian populism was neither a revolutionary, nor a conspiratorial undertaking, but simply a progressive literary and social reform movement. Moreover, it contained more of the idealization of the peasant than did its Russian version. Thus, the Russian *narodniki* of the late nineteenth century viewed the Russian peasant (*muzhik*) largely as a passive instrument of social revolution in their drive toward a classless and stateless communistic society. To the Hungarian populists of the interwar period, on the other hand, the exploited Magyar peasants constituted the backbone of the nation, and the fountainhead of a future national, cultural and ethical regeneration.

The origins of Hungarian populism are lost in the mist of history, although we know that in the course of its development it went through several evolutionary stages. There are some scholars who try to find these roots in the Hungarian Reform Period (1825–1848), and more specifically in the folk-oriented poetry of Sándor Petőfi (1823–1849) and of his disciples. Most of the researchers, however, go back only to the intellectual turmoils of the early decades of the twentieth century; more specifically to the early writings of Endre Ady, Zsigmond Móricz and Dezső Szabó, to the simultaneous search for original Magyar folklore and folksongs by Béla Bartók and Zoltán Kodály, and to the contemporary agrarian social movement connected with the activities of András Áchim (1871–1911). Most of the latter scholars agree that the heyday of Hungarian populism was in the period between the two world wars, and that during that quarter of a century, the movement went through three distinct phases.

During the first of these phases in the 1920s, Hungarian populism was by and large a literary movement; during the second phase in the 1930s it became increasingly sociological and sociopolitical in its orientation; while during the third phase (1938–1944) it became largely a political movement. This politicization of Hungarian populism came largely through the increased activism of its proponents, and it manifested itself

partially in the founding of the first populist party (the National Peasant Party), and partially in the participation of the populists in the activities of a number of other political parties that were geared toward the transformation of Hungarian society. Thus, it was during this third phase of the movement's interwar history that individual populists began to move apart on the political spectrum, and became associated with various radical political orientations — from the Far Left to the Far Right. For this reason, historians generally have the tendency to discuss the populist movement under such categories as “Left,” “Right,” and “Center” — even though these categories are too rigid for the movement whose basic unity has never been broken.

During the Coalition Period (1945–1948) that followed World War II, most of the populists who had not compromised themselves through association with the Radical Right, became active in the National Peasant Party. Their immediate political role was limited by the fact that the majority of the non-communist forces rallied themselves around the Smallholders Party. But their ideology permeated much of the fabric of postwar Hungarian society and intellectual life. This was the very reason why their influence had to be undercut, and their organizations had to be destroyed. With the rise of Rákosi's monolithic dictatorship, the spokesmen of Hungarian populism either left the country, withdrew into silence, or were forced into collaboration with the regime. And while the spirit of populism continued to linger on, only those in exile were able to speak up and keep the flames alive.

Although populism was one of the most significant intellectual and social forces in twentieth-century Hungarian life, and although many have written about various aspects of this movement, with the exception of a few unpublished dissertations,¹ not until recently did this movement find competent monographers who were willing to undertake the goal of summarizing and evaluating populism as a whole. This delay was due to at least two reasons. First, until recently the study of populism was taboo in Hungary, which prevented native Hungarian scholars from engaging in research on this topic.² Second, many of the prominent exponents and participants of this movement are either still alive, or are only recently deceased, and this made it extremely difficult to deal with this topic. After decades of silence, however, suddenly two separate volumes appeared on the scene — both of them in German. One of these — which simultaneously also appeared in an English translation — was written by Emmerich András, a Jesuit and the director of the Vienna-based Hungarian Institute for Sociology of Religion; and the other one by Gyula Borbándi, a prolific publicist and historian, the

editor of the Munich-based journal *Új Látóhatár* [New Horizon], who himself grew out of the Hungarian populist movement.³ Of these two works, Borbándi's is the more comprehensive, more substantial one, while András's is somewhat more analytical — a fact that undoubtedly stems from the former's historical, and the latter's sociological approach.

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Entitled *Der ungarische Populismus*, Borbándi's work is a meticulous major synthesis that covers virtually every conceivable aspect of the populist movement in Hungary, from its roots to and beyond its re-emergence in the Revolution of 1956. Starting out with an overview of the historical evolution (Ch. I) and the socio-political structure (Ch. II) of interwar Hungary, Borbándi continues with the discussion of such related questions as the agro-socialist movement of the late dualist period (ca. 1890–1918), the bourgeois radical movement of the early twentieth century and its relationship to the peasant question, the problem of land reform during the interwar period, and finally the role of the so-called “critical intelligentsia” and its attitude toward social reform in general (Ch. III). Only after having laid the foundations in three lengthy chapters does Borbándi undertake to discuss the rise, development, achievements, and demise of the Hungarian populist movement. In his discussion of the origins, Borbándi distinguishes clearly between Hungarian populism and the German *völkisch* movement with its racial overtones, as well as between true populism (*népi mozgalom*) and pseudo-populism (*népies mozgalom*). Moreover, he also makes an effort to demonstrate the uniqueness of the Hungarian movement by pointing out those of its features that separate it from its foreign counterparts (e.g., Russian, Roumanian, Czech, French, and American).

Having clarified the nature of Hungarian populism, Borbándi continues with the discussion of the most significant intellectual fathers of this movement (e.g., Endre Ady, Zsigmond Móricz, Dezső Szabó, Béla Bartók, and Zoltán Kodály), as well as its most noted literary and sociological exponents (e.g., József Erdélyi, Gyula Illyés, László Németh, István Sinka, János Kodolányi, Géza Féja, and Imre Kovács). He also makes an effort to discuss the somewhat ambiguous relationship between the “populists” and the “urbanists,” but unfortunately without paying adequate attention to the so-called “Jewish question” that often played into, and at times strained this relationship.⁴ (Most of this strain

was the result of the populists' natural and almost exclusive attention to the rural or peasant question, while some of it stemmed from the various shades of anti-Semitism that generally colored the thinking of the majority of Central and East European intellectuals.)

Having discussed the roots and emergence of Hungarian populism, Borbándi turns his attention to the developments of the 1930's and 1940's, and more specifically to the movement's various literary, social and political manifestations. These included the so-called "village explorer" movement among the youth of that period, the birth of the great sociographies on the life and problems of the Hungarian peasant masses, the foundation of a number of cultural circles and scholarly centers that were meant to deal with the peasant problem, and the burgeoning of numerous populist or populist-oriented newspapers, journals and publications, all of which were involved in the spread and popularization of the populist ideology.

Borbándi's treatment of the literary, scholarly and sociological manifestations of populism is followed by a similar treatment of the movement's politicization. In this connection the author discusses such significant developments as the birth of the "New Spiritual Front" and the "March Front," the role of the so-called "Reform Clubs," Gyórfy Colleges, and the Hungarian populist youth organizations of Transylvania ("Transylvanian Youth") and Slovakia ("Sickle"), the noteworthy populist conferences during World War II (e.g., Szárszó I and II), as well as the foundation and functioning of the National Peasant Party, established for the purpose of serving as the political arm of the whole populist movement.

The next few chapters of Borbándi's work are devoted to the discussion of the developments following World War II, including the populists' participation in postwar reconstruction, their gradual defeat and elimination from positions of influence, and their split into three factions: those who chose to collaborate, those who went into "internal exile," and those who opted to leave the country so as to keep the flames of populism alive. The ranks of the latter included young Borbándi, as well as his co-editor and publisher József Molnár, whose journal *Új Látóhatár* is still the main forum of Hungarian populism; but a populism that is heavily tinged both by humanitarianism, as well as by Western liberalism.

In the last two chapters, Borbándi deals with the temporary rebirth of Hungarian populism during and after the Revolution of 1956 (e.g., the Petőfi Party), and then with the final assessment of the overall achievements and failures of this movement. In his final chapter he also tries to

assess the current and prospective influence of populism in Hungarian intellectual and social developments. With respect to the movement's past, Borbándi found that — while less than fully successful as a political movement — populism was quite successful as an intellectual force. It permeated and still permeates much of Hungarian thinking, and — so he claims — it will also serve as a source of inspiration for a number of generations in the future. Moreover — given favorable political developments — populism may again be put forth as a viable and desirable alternative (the “Third Road”) to capitalism, as well as communism.

Gyula Borbándi's *Der ungarische Populismus* is a major achievement in Hungarian historical scholarship. It is the first really comprehensive treatment of this significant movement in Hungarian history; and what is equally important — notwithstanding the author's personal involvement and convictions — it is an enviably detached and scholarly treatment. Thus some suggestions for improvement are made in the hope that the next edition of this work will be even more thorough and free from errors.

Not counting minor details and a few unavoidable factual mistakes, we feel that for a foreign audience some of the sections of this otherwise worthy volume are a bit too detailed, too encyclopedic in its coverage, particularly when it comes to the listing of the names of the participants in various manifestations of Hungarian populism. (As an example, not counting duplications, page 142 contains at least 25 names. Duplications raise this number to well over 50.) Although included in the name of fairness and completeness, some of these listings are not always essential; or if essential, they could have been placed into explanatory footnotes. Such a solution would have made Borbándi's book more readable, and would have also made it easier for the uninitiated to follow the flow of events. We also have the feeling that Borbándi's interpretations of Hungarian populism is rather generous in its inclusiveness. He tends to include persons, institutions and movements that normally would not come under the heading of “populism.” We grant that this more inclusive approach does have its merits, as opposed to a more exclusive approach of previous studies. But if inclusiveness was the author's intention — and perhaps even without it — he certainly should have included a brief treatment of the historian Elemér Mályusz (b. 1898) and of his well-known Ethnohistory School (*népiségtörténeti iskola*), which had close intellectual links, as well as a number of direct connections with the populist movement in interwar Hungary.⁵ In point of fact, Mályusz's comprehensive work on the nature and needs of Hungarian historical studies (*A magyar történettudomány*, 1942)⁶

appeared in the series (“Bólyai Könyvek” — “Bólyai Books”) that Borbándi listed as one of the important monographic series of the populist movement (p. 148). But above and beyond this fact, Mályusz’s Ethnohistory School — contrary to Gyula Szekfű’s more universal, subjective and also more influential *Geistesgeschichte* School⁷ — did in fact place considerable emphasis on the *people*, as opposed to the *state*, and also sought to find the native roots of Hungarian cultural, intellectual and social evolution, with considerable attention to the creativity of the “Magyar folk spirit” — very much in line with some of the ideas of the Hungarian populists.

In addition to the role of Elemér Mályusz and of Hungarian ethno-history, Borbándi also might have mentioned the role of István Gál (b. 1911), the spiritual father of “New Humanism,” and the founding editor of this movement’s journal, the *Apollo* (1935–1939).⁸ Gál’s role was all the more important as, in addition to popularizing the populists in non-populist circles, he also tried to serve as a link between the populists and the urbanists in the spirit of the new humanist orientation that he fathered in that age of growing intolerance.

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Emmerich András’s *The Rise and Development in Hungary of the So-Called “Popular [sic, Populist] Movement” (1920–1956)* — which appeared simultaneously in German and English editions — is a shorter and less comprehensive work than Borbándi’s, but it too has its special merits.⁹ Although covering basically the same territory as Borbándi, András’s approach is different; this stems largely from the fact that he is a sociologist and not a historian. The result is that his work is often more analytical than descriptive. This is particularly evident in the initial three chapters, where András renders a vivid, and often remarkably frank view of Hungary’s political, social and economic development in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and of the resulting “feudal-capitalistic” social system that characterized not only Hungary, but also much of East Central Europe. Thus, whereas in Western Europe the struggle between feudalism and capitalism (economic liberalism) ended in the latter’s victory, and resulted in the evolution of a type of society that became responsive to the economic and cultural needs of the masses, in East Central Europe this did not come about. Here, the clash between feudalism and capitalism — which was considerably delayed — did not produce a clear-cut victory for either side. Instead it produced a hybrid society that was heavily burdened with the remnants of feudalism

right up to the end of World War II. This was equally true for Hungary, where social and economic differences among the various population strata were not only great, but were virtually fossilized and embedded into sacrosanct values inherited from the past. In this society, where one's position was usually connected with one's birth, lineage, as well as hereditary and non-hereditary titles, social mobility was rare and difficult. And even when becoming more common — such as during the turbulent 1930s — this mobility was largely a one-way street. This meant that unless one was willing to accept the tenuous position of the literary intelligentsia on the peripheries of “society” proper, the newcomer or *homo novus* was obliged to acclimatize to the mentality and way of life of his new social class. Thus, instead of injecting fresh spirit into his new social milieu, such a newcomer merely swelled the ranks of those who perpetuated this archaic social system. And while the various youthful reformers — both of the populist and non-populist variety — managed to make a few dents in this archaic façade of interwar Hungary's “neo-Baroque” society, not until after World War II was it swept away, along with every other aspect of the traditional world.

András's portrayal of this archaic society — although based largely on the works of interwar historians, sociologists and populist authors — is both revealing and convincing. Perhaps he should have made a greater effort to study and to use also some of the more recent (mostly Marxist) works on this topic and period — as did Borbándi. But not even greater reliance on more recent scholarly literature would have changed the general picture considerably.

András's coverage of the Hungarian populist movement (which, unfortunately, is always mis-translated as the “popular movement”) is quite good, but much more traditional than Borbándi's — at least in the sense that the former sticks to the discussion of the generally accepted populists and populist institutions, and does not try to deal with persons whose populist interests were only peripheral. Even so — in our view — András too should have paid some attention to Elemér Mályusz's Hungarian Ethnohistory School, which was the only orientation in Hungarian historiography that concentrated primarily on the people and on the various history-shaping manifestations of the folk culture.

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These observations notwithstanding, both Borbándi's and András's works can be regarded as major scholarly studies which will undoubtedly serve as handbooks of the Hungarian populist movement for

some time. They are works that deserve the attention and respect of the scholarly world, and should secure for the authors well-deserved scholarly recognition.

Both works are supplemented by useful biographical sketches and bibliographies, but in Borbándi's work both of these are more extensive. Moreover, Borbándi's work also contains an annotated list of populist and populist-oriented newspapers and periodicals, as well as an excellent name index. It is also beautifully printed — as are all books published by Aurora of Munich.

Unfortunately this is not true for András's book, which is typed. It also has an unusual chaptering system, which makes it more difficult to follow. Nor is its bibliography arranged alphabetically, again posing problems for someone searching for a specific work. The translation, however, which generally (but not consistently) follows the American usage, is quite good. It is regrettable that the most important word in this volume — "populist" — was mis-translated as "popular."

NOTES

1. Some of the relevant dissertations include: Karen Brockmann, *Populist Literature in Hungary*. Columbia University, 1966; Charles G. Gati, *The Populist Current in Hungarian Politics, 1935-1944*. Indiana University, 1965; Marian A. Low, *László Németh: A Study in Hungarian Populism*. Harvard University, 1966; and Asher Cohen, *Le populisme hongroise avant la deuxième guerre mondiale*. University of Paris, 1973.
2. Examples of recent monographs dealing with aspects of the populist movement include: István Tóth, *A Nemzeti Parasztpárt története, 1944-1948* [The History of the National Peasant Party, 1944-1948]. Budapest, 1972; and Gábor Tánczos, editor-in-chief, *Népi kollégisták útja, 1939-1971* [The Path of the People's Collegians]. Budapest, 1977. Short summaries of the populist movement can also be found in the two representative Marxist syntheses, dealing respectively with the literary and the historical aspects of this question: *A magyar irodalom története* [The History of Hungarian Literature], editor-in-chief István Sótér, 6 vols. Budapest, 1964-1966, vol. VI, pp. 290-311, 646-691; and *Magyarország története, 1918-1945* [History of Hungary, 1918-1945], editor-in-chief György Ránki. Budapest, 1976, pp. 839-846. The latter work is the first published volume of a projected ten-volume history of Hungary.
3. The *Új Látóhatár* [New Horizon], which is not only a populist, but also the most highly regarded Hungarian language journal in the West, was founded in 1950 under the title of *Látóhatár* [Horizon]. After a series of changes in its title, it assumed its present title in 1958. Cf. *Repertorium Új Látóhatár, 1950-1975* [The New Horizon Index]. Munich, 1976.

4. The so-called "Jewish Question" has generally not been discussed or treated in Hungary since 1948 when István Bibó wrote his searching essay that tried to discuss this question in a warm human tone. Cf. Bibó's study in his *Harmadik út* [The Third Road]. London, 1960. The ice remained unbroken until recently when György Száraz came forth with his interesting and sensitive study, *Egy előítélet nyomában* [In the Path of a Prejudice]. Budapest, 1976, which created quite a stir. See also George Bárány's "Magyar Jew or Jewish Magyar?" *Canadian-American Slavic Studies*, vol. 8 (1974), 1 44; and S. B. Vardy, "The Origins of Jewish Emancipation in Hungary," *Ungarn-Jahrbuch* (Munich), vol. 8 (1977), 137-166, which has an extensive bibliography on this question.
5. On Elemér Mályusz and the Hungarian Ethnohistory School see Steven Bela Vardy, *Modern Hungarian Historiography*. Boulder and New York, 1976, pp. 102-120; and *Album Elemér Mályusz. Studies Presented to the International Commission for the History of Representative and Parliamentary Institutions*. Brussels, 1976, pp. ix-xxiii.
6. Elemér Mályusz, *A magyar történettudomány* [Hungarian Historical Sciences]. Budapest, 1942.
7. On Szekfű and the *Geistesgeschichte* School see Vardy, *Modern Hungarian Historiography*, pp. 62 101; and *idem*, *Hungarian Historiography and the Geistesgeschichte School*. Cleveland, 1974.
8. On Gál and the *Apollo* see Jaroslava Pašiaková, "Apollo," in *Tanulmányok a csehszlovák-magyar irodalmi kapcsolatok köréből* [Studies in the Area of Czechoslovak-Hungarian Literary Relations]. Budapest, 1965, pp. 439 450; and Steven Bela Vardy, "The Development of East European Historical Studies in Hungary Prior to 1945," *Balkan Studies* (Thessaloniki), vol. 18, no. 1 (1977), 51 90.
9. The German version of András's work is entitled: *Entstehung und Entwicklung der sogenannten Völkischen Bewegung in Ungarn, 1920-1956*. Vienna, 1974.

Fermentation and Ossification in Hungarian International Law

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Nemzetközi Jog [International Law]. By György Haraszti, Géza Herczegh and Károly Nagy. Budapest: Tankönyvkiadó, 1976. Pp. 491.

Political events in the seventies show that international conflicts have been increasing; nevertheless, growing global inter-dependence and expanding international intercourse have had a vitalizing effect upon international law in general. The Soviet Bloc is no exception, and the recently published volume is an expression of this growing interest in international law in Hungary. The new university textbook, written by the three leading professors in the field,¹ is the second edition of a work published by the same authors in 1971.² Even though there are no major structural differences between the two editions, the present work enlarges on some important topics, reorganizes some other parts successfully, and incorporates the most current material.³

The authors cover the traditional areas of international law and present the material with a double objective: the book is written both as a textbook as well as a handbook for those who have a practical interest in the discipline.⁴ The nature and characteristics of international law are discussed exclusively on a Marxist theoretical basis. However, in the historical part the political approach is somewhat reduced; for example, the "imperialist" and "capitalist" phases were combined and some Lenin quotations were omitted. In the area of inter-state cooperation, emulating Soviet doctrine, the authors stress the legal nature of international cooperation, invoking especially Articles 1(3) and 55 of the United Nations Charter and the 1970 General Assembly resolution regarding friendly relations among states.⁵ According to the latter, cooperation between states must be carried out without discrimination, "irrespective of the differences in their political, economic and social systems" (Ch. III, pp. 93-94). In sharp contrast to this position and the concept of