

BOOK REVIEWS

East Central European Perceptions of Early America. Edited by Béla K. Király and George Barany. Lisse: The Peter de Ridder Press, 1977. Pp. 144.

Since little scholarly attention has been paid in America so far to the East Central European image of the early United States, volume five of the Brooklyn College series: *Studies on Society in Change*, is a most welcome enterprise. It consists of six essays: one on Austria, one on Bohemia, two on Hungary and two on Poland, with a preface, an introduction and a concluding article. The present review will concentrate on the two essays dealing with Hungary: Alfred A. Reisch's "Sándor Bölöni Farkas's Reflections on American Political and Social Institutions" and Béla K. Király's "Béla Széchenyi's American Tour."

The first choice, that of Bölöni's *Utazás Észak-Amerikában*, is an obvious one; the Transylvanian wrote the first Hungarian travelogue ever on the United States. What Reisch does not mention is an equally important fact, namely that published in 1834, Bölöni's work preceded by one year Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*. Even its Hungarian translation by Gábor Fábán came out earlier than the second Hungarian travelogue, Ágoston Haraszthy's in 1844. In consequence, Bölöni's is the only Hungarian account of the young republic unaffected by the Frenchman's perceptive remarks. The second choice, Béla Széchenyi's *Amerikai útam*, 1863, is less obvious. Following Bölöni's and Haraszthy's, three travelogues appeared on the U.S. before 1863, two more with chapters on North America and two others belong to the same period though they were published later; some of these books are outstanding. Evidently, Király was prompted in his choice by the fact that Béla Széchenyi belonged to one of the most distinguished and worthiest aristocratic families in Hungary. His tour in America realized a dream that had been denied by Metternich to his father, István Széchenyi, who had so ardently wished to see "das werdende Land."

The radically different approach and emphasis in the two essays contribute an added interest to the whole volume. Király examines Széchenyi's travelogue in the Hungarian historical context, while Reisch's

standpoint is that of self-critical, post-Vietnam War, post-Watergate America. In his learned presentation, Reisch provides a valuable though incomplete bibliography of his author. He calls him Farkas but the author is better known in Hungary as Bölöni, occasionally Bölöni Farkas. Hungarian names can present almost insolvable problems when it comes to a correct English version. Bölöni Farkas is a kind of multiple surname; Farkas is the real surname and Bölöni merely indicates the place where the family came from. However, similarly to other famous Hungarians, like the poet Csokonai (Mihály Vitéz), he came to be known by that name designating a geographical location. Indeed, in the concluding essay of the volume: "The Appeal and the Echo," George Barany correctly refers to him as Bölöni or Bölöni Farkas.

Reisch describes Bölöni's work as "hardly a balanced evaluation of Jacksonian America." That this "Columbus of Democracy," as a biographer so perceptively pointed to his role in Hungarian history, emphasized the positive sides (liberty, equality, free press, education, progress, free enterprise, etc.) is absolutely true, but he did not ignore the negative qualities (slavery, emergence of a moneyed aristocracy) either. If the positive side comes out stronger, this enthusiasm is not due to "youthful Romanticism," but is a consequence of a historical situation. Bölöni desperately needed to find a model; he accomplished a mission. Travelogues in Hungary of the 1830s and 1840s were a kind of political literature trying to awaken the feudal, backward, apathetic country. Indeed, in the opinion of István Széchenyi, the great promoter of progress in Hungary, Bölöni's book had the shattering effect of "thunder and lightning," and in Széchenyi's view no one ever has honored Hungary "with a more useful and more beautiful present." That Bölöni, "like many Americans, . . . believed the U.S. was a pioneer forging a new era for mankind," is a correct assessment. But then most Europeans of the time considered America "the Utopia of the Common Man." As Martin Lipset so accurately stated in his preface to Harriet Martineau's *Society in America*, "the Europeans came to America from societies that retained strong elements of a feudal caste-ridden past." For Hungarians this was even more true. Also, with all their shortcomings, American institutions objectively constituted an attractive alternative to most Europeans. By applying in his essay the point of view of the soul-searching, frustrated, post-Vietnam war, post-Watergate American atmosphere Reisch perfectly matches the spirit of Bölöni's book, which is equally representative of a historical atmosphere.

Király's analysis of Béla Széchenyi's travelogue, on the other hand,

focuses on the relevance of those early travelogues in the old country. As Tocqueville said: "Though I seldom mention France, I do not write a page without thinking of her." Széchenyi too observed everything in America with Hungary in mind. As Király so emphatically points out, the main purpose of his book was "to educate the Hungarians," and thus, to promote progress in all fields of life. In consequence, as Király says, his style had to be "didactic," giving detailed background information before analyzing issues.

When Széchenyi visited, the Civil War was already on. Thus, the slavery issue was much more prominent than in Bölöni's days. Király points out correctly how much Széchenyi blamed the black man's "primitiveness" on the lack of education and how realistic he was in his assessment of the black man's treatment in the North. Nor does Király ignore the fact that Széchenyi showed a great deal of understanding for the Secessionists. Indeed, he was the only Hungarian travelogue-writer to advocate the Southern case out of economic fairness to the white slave-owners. He was trying to strike a just balance. Király is right in claiming that in Széchenyi's view "the South is obliged to proclaim abolition for the sake of mankind." Király also mentions that Széchenyi believed the slave-owners should be compensated. The Hungarian aristocrat certainly tried to weigh carefully the two sides, and Király wants to do justice to this fact. However, occasionally his subtle paraphrase, like, "the emancipation of four million slaves would then ruin the South's six million whites," almost changes Széchenyi's argument. The Hungarian put it in much more aggressive terms: "It is possible to state *à la* Lincoln that there is an end to slavery, but I ask whether anyone has the right to free about four million blacks and ruin by that six million whites?"

Throughout his presentation, Király successfully keeps the emphasis on the Hungary-oriented character of the early travelogues. In consequence, his approach differs radically from Reisch's; indeed, the two essays, following each other in the same volume, successfully complement each other. They demonstrate most vividly how much a writer's emphasis, his priorities influence his presentation of a historical document.

The American Non-Policy Towards Eastern Europe 1943-1947. By Geir Lundestad. Tromsø: Universitetsforlaget, 1978. Pp. 654. Distributed in the United States and Canada by Columbia University Press. \$18.00 paper.

This large book was inspired by the author's desire to probe theories on the origin of the cold war in the context of American policy toward Eastern Europe. The structure of the volume is complicated. After an introductory chapter, Part One discusses American universalism toward Eastern Europe. Part Two examines American policy toward Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Rumania, Bulgaria, Finland, and the Baltic States. A chapter compares policies toward the various East European countries. Another examines the peace treaties with the Danubian Axis satellites, and another scrutinizes the American attitude toward plans for federation in Eastern Europe. Part Three raises the question: what could and what did the United States do against Soviet domination in Eastern Europe? Three possible levers are considered — the atomic bomb, the American conventional military strength, and the power of the immense American economy. An appendix summarizes Soviet policy toward Eastern Europe. The notes, about 150 pages of them, show a Sisyphean research in American archives, manuscript collections and libraries. The result is a very useful book for students of East European affairs.

Throughout the narrative Lundestad emphasized that there was no consistent United States policy toward Eastern Europe. But consistency is not always a virtue or even possible in foreign policy. Eastern Europe — a low priority area on the scale of American interests — had to yield to more important interests, as the author explains on several occasions.

In the opinion of this reviewer the main reason for a contradictory and confused American policy toward Eastern Europe was the lack of a high-level policy-making organ in Washington. A first step was made in this direction only in 1944 with establishment of the State-War-Navy Coordinating Committee. But President Roosevelt remained his own secretary of state throughout the war and made the important foreign policy decisions, sometimes even without informing the Department of State, which played a subdued role during his administration. Special emissaries and representatives of wartime agencies appeared in foreign countries and few people knew who was doing what, when, where, how and why in foreign affairs. The tons of planning and briefing papers available now in official publications, archives, and memoirs are to a large extent expressions of individual or group suggestions and opinions