

Rolling Transition and the Role of Intellectuals: The Case of Hungary, by András Bozóki, Budapest, Vienna and New York, Central European Press, 2022, \$115.00, £82.00, €97.00 (hbk), 618 pp., ISBN: 978-9633864784.

This is a book about intellectuals in late twentieth-century Hungary. Although not strictly a work of intellectual history, it is very much of interest to intellectual historians of the Soviet and post-Soviet eras. András Bozóki, professor of Political Science at Central European University, has been researching this topic for a long time. Continuing the focus of his previous work, *Rolling Transition* examines the democratic transition in post-Soviet Hungary from a social history perspective. As a young intellectual, the author himself was involved in the events he analyses in this book, although, somewhat strangely, we learn nothing about this from the book itself. But more on this later.

In one of his earlier works, Bozóki called the period from the early 1980s to the early 1990s the 'long decade of intellectuals', suggesting that this social group played a special role in the regime change in Hungary. In the present volume, the period of transition is understood even more broadly: the events analysed range from 1977 to 1994. This time-frame is by no means arbitrary, although it is obviously debatable. Nevertheless, the length of the transition period is an important part of the thesis suggested in the book's title: the rolling transition.

Bozóki argues that the Hungarian regime change was special because of the prominent role of intellectuals. As with most analyses of regime change in Eastern Europe, he sees the major parallel for Hungary in Poland. The main difference, however, between the Hungarian and the Polish cases is that a massive workers' movement, Solidarity, provided a social embedding for opposition activity in Poland, whereas Hungary did not experience anything similar during the socialist era.

Rolling Transition approaches its subject, by Bozóki's own admission, in the tradition of Weberian interpretative sociology. Before the historical analysis begins, we are given a compulsory (and lengthy) chapter on the theory of intellectuals, from Antonio Gramsci to Zygmunt Bauman. The theoretical introduction is followed by an analytical chapter on the Kádár regime, named after János Kádár, General Secretary of the Hungarian socialist Worker's Party for 32 years (1956-1988). Bozóki shows that the significant oppositional participation of Hungarian intellectuals, discussed in the following chapters, did not come out of the blue. Its origin lies precisely in the relatively great freedom of the Kádár regime within the socialist bloc. Bozóki aptly uses the term 'selective repression' to describe the measures of the regime. This informative chapter helps us to understand the mechanisms of any soft dictatorship's exercise of power to manage the intelligentsia: informal control, the mix of censorship and self-censorship and the co-optation of a large part of the intelligentsia into the system through the famous three P's (Promote, Permit, Prohibit).

In Chapter 3 Bozóki presents the 'period of dissent' through a content analysis of Samizdat newspapers. These illegally published newspapers were the media of the so-called democratic opposition (in fact, this was the only active opposition group before the mid-1980s). Within their pages, opposition thinkers sought to offer an alternative to the official political discourse. Samizdat newspapers dealt with taboo subjects such as churches and minorities, anti-politics and human rights. In a few years, the ideologues of the democratic opposition went from neo-Marxism to promoting the ideas of liberalism and civil society.

In the following chapters of the book, events accelerate. The exciting second half of the 1980s is the 'age of circles', with the emergence of opposition organisations (which later become the regime-changing parties). The reformist wing of the state party (discussing a change of the political model and not of the regime) follows the Polish path by starting round-table discussions with these organisations. The roundtable negotiations are the point, or rather, the series of events, where regime-changing elites and intellectual elites can be treated as essentially synonymous groups. Literally everyone who counts

is present here: the negotiating delegations of the opposition soon formed the elite of the regime-changing parties.

The roundtable negotiations have certainly never been analysed in such detail in English. The participants in this 'explicit bargaining' (Elster) are a well-defined group of about 500 people. Most of them are middle-aged men, and, in the ranks of Fidesz, also some university students (yes, young Viktor Orbán as well). It was also here that József Antall, the first freely elected prime minister, became known. In some footnotes of this chapter, the author informs the most attentive readers that he was also present at the famous table among the negotiators of the Fidesz and later became a minister in the first Gyurcsány government.

Then a new chapter begins, both in the book and in Hungarian history. After the first free elections, intellectuals suddenly find themselves in the parliament. Of course, this new situation was not to everyone's taste. Some became professional politicians, while others fast retreated from politics, realising, that it is not for them. As it is cited from one of the best-known public intellectuals: "I'm not the kind of man who can spend his time sitting in committee meetings. I can hardly tolerate boredom - and yet the whole political life is one gigantic meeting." (p. 416.) A rather relatable mind-set.

The final chapter of the book attempts to quantify the role of intellectuals in the democratic transition. It identifies the main actors and events, distinguishing between the periods of dissent, open network building, roundtable negotiations, parliamentary politics, and new pro-democracy initiatives. Each of these periods is characterised by a different kind of intellectual activity.

Bozóki speaks of a rolling transition based on the overlapping personal connections of those involved in opposition activities in different periods: intellectuals from different eras passed the baton to each other, ensuring the long-term success of the opposition. Between 1977 and 1994, about 2000 participants can be identified in open opposition activities (petitions, samizdat publications, later the organisation of opposition meetings, round tables), 90 % of whom can be counted as intellectuals. This figure includes the signatories of the Democratic Charter after the regime change, although many of them were new to opposition activity - understandably so since they no longer had to fear retaliation as they did in the Kádár regime.

Based on Bozóki's calculations, it is also possible to draw up a top list of opposition activism. At the top of the imaginary podium is the philosopher János Kis, a prominent figure of the democratic opposition (interestingly, together with another top-listed figure, Bálint Magyar, both of whom are now Bozóki's fellow professors at the Central European University, driven out of Hungary by the Orbán government). This quantitative chapter also presents typical life histories and basic statistics (gender, age and occupation), thus expanding our knowledge of the oppositional intelligentsia as a social group.

Bozóki thus argues that the rotation of actors can be the secret of a successful transition. On this basis, he creates the convincing concept of rolling transition: 'incremental, nonviolent, elite driven political transformation which is based on the rotation of agency and it results in a new regime.' (p. 547)

Finally, some critical remarks. In the quantifying chapter, Granovetter's concept of weak ties is touched upon. It is a missed opportunity that the networks of opposition intellectuals were not mapped out, even though otherwise networking was a very important concept in the book. Networks could have been used as a basis for explaining the whole story. Maybe someday someone (possibly the author himself) will use historical network analysis to process this data in a different way.

My other criticism concerns the question of the positionality of the researcher. Of course I can only speculate why András Bozóki does not reflect at all on his own role in the events he describes in his book. It is hard to imagine that such a renowned social scientist would not recognise the methodological significance of his own position in both his choice of subject and his approach. Perhaps it has to do with a misinterpreted Weberian value-free conception of science? Or is it just an exaggeration of an allegedly

objective writing style? Bozóki does not tell us. This aside, the thoroughness of the work done is praiseworthy. The concept of rolling transition is theoretically and empirically well-founded, the details are fascinating to read. It remains to be seen whether a theory based on this Hungarian case has more general relevance.

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