1848–1849 IN HUNGARY

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There can be no doubt that the Hungarian Revolution of 1848 and the subsequent war of independence belong to the events that significantly contributed to the development of modern Hungarian historical consciousness. Decisive alternatives emerged during this critical period: national sovereignty *versus* development under foreign power, or the cultivation of friendly compromises reached through negotiations *versus* violent confrontations. The patterns of thinking associated with these choices also imposed their influence on the interpretations of other recent historic turning points such as the events of 1956.

For a better understanding of what happened to Hungary during the years 1848–1849 we need to divide the events into three distinct but interconnected spheres. First, we need to consider the discussions between the spokesmen of the last Hungarian feudal assembly, the Diet of 1847–1848, and the leaders connected to the court of Emperor Ferdinand I (as King of Hungary: Ferdinand V) (1835–48) in Vienna. These discussions were followed by the negotiations on the formation and recognition of an independent and responsible Hungarian government in 1848. Second, we have to delineate the revolutionary mass movement organised by leftist and radical intellectuals in Pest on March 15, 1848. Third, we need to examine the civil war, which began in autumn 1848, between the National Guard army of the Hungarian government, the Austrian troops, and the insurgents of the non-Magyar nationalities.

Due to the expansion of the Turkish Empire and to the rise of the House Habsburg, the kingdom of Hungary, one of the leading states in East-Central Europe during the late Middle Ages, had lost its independence during the sixteenth century. From this time on the lands of the Hungarian crown became parts of the realm of the Austrian Habsburg dynasty. The upper stratum of the population, the Hungarian landed-estate-owner nobles, were, however, able to preserve a considerable portion of their rights in local administration and retained the opportunity to assert their privileges and influence in the government of the realm at the diets. From the 1830s, during the so-called Reform Period, these diets contributed deci-

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sively to the abolishment of feudal institutions and took the initial steps toward democratisation and modernisation.

One of the most important demands of these diets was to make Hungarian the official language of the kingdom. This was satisfied at the diet of 1843–44. Act II, 1844 made Hungarian, instead of Latin, the official language in all branches of administration.

The aspirations of political nationalism were preceded or accompanied among the Hungarians, as well as among other nations in East-Central Europe, during the first half of the nineteenth century by phenomena of cultural nationalism. During that period the activities of such writers as György Bessenyei (1747–1811), Ferenc Kazinczy (1759–1831), József Kármán (1769–95), Ferenc Kölcsey (1790–1838), and Mihály Vörösmarty (1800–55) began a new era for literature in which patriotic themes were rendered by original artistic texts, written in the vernacular. Institutions of Hungarian literature were established as well, bringing into existence the foci of cultural memory. The Hungarian National Museum and Hungarian National Library opened in early 1848, based on a generous gift from Count Ferenc Széchényi's (1754–1820) private collection in 1802. The establishment of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences was initiated in 1825 by his son Count István Széchenyi (1791–1860). Furthermore, the first scientific and literary periodicals were also launched at that time. These included: *Uránia* (1794–95), *Tudományos Gyűjtemény* [Scholarly Collection] (1817–41), *Aurora* (1822–37), and *Athenaeum* (1837–43). The harbinger of modern political journalism in Hungary, Lajos Kossuth's (1802-94) *Pesti Hirlap* [Pest News] (1841–49) began in January 1841. The members of the pre-March [1848] generation, working in these institutions, publishing in these newsletters, undertook the task of transforming and modernising Hungary in 1848. Spurring the political revival, Count István Széchenyi in his epoch marking studies at the beginning of the Reform Period: *Hitel* (Credit, 1830), *Világ* (Light, 1831), *Stadium* (Stage, 1833) "put into words the ideas already circulating among many of his contemporaries" (Niederhauser 205). Credit, in Széchenyi's idiom, meant first of all an economic modernisation program in opposition to the institution of the ancient law of family entail, which constituted a powerful obstacle to credit operations in Hungary and made "the sale, and even the mortgaging, of farms [...] virtually impossible" (Kosáry, *History* 192). But "credit" also had a wider sense; it referred to trust in Hungary's better fortunes. "Many think," so says the very last sentence of Széchenyi's work, "that Hungary is a thing of the past; I like to believe its greatest achievements lie in the future" (Kosáry, *History* 193).

Another important political program was adumbrated by centralists such as Baron József Eötvös (1813–71). In his important study *Reform* (1847) Eötvös made use of the contributions of his allies – above all László Szalay's (1813–64) and Ágoston Trefort's (1817–88) – and elaborated a modernisation project for

Hungary. The principal political requirements of this project included suppressing the municipal system of feudal counties and establishing a government with a responsible ministry.

The pace of the events that led to the democratic transformation speeded up during the first days of March 1848. Having received in Bratislava [Pozsony/Pressburg], where the Diet was convened, the news on French February Revolution, Kossuth, the leader of the Hungarian liberals, delineated the demands of many Hungarians in an address on March 3rd. Kossuth asked for "a separate and independent financial board for Hungary." He called for a change in Austria, too, reminding his audience that "the constitutional future of our nation will not be secure, till the King is surrounded by constitutional forms in all the relations of his government" (Headley 64). Some historians hold that this speech was not so much a systematic expounding of his political views, but rather an example of "Kossuth's political genius" that "rose to the occasion," "[s]ensing in a flash the relevance to the situation of the centralists' demand (which he had previously not taken very seriously) for a responsible government for Hungary" (Macartney 155).

On March 13, 1848 revolution broke out in the imperial capital of Vienna. Prominent figures of autocratic policy, including Chancellor Prince Metternich (1773–1859) and others, were dismissed. Ferdinand introduced freedom of the press, allowed the arming of the people, and promised to issue a constitution. (The western part of the empire duly obtained a constitution on April 25, 1848.) The Viennese revolution suddenly leapfrogged the events in Bratislava, and under these circumstances, all further discussions about the Hungarians' claims and demands appeared superfluous. A delegation under the leadership of Kossuth and Palatine Prince Stephen (1817–67) embarked for Vienna to gain acceptance of the Hungarian claims and to induce the ruler to appoint a responsible Hungarian government. Soon the delegation returned with good news. On March 17 Ferdinand consented to appoint Count Lajos Batthyány (1806–49) Prime Minister, and Batthyány formed his government with the most prominent liberal figures of Hungary. These included, among others: Count István Széchenyi as Minister of Communication and of Public Works, Kossuth as Minister of Finance, Baron Eötvös as Minister of Education and Religion, and Ferenc Deák (1803–76) as Minister of Justice.

The Diet of 1847–1848 therefore concluded its legislative work in the enthusiastic atmosphere of the trans-European revolutions. The April Laws, which constitute a charter of the breakthrough to modern Hungary, were approved by Ferdinand on April 11, 1848.

The literary movements of the 1840s formed by another intellectual group – more radical than that of bourgeois liberal nobility – played a leading role in the revolutionary events in Pest. A great many of the adherents of this "March Youth" – the term "comes from a poem of Sándor Petőfi (1823–49) with the same title"

(Kalla 93) – belonged to a circle, which met regularly in the Pilvax Café. The group united the editorial staff of several literary papers (e.g., the *Pesti Divatlap* [Pest Vogue]) and chose as its spiritual father Mihály Vörösmarty from the older generation. Members of this group included, for instance, Petőfi, Mór Jókai (1825–1904), Dániel Irínyi (1822–92), and József Irányi (1822–59).

The radical youth in the Pilvax' "Opposition Circle" became more and more discontented with the legislative work of the *Status et Ordines* and summed up its claims in twelve points. These demands went beyond reform and assumed an "openly revolutionary character" (Deme 17). According to the final formulation of József Irínyi, the young radicals desired the following:

1. Freedom of the press and the abolition of censorship.
2. Responsible government in Pest.
3. Annual meetings of the parliament in Pest.
4. Equality before the law in civil and religious matters.
5. A national guard.
6. Equality of taxation.
7. Abolition of the feudal burdens.
8. Jury system on the basis of representation and equality.
9. A national bank.
10. The armed forces should swear allegiance to the constitution; and our Hungarian soldiers should not be removed from our soil.
11. Political prisoners should be freed.
12. Union with Transylvania. (Deme 16–7)

After the arrival of the news about the Viennese Revolution in Pest, on March 15 the time was ripe for the young radicals to make their demands. A mass demonstration, organised by the "March Youth," hoped to wring during that same afternoon some concessions from the Viceroyalty Council, the head of the domestic administration in Hungary. The most important demand was the proclamation of liberty of the press. True, during the morning, a *de facto* liberty of the press has already been attained by the seizing a printing press by the revolutionary mob and the printing of the "Twelve Points" as well as Sándor Petőfi's *Nemzeti dal* [National Song].

During the following months the voices of the heroes of the "Great Day" were conveyed through the newspaper *Marczius Tizenötödike* (March Fifteenth) "which bore the date of the Pest revolution as its symbolic name" (Kosáry, *Press* 85). Furthermore, the parliamentary opposition of the new Hungarian government was recruited from the ranks of the young radicals.

Despite being in the numerical minority and in relative isolation, the "March Youth" filled indeed a very important social role in the Hungarian Revolution, especially because they "should be considered [...] the intellectual vanguard of the

strata intent on bettering themselves – the petite bourgeoisie in the making" (Kosáry, *Press* 27). In addition, it is also true that "[t]he story of March 15 became a national legend in Hungary; to this day the average Hungarian thinks of the events of this day when he thinks of 1848" (Deme 21).

Hungary's first representative Parliament convened in Pest on July 5, 1848. According to a relatively liberal franchise law, one quarter of the male population over twenty years of age voted for the 377 contested seats in the House of Representatives. The liberal wing of the land-owning gentry retained its political predominance with an overwhelming majority – only about thirty to thirty-five seats were allotted to the opposition with its radical-leftist views.

The House passed one of its first resolutions in favour of strengthening the independent Magyar army. Kossuth, as Minister of Finance, demanded of the House in a long speech on July 11, 1848, a masterpiece of traditional Hungarian rhetoric, "200,000 soldiers, and the necessary pecuniary grants" (Headley 103). Effective recruiting began in September.

Although during the summer of 1848 the Hungarian government and the legislative body found themselves in a rather awkward situation vis-à-vis the imperial court at Vienna, the members were well aware of the firm legitimacy of the government's work. This situation changed suddenly with the issuing of the Austrian Ministry Paper of August 27, 1848, which declared that the activities and the very existence of the independent Hungarian ministries of finance and war were illegitimate.

In consequence, during the autumn of 1848 the political process for precipitating an armed confrontation between the troops of the Hungarian government and the army of the Austrian imperial court accelerated. On September 11 Baron Josip Jellačić (1801–59), Governor of Croatia and supporter of the policy of Vienna, crossed the river Drava (Dráva/Drau) in southern Hungary and mounted an offensive in the direction of the Pest. Two weeks later, after his arrival in Pest, Count Ferenc Lamberg (1791–1848), appointed by the emperor to be commander-in-chief of the Hungarian armies, was assassinated in a crowd on the pontoon bridge over the Danube.

Unable to maintain the legal order sanctioned by the king in April, Prime Minister Batthyány resigned on October 2, and the executive power was transferred to the National Defence Committee. Kossuth, head of this board, became the country's supreme leader. On December 2, 1848 Ferdinand V abdicated and his nephew, the young Francis Joseph I (1848–1916) ascended the throne of the Emperor of Austria. The new monarch, whose hands were not bound by the April Laws, initiated the operations for the pacification of Hungary immediately.

During winter 1848–49 these military operations brought considerable successes for the armies of the emperor, when the Hungarian government and Parliament were forced on December 31, 1848 to move to Debrecen.

The promotion of the young and highly talented Artúr Görgey (1818–1916) to commander-in-chief of the Hungarian National Guard on March 31, 1849 resulted in a change in the fortunes of war. During the spring campaign the National Guard reconquered a great part of the land taken by the forces loyal to the Habsburgs (the reoccupation of Pest and Buda came on May 21, 1849). In the exuberance following the fortunate turn of events in the civil war, the Parliament decided to take a radical step toward independence. On April 14 the House declared the Habsburg dynasty deposed and elected Kossuth as Governing President. A new government was formed on May 2 under Prime Minister Bertalan Szemere (1812–69).

In this critical situation Emperor Francis Joseph I asked for help from Russia. Tsar Nicolas I (1825–55) proclaimed on May 9, 1849 his willingness to intervene in the conflict. The invasion of Hungary's territory began in the very same month, and the united Austro-Russian forces, enjoying a strong numerical superiority, piled success on top of success. The National Guard suffered a decisive defeat on August 9, 1849 at Timișoara [Temesvár/Temeschwar]. Kossuth and the government resigned, and Görgei in the possession of plenipotentiary power surrendered on August 13 at Șiria [Világos]. Soon Kossuth, with hundreds of army officers, fled to Turkey.

The aborted war of independence was followed by a heavy-handed revenge on the part of the Austrian authorities. Prime Minister Count Batthyány was executed in Pest on October 6, and the execution of thirteen generals of the Hungarian National Guard took place in Arad on the same day. In 1850 Hungary came under absolutist administration under the leadership of Minister of the Interior Alexander Bach (1813–93) who initiated strong restrictions on political and civil rights. In administration Transylvania, the Serb Voivodina, and the Temes Banat were decoupled, and Hungary's central territory was divided into five districts, "delimited to some extent according to nationality lines" (Kann and David 347). The five headquarters were at Budapest (Magyars), Bratislava (Slovaks), Košice [Kassa/Kaschau] (Slovaks and Ruthenians), Oradea [Nagyvárad/Grosswardein] (Rumanians), and Sopron [Ödenburg] (Germans).

The achievements of the spring of 1848 could not be completely revoked. The law on perpetual redemption of serfs was not, for instance, annulled. The socage writ of March 2, 1853 declares in the spirit of the April Laws that "the former serfs 'are granted full ownership and free disposal rights over the socage land they hold'" (Orosz 76). The sum of the indemnity paid to members of the landowner class by the new absolutist government as a result of the regulations in 1853 fell, however, far below planned levels. As a result the middle-nobility, which came to be compelled to choose civil professions, ended up being short-changed by the process of serf emancipation. This gave rise to the landed gentry middle class, a

predominant group of fin-de-siècle Hungarian society, "whose relatively modest means were quite disproportionate to their social prestige and national pride" (Kann I 110).

The nationality issue constituted a third main sphere of events in revolutionary Hungary. Reference has already been made to the fact that the forces of the Hungarian bourgeois government were tragically tied down by the management of ethnic conflicts with non-Magyar nationalities. These peoples, filled with enthusiastic optimism in the first weeks of the revolution, and united against the Old Order in the spirit of the slogan "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity" inherited from the French Revolution of 1789, soon realised that the Hungarian government was not ready to satisfy the political claims of the non-Magyar nationalities. Instead, the Hungarian elite regarded the new legal independence as an assertion of the Magyar nation's historical rights. It is no wonder then, that other peoples living in Hungary turned to the Austrian imperial court with their petitions. Moreover, their unaddressed grievances led to bloody interethnic confrontations.

The House of Representatives, holding its sessions during the summer of 1849 in Szeged [Szegedin/Segedin], had in the desperate military situation no other choice but to give on July 28 the non-Magyar nationalities far-reaching concessions concerning their cultural and administrative autonomy. The House declared in its resolution the right for the "free development of all nationalities living on the territory of Hungary" (Irányi and Chassin I 357). (Emancipation was given to Hungarian Jews as well.) Although "[t]he Hungarian government [...] announced it immediately and tried to utilise it both in its European propaganda and in the appeasement process" (Gergely 55), the Nationality Resolution was overshadowed by the fact that "as long as it did not consider the danger to be sufficiently serious, the Hungarian liberal leadership tried to avoid granting even minor concessions" (Spira 203).

All in all, "[w]ith the Russian intervention, the fate of the Magyar Revolution was sealed" (Kann I 126). Acts VIII and IX 1849 are, and remain, spectacular proof of the fact that ethnic reconciliation projects always come too late in East-Central Europe.

The Hungarian Revolution of 1848 and the ensuing war of independence in 1848–49 raised the crucial questions – political, social, and intellectual – in nineteenth-century Hungary, without being able to answer them, at least not in a reassuring manner. The dispute over constitutional law came to a half-century long rest with the Constitutional Settlement of 1867, the year of the foundation of Austria-Hungary's Dual Monarchy. A solution of social conflicts – in particular of interethnic conflicts – was made, however, impossible by the Hungarian elite's insistence on political supremacy and on the historical principle of Hungary's territorial integrity. The conflicts between Magyars and Slovaks, Serbs, Croats,

or Rumanians presented themselves during the second half of the century with an increasing intensity, contributing ultimately in a decisive way to the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy in 1918.

On an intellectual level, it was neither philosophy, nor history, but literature in Hungary that confronted the dilemmas of bourgeois society. This literature – lyric poetry above all – accompanied the events of 1848–49 as well, "producing an abundant military poetry not seen since the age of the war of independence at the turn of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries" (Hermann 339). The poetry of 1848–49 includes a rich variety of genres that range from pieces of trashy propaganda literature all the way to patriotic works by Hungary's very best poets – such as *Nemzetőr dal* [National Guardist's Song] by János Arany (1817–1882), and *Harci dal* [Battle Song] by Vörösmarty – to Petőfi's revolutionary-republican romanticism.

Literature also cherished the memory of 1848–49 and tried to draw lessons from the tragic events as well. One of the dominant patterns of this 1848 literature was its heroic-mythical immortalization, above all embodied in Mór Jókai's late romantic novel writing. Jókai, a member of the "March Youth," during his long life described the events of 1848–49 from ever newer and newer aspects, always obeying the rules of a mythology created by himself. It is partly due to these novels – the most outstanding of them is *A kőszívű ember fiai* [The Sons of the Stone-hearted Man] (1869) – that 1848–49 has an extraordinary reputation in Hungarian history. *The Sons of the Stone-hearted Man* delineates the most impressive moments of the revolutionary years with the instruments of a romantic epos: the alliance between revolutionaries in Pest and in Vienna; the adventurous desertion of Hungarian *hussar* troops from the emperor's army to join the national guard; or the scene of Buda castle's siege and liberation by the Magyars.

True, it would be an exaggeration to speak of a philosophy of history in the case of this novel. It remains, however, also true that Jókai, with an extreme idealisation of the title-role heroes' mother (Mrs. Baradlay) – assigning her some of the attributes of the Holy Virgin, *Patrona Hungariae* – is indeed able to connect 1848 with essential values and predilections of Hungarian history.

On the other hand, the representatives of the pre-March Hungarian liberal intelligentsia were also confronted with the memory of 1848. Thinkers who believed in a doctrinairian, French-style liberalism, were now to lose their illusions about man's ability to improve himself, and political institutions able to be improved by laws and philosophical doctrines. It was Baron József Eötvös who drew the consequences of 1848 with all their pessimistic implications in his *Einfluss der herrschenden Ideen des 19. Jahrhunderts auf den Staat* [Influence of the Prevailing Ideas of the 19th Century on the State] (1851–54); and it is also this disillusionment to which a magnificent dramatic poem of Hungarian literature – Imre Madách's (1823–64) *Az ember tragédiája* [The Tragedy of Man] (1861) is due.

A third distinguished writer of mid-century Hungarian literature, Baron Zsigmond Kemény (1814–75), contributed not only with both of his post-1848 essays, *Forradalom után* [After Revolution] (1850) and *Még egy szó a forradalom után* [One More Word after the Revolution] (1851) to understanding the sociopolitical factors that had led to the revolution, but also attempted to explore some deep-lying determinations of Hungarian history in his novels *A rajongók* [The Devotees] (1858) and *Zord idő* [Hard Times] (1862), which contain tragic stories set in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Hungary and Transylvania. Finally, the conflicts between old and new values, produced by great political changes, and the issues of a possible reconciliation are represented, with hints of an elegiac resignation, in the novel of the literary historian Pál Gyulai (1826–1909) *Egy régi udvarház utolsó gazdája* [The Last Master of an Old Mansion] (1857).

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