

Historians and the Nation: The Problem of Magyar National Awareness 1790—1836

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Only six decades separated the first Hungarian Reform Diet of 1790 and the Hungarian Revolution of 1848. Yet this relatively brief time span witnessed a remarkable transformation in Magyar national awareness. At the time of the Diet of 1790, one could not properly speak of Magyar nationalism in the modern sense of that word. The idea of "Nation" was a class-centered concept held by the predominantly Magyar Hungarian nobility; the vast majority of Magyars — about 95% — were not even legally members of the *natio Hungarica*. Under the impact of Romantic and nationalistic ideas from Western Europe, as well as economic and political pressures from Austria, Magyar national awareness began to manifest itself, particularly during the long and autocratic reign of *Francis I* (1792—1835). Impelled by these influences and pressures, the Magyar nobles, led by the landed gentry and a small group of liberal magnates, slowly changed their thinking and began to work toward national unity on the bases of ethnic principles and class equality. By the time of the Reform Diet of 1832—1836 these new patterns of thought had made significant progress among the Magyar upper classes. It is true that as of 1836 the Magyars had not yet been able to solve the prevailing social conflicts, nor to remove all the barriers to national solidarity. Nevertheless, without the steady progress of the preceding four decades, the Hungarian Revolution of 1848 — the first overt expression of modern integral Magyar nationalism — would not have been possible.

In view of the importance of this seminal transitional period in Magyar national development it is remarkable that the problem has not been investigated more thoroughly. Although the range and variety of the existing literature is vast, no scholar has been able to explain adequately how and why certain segments of the class-conscious Magyar nobility developed an awareness of the need for a universal Magyar national movement embracing all classes during the early part of the nineteenth century.

Historical studies on Magyar society of the period have all too often tended to be circumscribed by the social milieu and personal prejudices of the observers. Their works have centered, broadly speaking, on socio-economic and political relations of the Habsburgs, the Magyar nobility, and the Hungarian peasantry. Other works have dealt with the cultural aspects of Magyar and

Hungarian society at that time. These scholarly efforts have tended to obscure the fact that beneath the secular activities a profound change was occurring in the outlook of the Magyar nobility. By the end of the period they had not only parted company with the non-Magyar Hungarian aristocracy, but they were willing to concede — at least in principle — the equality of all members and segments of Magyar society.

Ferenc Kölcsey — author, poet, and gentry deputy from Szatmár County — was a well-intentioned observer and participant during the Reform Era. As an acquaintance of most of the prominent personalities of his day, he could not always evaluate the true motives of his own class, which was fond of posing as the defender of the Magyar peasantry against alleged Habsburg oppression. *Kölcsey* was deceived, for example, by the activities of the gentry at the 1825—1827 Diet, which engaged in a power struggle with the Habsburgs and only coincidentally benefited the peasantry. He was surprised when the peasants retained their traditional trust in the Habsburg dynasty. Eventually, however, *Kölcsey* recognized that members of his class were not as altruistic as he had believed and hoped, especially when his own County had him recalled for his liberal views¹).

Lajos Kossuth, at the time a fledgling political leader and observer during the early reform period, underwent similar fluctuations in his evaluation of the gentry. At the opening of the 1832—36 Diet, for example, *Kossuth* believed that the gentry sincerely desired reforms, and that the Vienna government plotted to sabotage these efforts by turning public opinion against them²). After only a few days, however, *Kossuth* became disillusioned when Deputy *Pál Nagy* delivered his reform-minded speech favouring commoners and most of his gentry colleagues turned against him. *Kossuth* remarked ruefully: “Pál Nagy’s misfortune is that the present age is one century behind him and hence does not understand him.”³) By January 21, 1833, *Kossuth* was sufficiently disenchanted to label the closed preliminary meetings of the gentry in the diet, the so-called regional sessions, “a sorry affair”, where “little sense is being made”⁴). *Kossuth* was far more impressed with liberal-minded magnates such as *Széchenyi*, *Wesselényi*, *Károlyi* and *Eszterházy*⁵). Not until the end of 1834 was *Kossuth*’s confidence in the gentry restored. At that time, the Lower House had passed a resolution to abolish a law (*avaticitas*) which favoured the nobility, though it still discriminated against property owners without titles⁶).

Kossuth’s initial reaction to the Vienna government’s alleged designs on the hegemony of the gentry was fairly typical of his age and social class.

¹) F. Kölcsey, *Összes művei* [Complete Works], Franklin Társulat, Budapest, n. d., pp. 1234, 1240—1241 and 1279.

²) L. Kossuth, *Országgyűlési Tudósítások* [Diet Reports], ed. I. Barta, Budapest, 1948—1961; *Kossuth*’s notes of December 24, 1832, Vol. 1, pp. 36—37.

³) *Ibid.*, p. 96.

⁴) *Ibid.*, p. 110.

⁵) *Ibid.*, p. 112.

⁶) *Ibid.*, November 12, 1834, Vol. III, p. 675.

Indeed, many Magyar contemporaries were openly hostile toward the Vienna government and accused the Habsburgs of illegally meddling in Hungarian affairs to sow dissension between the nobles and peasants. They believed that the Vienna government deliberately supported the peasantry against their Magyar noble landlords in order to prevent the development of a broadly based Magyar national movement. For instance, according to Bishop *Mihály Horváth*, who was also a liberal-minded historian, the Vienna government used various illegal methods of economic harassment against the gentry to weaken them, destroy their wealth and morale, and thus prevent them from assuming leadership of a Magyar national revival⁷⁾. *Kolos Vaszary's* conclusions were similar in a study of the 1825—1827 Diet based on the minutes of the closed regional sessions. *Vaszary* stated that as early as 1825 gentry deputies had been prepared to consider seriously the necessity for reform to benefit the lower classes⁸⁾.

Other writers were more moderate in their appraisal of the Habsburgs. *János Mailáth*, for example, a well-known Magyar historian of the era, ascribed the breach between the Magyar nobility and the Vienna government to the unskillful policies of *Francis I*, not to the deliberate ill-will of the regime as a whole. He showed how, in 1811 and again in 1816, the King blundered by forcing devaluation of the currency in Hungary without Diet consent, by refusing to return the Adriatic Littoral to Hungary and by staffing its administration with Austrian Germans. In *Mailáth's* opinion, a power struggle between Vienna and the Magyars was unavoidable under these circumstances. The King's policies had revived dormant fears among Magyars that their constitutional rights would be abolished and Hungary incorporated into the Empire⁹⁾.

During the succeeding period, which includes the writing of Magyars and Austrians between 1867 and 1918, historians became even more favourable to the gentry than the works of contemporary observers had been. By 1848 Magyar historians were deeply committed to the ideals of the Age of Reform and the men who had played a part in it. Consequently they exaggerated both the effectiveness and the scope of the gentry-led resistance to the Habsburgs' centralizing and disruptive policies. These scholars emphasized the gentry's willingness to create a society where commoners, including the

7) *M. Horváth*, *Az ipar és kereskedés története Magyarországon a három utolsó század alatt* [The History of Industry and Commerce in Hungary during the Last Three Centuries], Buda, 1840, pp. 355—365. For similar opinions by a contemporary, see *G. Berzeviczy*, „A parasztok állapotáról és természetéről Magyarországon“: *Berzeviczy Gergely élete és művei* [About the Condition and Nature of the Peasants in Hungary: The Life and Works of Gregory Berzeviczy]. Ed. *J. Gaál*, Budapest, 1902, Part II, p. 127.

8) *K. Vaszary*, ed., *Adatok az 1825-ki országgyűlés történetéhez* [Documents about the 1825 Diet], Győr, 1883, pp. 39—42.

9) *J. Mailáth*, *Geschichte des Österreichischen Kaiserstaates*, Hamburg, 1850, Vol. V, pp. 389—391.

peasantry, would obtain equal rights. A legend emerged, especially after the Revolution of 1848—49, about the gentry's alleged selfless patriotism and dedication to the Magyar national idea even at the cost of material sacrifice. *Béla Grünwald*, for example, wrote that Magyar noblemen were unique: "A privileged class renounced its own immunities voluntarily, without external compulsion and without the participation and cooperation of democratic elements."¹⁰⁾

Sándor Matlekovits, an economist and member of the Hungarian Parliament, assumed a more moderate viewpoint, believing that Vienna sincerely desired to promote culture and economic well-being in Hungary. But, in his view, the regime had been inept because it had prohibited freedom of the press and assembly long after any need for such measures had passed. These unpopular regulations had prompted Magyars to question the sincerity of the Habsburgs. After 1825, according to *Matlekovits*, Magyars had seen evil even where good was intended and they had put their trust in *Széchenyi's* reform programme. The Habsburgs had opposed these moderate proposals and soon the gap between Magyars and the Vienna government had become impossible to close¹¹⁾.

Some Austrian historians accepted the views of their Magyar colleagues on the divisive nature of Habsburg policy. *J. H. Schwicker*, for instance, documented what appeared to him to be organized efforts during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to settle Germans and Serbs in Hungary in the belief that this would weaken the Magyars¹²⁾. *Karl Hudeczek* studied Vienna's economic policies and came to the conclusion that it had been deliberately designed to protect the producers in other parts of the Empire at the expense of the Magyar gentry, whose principal source of income was agriculture¹³⁾.

Besides the traditional emphasis on socio-economic and political studies, some Magyar historians of this period began to examine various cultural aspects of the Age of Reform and the era preceding it in an attempt to find evidence of liberalism and conscious Magyarism among the upper classes. An interesting study by the Magyar historian *Móric Kármán* investigated the gentry-controlled schools during this period and found evidence of a growing Magyar awareness among both the students and the teachers, most of whom had been of gentry origin but which had also included some persons of humble, even peasant, extraction. In order to show the Habsburgs' interference in this aspect of gentry-peasant relations, *Kármán* indicated that the Vienna govern-

¹⁰⁾ B. Grünwald, *A régi Magyarország, 1711—1825* [The Old Hungary, 1711—1825], 3rd ed., Budapest, 1910, p. III.

¹¹⁾ S. Matlekovits, *Das Königreich Ungarn, Volkswirtschaftlich und statistisch dargestellt*, Leipzig, 1900, Vol. I, p. VI.

¹²⁾ J. H. Schwicker, *Geschichte der Österreichischen Militärgrenze*, Vienna, 1883, pp. 182—186.

¹³⁾ K. Hudeczek, *Österreichische Handelspolitik im Vormärz*, Vienna, 1918, pp. 80—85.

ment had made it difficult to obtain exit permits for study in Western European universities¹⁴).

A few Magyar and Austrian writers were more favourable toward the Habsburgs. Though known more for his excellent work on 18th century Hungarian history, the renowned Magyar historian *Henrik Marczali* also produced a general history of Hungary in which he tried to prove that the greatest obstacle to reform in the 1830s had been the prejudice of the Magyar nobility, not the policy of the Vienna government¹⁵). Agreeing with *Marczali* were a number of Austrian historians, notably *Adolf Beer*, who, in a study based on Austrian archival sources, concluded that Austria had sought an equitable financial solution in Hungary during and after the Napoleonic Wars without hurting the nobility. In *Beer's* view, the Vienna government had devalued the Hungarian currency reluctantly, but justifiably, on the grounds that the nobility had failed to meet their financial obligations to the Empire in proportion to their numbers¹⁶).

In 1889 the Austrian historian *Franz Krones* published a study on *Anton von Baldacci* and his "Denkschrift" of 1816 in order to show that in the view of contemporaries the fiscal policies of Vienna had been not only justified but lenient. He stressed that the Magyar nobility and upper clergy had profited during the war, especially in grain, and hence could not have expected special consideration from the Habsburgs. On the contrary, according to *Baldacci*, the gentry, with their surpluses of grain and profit, had been duty bound to remedy the misery of the lower classes, but they had failed to do so¹⁷).

After the break-up of the Monarchy the schism between documented and unsupported interpretations of the gentry's role in the Reform Era intensified. For some time after the war Magyar historians continued to emphasize the positive role of the gentry in the Age of Reform and to criticize Habsburg policy, without, however, providing any new documentary evidence. Even one of the most reputable Hungarian historians of this period, *Gyula Szekfű*, viewed the Magyar gentry as a progressive force whose enlightenment had been engendered by their education in foreign universities as well as by rational Western thinkers. *Szekfű* maintained that as a result of these influences there had been a great deal of liberalism among the gentry by the 1830s, especially among the younger generation. Under the impact of enlightened ideas, progressive members of the gentry had assumed leadership of the Magyar national movement and had attempted to create a Magyar

¹⁴) M. Kármán, *Ungarisches Bildungswesen. Geschichtlicher Rückblick bis zum Jahre 1848*, Budapest, 1915, pp. 45—48.

¹⁵) H. Marczali, *Magyarország történelme [A History of Hungary]*, Budapest, 1912, Vol. II, p. 613.

¹⁶) A. Beer, *Die Finanzen Österreichs im XIX. Jahrhundert*, Prague, 1877, pp. 129—130.

¹⁷) F. Krones, *Freiherr Anton von Baldacci über die inneren Zustände Österreichs: Archiv für Österreichische Geschichte*, Vol. LXXIV (1889), pp. 57 and 60—61.

national state in which all Magyars would have been free and equal¹⁸). *Kamill Sándorffy*, a lesser-known historian of this period, went even further to say that the Magyar gentry by the 1830s had been prepared spiritually as well as culturally to introduce many reforms even without foreign influence¹⁹).

With the passing of time, as Austria's restraining hand was removed, many Magyar historians increased their criticism of Vienna government policies of the early 19th century. Some of these writers accused the Habsburgs of having tried to prevent the Magyar gentry from achieving reform and national unity, while others sought to make the Vienna government the scapegoat for the gentry's failures. In this regard, the works of *Kornél Tábori* and *Sándor Takáts* exaggerated the activities and abuses of the Austrian secret police in Hungary, while *Gyula Miskolczy* stressed what he believed to have been anti-Magyar plots of an alleged secret camarilla at the court of *Francis I*²⁰).

Later on, under the impact of secret archival material released by the postwar Austrian government, some of these *interbellum* historians began to modify their critical interpretation of Imperial policy. *Gyula Szekfű*, who had earlier praised the gentry and the growth of their liberal attitudes, edited an important collection of documents in 1926 dealing with various Austrian agencies that had influenced affairs in Hungary. By these documents it was shown that the various Austrian agencies had debated Hungarian issues with reasonable honesty and detachment, and that Vienna's policy, although it conflicted with Magyar national aspirations, had seldom been illegal and, more often than not, was the result of misinterpretations of conditions in Hungary and of Magyar sentiments²¹).

Subsequently, instead of blaming the Habsburgs for the failure of the Magyar movement, Hungarian historians began to emulate *Szekfű* by analysing original documents. A particularly good reappraisal of gentry-peasant relations was offered during this period by *István Szabó*, who wrote that the gentry had not been motivated by altruism since they had systematically exploited the peasantry by expanding their own noble privileges and landholdings. *Szabó* pointed out that, although a new generation of liberal-minded nobles had appeared during the 1830s, opposition to social justice among the

¹⁸) Gy. Szekfű, *Három nemzedék és ami utána következik* [Three Generations and What Follows After], 4th ed., Budapest, 1935, p. 93.

¹⁹) K. Sándorffy, *Törvényalkotásunk hőskora. Az 1825—1848 évi reformkorszak törvényeinek története* [The Heroic Age of Our Lawmaking: The History of Our Laws During the Reform Era of 1825—1848], Budapest, 1935, p. 24.

²⁰) K. Tábori, *Titkos rendőrség és kamarilla* [Secret Police and Camarilla], Budapest, 1921, pp. 14—15, 34—39; S. Takáts, *Kémvilág Magyarországon* [The World of Spies in Hungary], Budapest, n. d., Vol. I, pp. 5—7, 82—89, 93—95, 163—164; Vol. II, pp. 72, 79—87; Gy. Miskolczy, *A kamarilla a reformkorszakban* [The Camarilla During the Age of Reform], Budapest, 1930, pp. 12—13, 32—39, 54—57.

²¹) Gy. Szekfű, *Iratok a magyar államnyelv kérdésének történetéhez, 1790—1848* [Documents on the History of the Magyar Official Language, 1790—1848], Budapest, 1926, pp. 335—341, 366—367, 373—378, 399—401.

majority of aristocrats had continued throughout the entire decade. Szabó cited the example of Count *István Széchenyi*, whose publication "Hitel" (1830), propagating reforms that would benefit the lower classes, had been branded treasonous by many nobles. Some counties had gone so far as to burn copies of the offending publication publicly²²).

A new category of historical interpretation came into being when the Communists assumed power in Hungary, one fraught with thorny ideological dilemmas. According to *Erik Molnár*, one of Hungary's most influential and authoritative Marxian theoreticians, the entire history of Hungary had to be rewritten. Historians were to be enlisted "... in the task of educating the people in Socialist patriotism and international proletarianism"²³). The foremost task of the new historiography, in the view of *Molnár* and *István Barta*, another influential Marxist historian, was to rectify the attempts of the pre-Marxian era "... to discredit liberalism and the 1848—49 Revolution"²⁴).

This new interpretive thrust was not only carried out by Marxian historians. It was to become the major impulse of research activity. In Hungary, however, the historical application of the Marxian dialectic encountered serious difficulties. Liberalism implies the presence of a strong and self-conscious middle class in a relatively well developed technological society; but Hungary had neither an industrialized sector at the time nor a native Magyar bourgeoisie. Consequently, Marxist historians had to recast two of Hungary's politically and economically most dynamic groups — the landed gentry and a handful of liberal-minded magnates — into the bourgeois mould. In view of these demands, the new Marxian historiography acquired a major research target — an investigation into the economic and social history of the peasantry and the nobility based on archival sources.

A further consequence of the interest in Hungarian reform was that moderate Magyar reformers, such as Baron *Miklós Wesselényi* and Count *István Széchenyi*, came to occupy a prominent place in the Marxian Pantheon²⁵).

²²) I. Szabó, *A magyar parasztság története* [History of the Magyar Peasantry], Budapest, 1940, pp. 70—71.

²³) E. Molnár, *A magyar történetírás az elmúlt évtizedben* [The Development of the Hungarian Historiography in the Last Decade]: *Századok*, Vol. XCIV, No. 1 (1960), pp. 45, 58.

²⁴) I. Barta, *Entstehung des Gedankens der Interessenvereinigung in der ungarischen bürgerlich-adligen Reformbewegung: Nouvelles études historiques*, publiées à l'occasion du XIIe Congrès International des Sciences Historiques par la Commission Nationale des Historiens Hongrois, Vol. I (1965), p. 502. Also see E. Molnár, *A magyar történetírás tíz esztendeje* [Ten Years of Magyar Historiography]: *Századok*, Vol. LXXXIX, No. 2 (1955), pp. 183—184.

²⁵) Gy. Spira, *Széchenyi's Tragic Course: Nouvelles études...*, Vol. I (1965), pp. 517—529; I. Barta, *Széchenyi és a magyar polgári reformmozgalom kibontakozása* [Széchenyi and the Unfolding of the Magyar Bourgeois Reform Movement]: *Történelmi Szemle*, Vol. III, No. 2—3 (1960), pp. 224—225; A M.T.A. Történettudományi Bizottsága és a M.T.A. Történettudományi Intézete, *Széchenyi István (Halálának századik évfordulójára)* [On the Occasion of Stephen Széchenyi's 100th Death Anni-

According to *István Barta*, even the conservative magnate, Count *József Desseffy*, qualified as a progressive because "his ideas and works, whether willingly or not, helped Magyar noblemen in the Age of Reform to make the leap from feudalism to capitalism and hence *Desseffy* conformed to the Marxist dialectic"²⁶).

In 1948 *Gyula Mérei*, an economic historian already active in the pre-Marxian period, wrote a work which is still the most authoritative study on the subject of agricultural society in the Reform Era. *Mérei* explained that the gentry could no longer maintain their estates profitably in an age which was becoming increasingly more technological and therefore they had no alternative but to exploit the peasantry. When this approach failed they had to attempt other methods that would ensure their economic survival. The gentry had first tried to enter the world of commerce and, later on, they had gone into manufacturing. This had led many of them to modify their way of living and, according to *Mérei*, they had become an aristocratic, capitalistic bourgeoisie attempting to lead the Magyar national movement in order to gain the loyalty of a future army of wage labourers²⁷).

Another study, written by *István Szabó*, shed important new light on the social structure of the peasantry. His research on the village judgeship, an intermediate social stratum between the peasantry and the nobility, brought to light a new relationship. *Szabó* showed that the village judge, originally elected by the peasantry, was being arbitrarily nominated by the nobleman during the Vormärz and hence no longer represented the interests of the villagers²⁸).

With a new generation of Marxian historians which emerged during the 1950s a number of well-documented studies appeared dealing with the peasantry, which threw an unfavourable light on the nobility. For example, in 1954 *Imre Szántó* published the results of his extensive research on the expropriation of peasant tenures on the trans-Danubian estates of Count *Festetics*²⁹), one of the richest men in the Austrian Empire³⁰). In the following

versary]: *Századok*, Vol. XCIV, No. 1 (1960), pp. 276—277; Molnár, *Történetírás*, p. 55; Z. Trócsányi, *Wesselényi Miklós és világa* [Nicholas Wesselényi and his World], Budapest, 1970.

²⁶) I. Barta, *Széchenyi és a magyar polgári reformmozgalom kibontakozása*, pp. 231—232.

²⁷) Gy. Mérei, *Mezőgazdaság és agrártársadalom Magyarországon, 1790—1848* [Agriculture and Agrarian Society in Hungary, 1790—1848], Budapest, 1948, pp. 55, 164—165.

²⁸) I. Szabó, *Tanulmányok a magyar parasztság történetéből* [Studies from the History of the Magyar Peasantry], Budapest, 1948, pp. 291—294.

²⁹) I. Szántó, *A parasztság kisajátítása és mozgalmi a dunántúli Festetics-birtokon, 1711—1850* [Peasant Movements and Expropriations on the Trans-Danubian Festetics Estates, 1711—1850], Budapest, 1954, pp. 113—117, 124, 138—147, 170, 179—180.

³⁰) G. Hassels, *Statistischer Abriß des Österreichischen Kaisertums nach seinen neuesten politischen Beziehungen*, Nürnberg & Leipzig, 1807, p. 8.

year *Loránt Tilkovszky* wrote the first comprehensive and documented analysis of the peasant revolt, the so-called Cholera Uprising of 1831 in Northern Hungary³¹). Studies on various aspects of peasant life continued to appear during the 1960s as well³²).

It is interesting to note that Marxist historiography exonerated Habsburg economic policy from the charges of exploiting the gentry, which generations of Hungarian historians had previously recited like a Litany. The Habsburgs apparently fulfilled their role in the Marxian dialectic scheme by exerting economic pressure on the Magyar gentry, thereby coaxing them to abandon their feudal economic practices and way of life. In contrast — as we have seen — whenever the nobles engaged in “feudal” practices, especially directed against the peasants, they were subjected to relentless criticism by Marxian authors. In such instances Hungarian historians invariably opted in favour of the Habsburgs.

György Spira pointed out, for example, that Habsburg Imperial tariff policy was not designed to protect Austrian Germans at the expense of the Magyar gentry; it was meant to benefit the whole Empire impartially³³). Three years later, an important collection, edited by *E. Pamlényi*, further sought to explain Austria’s role in Hungarian economic development. Although the studies deal with a later era, the conclusions are even more valid for the period before the Hungarian Revolution of 1848. In one of these studies *Katus* points out, for example, that the delay in Hungary’s economic growth should not be ascribed to Austria’s obstructionism but to Hungary’s own backward social, economic and political structure. This was a direct reference to the gentry’s continuing dialectic-defying socio-economic behavior complex³⁴).

Another important task of Marxian historians was to investigate the relationship between the Magyars and the various nationalities under Habsburg rule. Marxist-Leninist doctrine is quite clear on questions of nationality. While encouraging cultural expressions of nationalism, it frowns on the numerous disruptive features of integral nationalism with its internecine strifes. These chauvinist tendencies had envenomed relations among Hungary’s national groups for over a century. Hungarian Marxists had to find a way either to obliterate the evidence of these national conflicts or at least to minimize them. *T. Vágvolgyi*, one of the more important Marxist historians, accused Imperial scholars of either ignoring contacts between Magyars and non-Magyars

³¹) L. Tilkovszky, *Az 1831. évi parasztfelkelés* [The Peasant Uprising of 1831], Budapest, 1955.

³²) J. Varga, *Typen und Probleme des bäuerlichen Grundbesitzes in Ungarn, 1767—1849*, Budapest, 1965, pp. 109—142.

³³) Gy. Spira, *A magyar negyvennyolc jobb megértését keresve* [Seeking a Better Understanding of Hungary’s 1848]: *Kritika*, Vol. V, No. 2 (1967), pp. 9—22.

³⁴) L. Katus, *Economic Growth in Hungary during the Age of Dualism (1867—1913)*, in: *Social-Economic Researches on the History of East-Central Europe*, ed. E. Pamlényi, Budapest, 1970, p. 79.

entirely, or of holding the cultural level of these nationalities in contempt. The new historiography, accordingly to *Vágvölgyi*, would expose these myths and prove that amicable relations existed between the Magyars and the other Hungarian nationalities³⁵). This emphasis on minority problems was consistent with the Marxian criticism and exposition of the former Magyar nationalist and chauvinist viewpoint. It became a task of high priority briefly after the 1956 Counter-Revolution³⁶).

Marxian literature on the non-Magyar nationalities has, however, been very sparse. The first monograph to deal with a specific national group appeared only in 1959 when the prominent historian *Zoltán I. Tóth* presented a study on the question of Roumanian national development in Transylvania and Hungary. The treatment is very interesting because on occasion the author revealed his Magyar prejudices. For example, *Tóth* blamed the Serb Orthodox clergy, not the Magyars, for having persecuted Roumanians and for having obstructed the development of their culture and language. According to *Tóth*, Roumanians had only opposed the introduction of Serbo-Croatian into their school system, not Magyar or German³⁷). A second study by *Tóth* on the same subject was published posthumously in 1966³⁸).

Another influential historian, *Endre Arató*, published a comprehensive two-volume study on the cultural and political evolution of Hungarian nationalities, but the work in most respects was merely an abridged synthesis of existing pre-Marxian literature. *Arató* oversimplified an important divisive aspect of the nationality problem by declaring that the Germans in Hungary had constituted no menace to the development of the Magyars. The author credited the Germans with local patriotism, or at best with loyalty to the *natio Hungarica*, but he neglected to mention their devotion to the Habsburg dynasty until well into the Age of Reform³⁹).

The most ambitious, yet least successful, undertaking in the area of nationality studies was a collection covering seven centuries, under the editorship of *G. Gábor Kemény*. The purpose of the work, which allegedly took a team of historians ten years to complete, was to prove that significant instances of amicable relations existed between Magyars and non-Magyars. Unfortunately,

³⁵) G. G. Kemény, ed., *A szomszéd népekkel való kapcsolataink történetéből. Válogatás hét évszázad írásaiból* [From the History of our Connections with our Neighbours. Selections from the Documents of Seven Centuries], Budapest, 1962, pp. 3—6.

³⁶) Molnár, *Történetírás*, pp. 45—47, 53—54.

³⁷) I. Z. Tóth, *Az erdélyi és magyarországi román nemzeti mozgalom, 1790—1848* [The Roumanian National Movement in Hungary and Transylvania, 1790—1848], Budapest, 1959, pp. 99—100, 103—104.

³⁸) I. Z. Tóth, *Magyarok és románok: történelmi tanulmányok* [Magyars and Roumanians: Historical Studies], Budapest, 1966.

³⁹) E. Arató, *A nemzetiségi kérdés története Magyarországon, 1790—1840* [The History of the Nationality Question in Hungary, 1790—1840], Budapest, 1960, Vol. I. Volume II covers the years 1840—1848.

the documents only serve to confirm the infrequency and casualness of such contacts, especially between 1830 and 1847, the period of greatest stress⁴⁰).

Marxian orientation also coloured the evaluation of the Magyar linguistic struggle of the early 19th century. *Arató*, for example, equated the controversy between the linguistic innovators and their conservative opponents as “the struggle between the forces of progress and those of feudalism”⁴¹). *Arató* contributed to a symposium on the same subject in 1964 but added nothing original to his previous work⁴²). Some evaluations of the linguistic problem have led to ludicrous conclusions. For instance, *János Varga* claimed that the growing interest of Magyars in their own language indicated a break with feudalism. *Varga* then reasoned that since Magyar replaced Latin, which was closely associated with feudal laws, the transfer represented a linguistic liberation as well. Further, the change was a sign of bourgeois tendencies and of a struggle against an external power, Austria⁴³).

In general, Marxian historians have viewed the Age of Reform, and the preceding period, as the stage for the dialectical struggle between the gentry and the small but powerful middle classes, the predominantly German merchants. However, these historians did not follow the traditional Marxian approach by trying to show that the bourgeoisie in Hungary took over the leadership from the Magyar nobility. Magyar Marxists tried to demonstrate instead that the Germans willingly became Magyarized and infused the gentry with bourgeois qualities. Noblemen allegedly abandoned their class-centered Magyarism in order to bridge the gap between themselves and the commoners and through their influence they also acquired bourgeois economic interests.

In an important monograph published in 1951, *Gyula Mérei* examined the gradual amalgamation of interests of the two hostile classes, the Magyar gentry and the predominantly German, Habsburg-oriented, merchants⁴⁴). In 1952, *Emma Lederer* wrote another important monograph which sought to explain why the landed gentry favoured commercial legislation on the eve of the Reform Era. According to *Lederer*, many members of the gentry had be-

⁴⁰) Kemény, *Szomszéd nép*, pp. 199—208. An even more recent work by a Marxian author, L. Kővági's *Nemzetiségi kérdés — Nemzetiségi politika* [Nationality Question — Nationality Politics], Budapest, 1968, considers contemporary nationality problems in Hungary with disarming candour.

⁴¹) *Arató*, *Nemzetiség I*, passim.

⁴²) E. *Arató*, *A magyar nacionalizmus kettős arculata a feudalizmusból a kapitalizmusba való átmenet és a polgári forradalom időszakában* [The Twin Appearances of Magyar Nationalism during the Transition from Feudalism to Capitalism and the Era of the Bourgeois Revolution], in: *A magyar nacionalizmus kialakulása és története* [The Formation and History of Magyar Nationalism], ed. E. Andics, Budapest, 1964, pp. 79—82.

⁴³) J. *Varga*, *A nemzeti nyelv szerepe a polgári fejlődésben Magyarországon* [The Role of the National Tongue in the Development of the Bourgeoisie in Hungary]: *Történelmi Szemle*, Vol. IV, No. 3 (1961), pp. 292.

⁴⁴) Gy. *Mérei*, *Magyar iparfejlődés, 1790—1848* [Magyar Industrial Development, 1790—1848], Budapest, 1951, pp. 164—165.

come prosperous during the Napoleonic Wars and their wealth enabled them to pursue their own economic interests through politics. This policy brought them together with the bourgeoisie and just short of attaining a bourgeois society in the second quarter of the 19th century⁴⁵). In the 1960s other historians have produced similar studies on economic and commercial problems during the Reform Era⁴⁶).

Some contributions to the study of cultural history as well have been made in recent years by Magyar Marxian historians. One of the first to recognize the importance of the underlying cultural aspects of the Reform Era was *Endre Arató*. In a study which appeared in 1960, he wrote that during the *Vormärz*, and in the preceding years, the Magyar national struggle shifted from the political to the cultural arena. According to him, the French Revolution of 1789 had caused political unrest which swept all of Europe and aroused concern among the Magyar nobility and Vienna, both of whom were committed to the maintenance of the status quo. As a result, *Arató* claimed, both parties agreed to a temporary political truce. Only with the Diet of 1825—1827, when the revolutionary danger was past, did the emphasis shift once more from the cultural to the political sphere⁴⁷).

In the same year *Sándor Bíró* published a work in which he investigated the teaching of history before and during the *Vormärz*, basing his study on textbooks as well as on unpublished lecture notes which he found in archives throughout Hungary. The manuscripts turned out to be repositories of Magyar nationalist propaganda as well as liberal and Romanticist sentiments⁴⁸). *Bíró's* monograph is of special importance because it offers valuable new source material and explains how national awareness could have developed among Magyars even before the Age of Reform.

In view of the importance of the pre-Reform era as a linking movement between the pre-1790 proto-nationalism of the nobility, and the full-fledged nationalism of the 1848 Revolution, it is surprising that the period has not attracted more attention outside Hungary. Prewar Imperial German historians

⁴⁵) E. Lederer, *Az ipari kapitalizmus kezdetei Magyarországon* [The Beginnings of Industrial Capitalism in Hungary], Budapest, 1952, p. 9.

⁴⁶) I. Bakács, *A magyar nagybirtokos családok hitelügyletei a XVII—XVIII. században* [The Credit Affairs of Magyar Estate Owning Families in the 17th and 18th Centuries], Budapest, 1965; G. Eperjessy, *Mezővárosi és falusi céhek az Alföldön és a Dunántúlon, 1686—1848* [Guilds in Agricultural Towns and Villages in the Great Plain and Trans-Danubia, 1686—1848], Budapest, 1967, pp. 110—118.

⁴⁷) *Arató*, *Nemzetiség I*, p. 172. Other works appearing at this time with cultural themes are L. Deme, *A XIX. század első felének harcai a nemzeti nyelvér. Nyelvünk a reformkorszakban* [The Struggles of the First Half of the 19th Century on Behalf of our National Tongue. Our Language in the Age of Reform], Budapest, 1966; F. Hernády, *Adattár a pécsi magyar színhátszás kezdeteihez* [Documents Concerning the Beginnings of the Magyar Theatre in Pécs], Budapest, 1960.

⁴⁸) *S. Bíró*, *Történelemtanításunk a XIX. század első felében, a korabeli tankönyvirodalom tükrében* [Our History Teaching in the First Half of the 19th Century, Mirrored in the Contemporary Textbook Literature], Budapest, 1960, pp. 82—91.

generally agreed with their Magyar and Austrian colleagues who were critical of the Habsburgs. *Anton Springer* wrote, for example, that the Vienna government had abandoned its unconstitutional practices in Hungary prior to the 1825—1827 Diet only because such methods had failed to destroy the Magyar gentry. After 1825, according to *Springer*, the Habsburgs had adopted the technique of forcing the gentry to honour to the letter all the provisions of the existing laws that ran counter to their interests⁴⁹).

R. F. Kaindl agreed with *Springer's* analysis and especially criticized the Habsburg policy of settling non-Magyars in Hungary. When the Habsburgs had temporarily lost certain German-inhabited districts to Napoleon, they had settled the refugees in Hungary. As a result Magyars had every reason to fear that Hungary would have become totally Germanized in the course of time⁵⁰).

Victor Bibl, a postwar Austrian scholar, did not accept *Kaindl's* opinion without reserve. He suggested that the case against the Vienna government was not as conclusive as certain Magyars, and even Austrians, believed. On the basis of primary sources in Austrian archives, *Bibl* concluded that conditions at the Court of *Francis I* had been too confused for the enforcement of a consistent anti-Magyar policy. In fact, the Austrian government had been beset with power struggles and Magyar interests had generally been relegated to a secondary position. There were occasions when *Francis I* had wished to incorporate Hungary into the Empire, while at other times the King had been content to achieve his aims legally⁵¹).

Among more recent historians opinions have been greatly divided among those who observed and classified and those who roundly condemned the behavior of the gentry in the *Vormärz*. *Robert A. Kann* and *Hans Kohn* belong to the former category. *Kann* proposed that Magyar nationalism rested on two foundations. One was political, based on the system of semi-independent counties and their extension, the Hungarian Diet. Both institutions, in *Kann's* view, had been sufficiently strong to challenge Habsburg encroachments. The other component of Magyar nationalism was economic and was predicated upon *Széchenyi's* commercial reform proposals, themselves based on English models⁵²).

Hans Kohn, a specialist in nationalism, placed greater emphasis on the Romanticist influence of *J. G. Herder* than on either political or economic factors. However, *Kohn* also ascribed the temporary success of Magyar nationalists to the fact that Magyar leaders had demanded political reform from the

⁴⁹) *A. Springer*, *Geschichte Österreichs seit dem Wiener Frieden 1809*, Leipzig, 1863, pp. 324, 360—361.

⁵⁰) *R. F. Kaindl*, *Geschichte der Deutschen in Ungarn*, Gotha, 1912, pp. 52—53.

⁵¹) *V. Bibl*, *Der Zerfall Österreichs*, Vienna, 1922, Vol. I, p. 370.

⁵²) *R. A. Kann*, *The Multinational Empire, Nationalism and National Reform in the Habsburg Empire, 1848—1918*, New York, 1950, Vol. I, p. 116.

Vienna government whereas the other nationalities in the Empire had been content with cultural concessions⁵³).

Oszkár Jászi, an emigré Hungarian statesman, was perhaps the most outspoken critic of the gentry's role. *Jászi* felt that the gentry's nationalistic crusade had been a sham. In his view the gentry, except for a small liberally minded faction, had been influenced only by economic, class and religious considerations, but never by a national conception. Even the 1848—49 Revolution had failed to imbue the gentry with a true spirit of social equality. The liberation of the serfs (*jobbágy*) had been carried out not by the gentry revolutionaries but by the *Bach* regime in Austria after the abortive Revolution⁵⁴).

The English historian *A. J. P. Taylor* agreed with *Jászi* when he questioned the sincerity of the gentry. In *Taylor's* opinion the gentry had not really been interested in the peasantry: they had merely wished to assume control of the Magyar national movement for their own interest. *Taylor* also pointed out a very important fact about the changing nature of Magyarism in this period. In the 18th century „Hungarian“ had meant an inhabitant of Hungary enjoying the privileges of a noble, whereas in the 19th century it had come to mean one of Magyar ethnic background. *Taylor* dated this change from 1825⁵⁵).

More recently two German historians, *F. Walter* and *H. Steinacker*, have collaborated in a work concerning the nationality problem in the Hungarian *Vormärz* and joined the chorus of disapproval against gentry behavior. The authors considered that the Magyar nobility had been a suspicious and backward group, determined to preserve the old order with its privileges at all costs. The Habsburgs, they believed, had tried to inaugurate reform in Hungary as far back as the 18th century, but each time they had encountered determined resistance from the nobles. *Walter* and *Steinacker* deprecated the Age of Reform by declaring that until 1848 Hungary had been an aristocratic nation in every sense of the word⁵⁶).

When discussing the Magyar Reform Movement, as we have seen, most historians have concentrated on the relations between the gentry and the peasantry, and the struggle between the Magyar gentry and the Vienna government. In the earlier period, these accounts were overly favourable to the gentry and critical of Habsburg policy. Recent trends, evident in both Magyar and non-Magyar, Marxian and non-Marxian writings, have modified the earlier interpretations on the basis of more readily available archival sources. Additionally, scholarly monographs on language, economics, minorities, and the underlying cultural aspects of the Reform Era have also shown

⁵³) H. Kohn, *The Habsburg Empire, 1804—1918*, New York, 1961, p. 26.

⁵⁴) O. Jászi, *The Dissolution of the Habsburg Monarchy*, Chicago, 1964, pp. 298—299.

⁵⁵) A. J. P. Taylor, *The Habsburg Monarchy, 1815—1918*, London, 1941, pp. 42—45.

⁵⁶) F. Walter — H. Steinacker, *Die Nationalitätenfrage im alten Ungarn und die Südostpolitik Wiens*, Munich, 1959, pp. 37, 40—41.

the importance of non-political factors in the Magyar national movement. The most notable contributions of this type in recent times have been rendered by Hungarian Marxist scholars in the realm of economic history and the status of the peasantry. Regretfully, these achievements are counterbalanced by the fact that after only a few halting steps Hungarian scholars have almost completely ceased to consider the challenging questions of Magyar nationalism in the Reform Era. Perhaps they are still mindful of *Erik Molnár's* complaint and warning over ten years ago that not enough energy is devoted by Hungarian historians to the criticism of bourgeois historiography, with the result that the Magyar nationalistic spirit still continues to crop up in Hungarian Marxist literature⁵⁷).

It is manifest from the evidence that the existing literature, despite its scope and heterogeneity — in fact, perhaps because of it — fails to give a unified picture of developing Magyar nationalism in the early Reform Era. The problem obviously fails to yield to any single-cause explanation. What is needed is a synthesis that would consider the evidence and analyze the effects of various factors on Magyar society, notably politics, economics, education, religion, language and literature. An objective and definitive historical analysis of this problem along these lines has yet to be written.

⁵⁷) Molnár, *Történetírás*, p. 53.