

**CORRUPTION AND
REFORM IN
HUNGARY; A STUDY OF
ELECTORAL PRACTICE**

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R. W. SETON-WATSON

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CORRUPTION AND REFORM IN HUNGARY

A Study of Electoral Practice

By

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in Hungary"*

WITH NUMEROUS DOCUMENTS

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Magyar vagyok. S arczom szégyenben ég,
Szégyenlenem kell, hogy magyar vagyok.
Itt mi nálunk nem is hajnallik még,
Holott máshol már a nap úgy ragyog.

(I am a Magyar. Shame bedecks my face,
That I must call myself of Magyar race.
We cannot see the dawn: 'tis gloomy night,
While all around the sun is burning bright.)

PETŐFI, 1847.

Mit törődöm a hazával?
A hazának száz bajával?
Majd elmúlnak a bajok,
Én magyar nemes vagyok!

(What care I for my country's state?
What care I for its parlous fate?
Let it find helpers where it can—
I am a Magyar nobleman.)

PETŐFI, 1846.

M.P. (addressing Cabinet Minister):—"Do you know how Katanghy got into Parliament?"

His Excellency shrugged his shoulders.

"I presume, because he had a majority of votes," he said; and added humorously, "After all, people do sometimes get into Parliament that way!"

COLOMAN MIKSZÁTH, *An Election in Hungary*, p. 154.

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8:12

Preface

THE Hungarian problem, with its acute racial complications, lies at the root of the whole question of the Middle East, and supplies the key to Habsburg policy and so to more than one vital issue in the international situation. In Hungary itself the question of Electoral Reform overshadows all others : and all parties are agreed that on the manner of its solution depends the future of the country, and perhaps of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy as a whole. Hence no apology would seem to be needed for the present study of the Hungarian electoral system. An exposure of the almost unparalleled corruption and violence which characterized the general elections of June 1910, will enable the reader to judge of the demoralization of public life in Hungary and the glaring inefficiency—to use no severer term—of the administrative machine. In emphasizing the widespread nature of the evil, my chief objects have been to show the absurdity of the claim that the present majority in any way represents the true will of the Hungarian people, and the urgent need of electoral reform of the most thorough kind, as the only means by which Hungary can be saved from irreparable disaster.

I have one further object. Electoral corruption is always loathsome, wherever practised. But in a polyglot state like Hungary, where it is employed by a single dominant race to rob all the other races of their political birthright, it is doubly oppressive ; and its victims cannot be blamed for their opinion that open absolutism would be preferable to a system which rides roughshod over the existing laws. The treatment meted out to the Non-Magyar races of Hungary, under cover of the

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most ancient constitution on the Continent, forms to-day one of the worst blots upon the scutcheon of European culture. I am no advocate of interference in the internal affairs of other countries; *je n'accuse pas, je constate*—and this, be it noted, in answer to repeated appeals to British foreign opinion on the part of official circles in Hungary. But I am at a loss to understand why the various well-meaning societies which exist in this country to defend the interests of oppressed nationalities throughout Europe and Asia, should so persistently ignore the cause of the Slovaks, Roumanians and other races subjected to Magyar rule. In any case, my aim will have been accomplished, if this volume should call renewed attention to the importance of the racial question in Hungary, alike in its bearing on the future of the Habsburg Monarchy and on Southern Slav and Balkan problems.

My chief difficulty—a difficulty which was continually present with me in writing *Racial Problems in Hungary*—is to create in the reader such a state of mind as will render credible even one-tenth part of the truth about Hungary. The bare facts may well seem to the average West European a mere fairy tale. Indeed, I have sometimes found myself refusing to credit the evidence of my own eyes, and often hesitate to publish certain facts, lest I should be accused of romancing. Bearing this difficulty in mind, I have been very cautious in my use of material for the present volume. My authorities may be classed under five different heads:—

(1) A large number of original documents (33 in all, of which 11 are actually in my own possession and the remainder have been specially copied for me from the originals) containing most startling proof of official intimidation and of illegalities during election time in Hungary.

(2) Special reports from certain constituencies, drawn up and signed by eye-witnesses, and supplied to me by persons for whose honesty and reliability I can vouch.

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(3) Reports of the Magyar, German-Hungarian and Austrian Press.

(4) The debates in the Hungarian Parliament during the month of July. The mutual recriminations contained in these debates are quite unusually instructive, and are sometimes almost Gilbertian in their humour.

(5) My own experiences in Szokolcza on June 1, 1910, at one of the most corrupt elections of modern times (see pp. 80-89).

The extreme violence, sometimes bordering upon scurrility, with which I have been attacked in Budapest for daring to publish these experiences in the Viennese Press, might seem to call for some rejoinder on my part; but certain kindly critics of my last book, *Racial Problems in Hungary*, took me to task for indulging in a personal defence against my Magyar slanderers and made it clear that I must not do so again. I therefore defer to their opinion and refrain from any personal defence.

I must content myself with a general acknowledgment to all those who have helped me in the collection of material for this book; it would obviously not be doing them a service if I were to publish their names. Even as it is, a Socialist journalist was sentenced to a term of imprisonment for quoting from my book *Racial Problems in Hungary*; an old lady of seventy was fined £4 last June, because I spent 20 minutes in her house without her reporting the fact to the police (see p. 85); and correspondence with my friends in Hungary is not rendered easier by the fact that even the registered letters I receive from that country are in the habit of arriving with the inscription, "Found open and officially sealed."

Let me conclude this preface with an electioneering story which I myself heard on a Hungarian election platform last May. "Not many years ago a noble Count stood as candidate for a West Hungarian constituency, and was in due course elected. Soon afterwards a deputation of the electors visited him in Budapest, reminded him of his promises at the time of

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the election, and asked him to use his influence in a certain direction. 'Why do you come to me?' asked the Count. 'Why, because you are our representative,' the astonished peasants replied. 'Nothing of the kind,' said the Count, 'I bought the constituency for £2,000. You all had your price—free lunches and free drinks into the bargain. I'm damned if I do anything for you. *We are quits!*' And in another minute the deputation found itself in the street."

Let those who expect genuine reforms from a Parliament which owes its existence to wholesale corruption of the kind described in this book, remember the answer of the witty Count!

R. W. SETON-WATSON.

AYTON HOUSE, ABERNETHY,
December 1, 1910.

LANDMARKS IN HUNGARIAN PARLIAMENTARY HISTORY

- 896-906. Conquest of Hungary by the Magyars under Árpád.
1000. Coronation of St. Stephen as first King of Hungary.
1102. Union of the Crowns of Hungary and Croatia.
1222. The Golden Bull—the Magna Charta of Hungarian liberties.
1301. Extinction of the Native Magyar dynasty.
1437. Union of "the three Nations" in Transylvania (Magyars, Saxons, Szekels).
1526. Battle of Mohács. Conquest of Central Hungary by the Turks.
1540-1690. Transylvania under native Magyar Princes.
1686. Recovery of Buda from the Turks.
1687. Parliament abolishes Elective Kingship, recognizes hereditary succession of the House of Habsburg, and revokes § 31 of Golden Bull (which legalized rebellion against a King who infringed the Charter).
1718. Final Expulsion of the Turks.
1723. Pragmatic Sanction.
1741. Parliament proclaims exemption of nobles from taxation.
1767. Urbarium, or Land Charter, of Maria Theresa.
1781. Edict of Tolerance.
1785-1790. Joseph II suspends Hungarian Constitution and modernizes the administration.
1790-1. Restoration of Constitution by Leopold II (esp. Law X).
1830. Magyar language made obligatory for all holders of public office.
1835-6. Magyar language introduced into Hungarian Courts.
1840. Magyar language becomes the official language of the Government.
1844. Magyar language becomes the exclusive language of Parliament.
1847 (November 10).
(December). Emancipation of Serfs passed by Hungarian Parliament.
1848. (March 3). Kossuth's Great Speech on the Address.
(March 23). First responsible Hungarian Ministry, under Count Louis Batthyány (Széchenyi, Kossuth, Deák, Eötvös also members).
The March Laws (Annual Parliaments, Union of Transylvania with Hungary, Abolition of feudal dues, Press Law, Taxation of all citizens, Electoral Reform, National Guard, Religious Toleration).