

Paksa, Rudolf: *Magyar nemzetiszocialisták. Az 1930-as évek szélsőjobboldali mozgalma, pártjai, politikusai, sajtója*. Budapest: Osiris Kiadó 2013. ISBN: 978-963-276-232-6; 400 S.

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Based on Rudolf Paksa's doctoral dissertation from 2012, „Magyar nemzetiszocialisták“ is not only the first scholarly monograph on the history of Hungarian national socialists since 1989 but in fact provides the first detailed overview of the myriad political actors, party initiatives, and press organs that created and shaped it during the 1930s and the first half of the 1940s. Its major aim is to correct numerous false stereotypes and thereby oppose both apologetic and diabolic representations of the history of Hungarian national socialists that tended to be produced in emigrant circles and under communist rule, respectively. In order to help understand this long censured and even tabooed historical phenomenon, the book also includes an unusually large corpus of party programs, key speeches and visual materials.

Drawing on extensive research into a plethora of previously unexplored sources and released nearly simultaneously with two other volumes by the same author that address related themes in a more popular vein<sup>1</sup>, „Magyar nemzetiszocialisták“ focuses on the biographies of leading politicians and their often hectic relationships with each other, the social composition of the Hungarian national socialist elite, and their access to and use of print media. The book begins with a substantial historiographical overview which argues that due to increased interest in the history of the Holocaust as well as new trends in Hungarian military, social and local history, research on the history of the extreme right has experienced a notable revival since the turn of the millennium (p. 45) – the author highlights the positive contributions made by János Gyurgyák and Krisztián Ungváry in particular. In subsequent chapters, Paksa places Hungarian national socialism into the broader context both of Hungarian political-ideological evolution – such as the development of nationalist and indepen-

dentist thought, the rise of anti-liberal and anti-Semitic convictions, imperial designs and racial ideas – and contemporary international, especially German and Italian trends.

Paksa argues that several national socialist formations registered for the Hungarian election of 1931 for the first time but none of them proved particularly significant or durable. As Paksa explains, the governing side pursued a repressive policy towards national socialists, repeatedly putting their activists on trial and banning their papers (p. 98). However, in parallel with the strengthening of Nazi Germany in the mid-1930s, a second wave of initiatives could be observed when Hungarian „race protectors“ (fajvédők) started to be receptive to Nazi ideas (p. 102). Ferenc Szálasi was to launch his Party of National Will in 1935 too. Backed by the hungarista movement, it combined ideas of race protectionism with a heavy dose of partly Christian, partly idiosyncratic mysticism and an unusually concessive stance on the question of revisionism (p. 105) – Szálasi saw the future Hungarian Empire as the third pillar of the new national socialist Europe but was willing to concede large-scale cultural and territorial autonomy to its various peoples. Unification of the multiple national socialist initiatives of the mid-1930s was repeatedly attempted but could not be achieved.

Paksa argues that by 1937, Szálasi's party was converted into a radically anti-Semitic revolutionary party that ambitioned to pursue the class struggle on a racial basis (pp. 110–113). Due, above all, to the formidable organizational skill of Kálmán Hubay, the party emerged as the most powerful force of the extreme right by the late 1930s (p. 128), exactly when efforts by chief ideologist Ödön Málnási consolidated the image of the imprisoned Szálasi as martyr and future leader (p. 132). In spite of heavy repressive measures, the election of 1939 brought notable successes.

Paksa finds that party representatives were unusually diverse in terms of their age, status, occupation and political prehistory (p. 175). In this respect the Arrow Cross re-

<sup>1</sup> One of them is a biography of Ferenc Szálasi, the other covers the history of the Hungarian extreme right in its broader European context until the present day: Rudolf Paksa, Szálasi Ferenc, Budapest 2013; Rudolf Paksa, *A magyar szélsőjobboldal története*, Budapest 2012.

sembled the governing party the most but whereas it included many ordinary soldiers of the 1919 counter-revolution who could be mobilized with slogans of betrayal, the establishment included its leaders whom they thereby confronted (p. 185). Another major difference Paksa identifies is that Arrow Cross men tended to be younger and typically only started their political careers in the 1930s. They could show little to no previous administrative experience or civic engagement though they were not particularly undereducated.

By 1940, the Arrow Cross faced a formidable challenge in the shape of the Party of Hungarian Revival. Led by Béla Imrédy, the latter included more established politicians with better access to the media and closer connections to the Christian churches. Whereas the Arrow Cross was preoccupied with in-fighting and got greatly weakened by 1942, Imrédy's men cultivated an image of seriousness and professionalism and quickly acquired the support of Nazi Germany (p. 234). Paksa asserts that Szálasi was thus to lose his leadership of the extreme right during the war years but only grew more revolutionary as a result.

Moreover, he argues that the successfully implemented German plan to occupy and pacify Hungary in the spring of 1944 brought experienced politicians to power. Many of them may have been members of the national socialist formation of Imrédy but had previously belonged to the governing party (pp. 276–277). They could all be considered members of the ruling elite of the era who, even as they were implementing the Holocaust, would refrain from pursuing a more encompassing program of social and economic transformation. On the other hand, upon its acquisition of power with decisive German help in October of the same year, the Arrow Cross was not only to commit Hungary's forces to the joint war effort but began to realize its agenda of a Hungarist state. Asserting that „the ruling elite of the Horthy era and the national socialist politicians belonged neither to the same generation, nor to the same milieu and did not possess the same status either“ (p. 305), Paksa highlights that no Arrow Cross minister could be considered a member of the

counter-revolutionary elite. At the same time, the case of Béla Imrédy and his „national socialism of the establishment“, otherwise convincingly presented by Paksa, rather suggests a continuum that would deserve further attention. Future researchers may fruitfully explore further how far the agenda of the Horthy regime and its national socialist opposition actually overlapped, especially with regard to anti-Semitism. Instead of reflecting on such a continuum, Paksa underlines, in accordance with the anti-totalitarian interpretation of history, the similarities between the Arrow Cross and communist regimes (p. 44).

In sum, „Magyar nemzetiszocialisták“ provides a rich and solid overview of the complex history of Hungarian national socialist personalities, parties and media outlets and offers insightful analyses of them. The social historical parts of the book succeed at revising false stereotypes of the Arrow Cross but they somewhat narrowly focus on its political representatives without exploring the party membership and voter base at large. The book may also have profited from greater attention to the varied forms of violence and the biographies of its perpetrators as well as the peculiar gender regime and sexual politics characterizing these movements in Hungary. Even so, the merits of the book are plentiful. Based on much previously unexplored material and reaching several original conclusions, Paksa largely succeeds at moving the discussion of Hungarian national socialism beyond sharply political and strictly evaluative discourses and thereby opens a new chapter in its professional study.

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