

THESES

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Red and White Terror in Hungary (1919–1921)

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1. The topic of the dissertation

1918–1920 is one of the richest periods of the 20th century Hungarian history in crisis. In a short time, three sharp political revolutions took place in the country. Firstly, in autumn 1918, the Autumn Revolution broke out as a result of the People's Republic was proclaimed, the second, on 21 March on the following year the Hungarian Soviet Republic was proclaimed, and thirdly, by the middle of the same year, a multi-directional and controversial counter-revolutionary system began. Due to the results of the prolonged World War, the drastic deteriorating economic and social conditions, the general brutalization on the front and in the hinterland, the crunching political turnarounds were accompanied by brutal reckoning waves. Such atrocities against certain groups of society have not happened before. This was least characterized the People's Republic, in which there were no organized trials and centrally directed, deliberately executed pogroms. At the same time in many cases the movements of the dissatisfied populace fed up with the war-deprivations could suppress only with armed forces and in the fusillades sometimes several dozen lost their life's. The Hungarian Soviet Republic, which was formed on March 21, 1919, to ensure its power so-called "terrorist troops" created in addition to the law enforcement organizations. The "Lenin Boys" and other troops – led by Tibor Szamuely, József Cserny and Ottó Korvin – appeared wherever the order of the Soviet Republic was threatened and after the retaliations in many places did organized executions. In addition, many of the local opinion leaders have been arrested and imprisoned for prevention purposes of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat. The common language and the posterity call these murders as a Red Terror.

From August 1919, the next wave of violence began when the officers and reserve officers of the National Army of the Counter-Revolutionary Government, led by the Minister of Defense Horthy Miklós, departed from Szeged to Siófok. We call the violent actions committed by the the Officers' Centuries led by Pál Prónay, Gyula Ostenburg-Moravek, and Iván as a White Terror. In addition to these retaliatory actions, the counter-revolutionary government, which was established in the summer of 1919, used the practice of legal liability against people who were exposed because of the activity under the Soviet Republic.

In our dissertation, we tried to make findings based on historical and memorial literature and archival documents on these two successive terror waves. Beyond the presentation of the events of 1919–1921, we've devoted great attention to the review of historical and laic processing's of the era as well to present the effects of the First World War on the post-war violence. In the chapter of the Red terror of this dissertation, we were subjected a sociological investigation on the membership of the 'Lenin boys' terrorist group, and we revised the summary register about the victims of the Red terror of Albert Váry, Royal Crown Attorney. To analysing the white terrorism in Hungary, we used almost contemporary data's (collected in the 1920s).

2. Research History

As a first chapter of the dissertation, we overviewed the research-history of the period from 1919 to the present. The attitude to the events of 1918–1919 was related to how the actor lived through the revolutionary events and what kind of ideological filter he was looking to the changes that had taken place. The first summaries of the Hungarian revolutions shortly after the events were not historical works but were memoirs' mostly from the former revolutionary leaders who escaped from the country in 1919 (Oszkár Jászi, Ernő Garami, Vilmos Böhm).

As opposed to the descriptions of the left-wing leaders in the view of the opinion-makers left in the country the responsibility for the recent bloody events is on the Red Terror and the Hungarian Soviet Republic. One of the most important identifying elements of the counter-revolutionary system was the rigid separation from the Soviet Republic and the Karolyi People's Republic. In addition to lay writers, the view of the professional historians of the Horthy era was not free of emotional overheating and exaggeration. The collection of victims of the Red Cross in Hungary started only a few months after the events began. The Crown prosecutor Deputy Váry Albert, who was assigned to the task, in his book published in 1921 (*Victims of Red Rule in Hungary*), the number of Red Terror victims was 590. First in 1931 (later in 2006), was published the unveiling propaganda book of Elemér Mályusz's, *The Red Emigration*. In this the Hungarian Soviet Republic was just as "the toughest absolutism" and the "less ruthless terrorist regime". Includes among the volumes of this era the book of the legitimist Gustav Gratz, *The Age of Revolutions*.

The defeat in the World War II meant not only the fall of the Horthy era, but also a radically new past interpretation. The "advertisers" of the new historical viewpoint were formerly fled intellectuals and communist sympathizers who returned from Moscow. The new approach the history seen as a chain of the history of class struggles, and the Horthy system was stamped as fascism from beginning to end. This coincided with the fact that the period before the Horthy system, the Hungarian Soviet Republic, was raised to a pedestrian. The decisive representatives of Communist narrative were Erzsébet Andics, József Révai and Aladár Mód. The judgement of the Soviet republic came to the first zenith in 1949 when it was characterized as the most glorious period in Hungarian history. The Hungarian historiography of the 1950s was on a very low level, based on the expected logic, themes and past contemplation of the Marxist history view. According to the interpretations published, the period following the Soviet Republic was marked by the operation of the 'Horthy hordes', 'bandits', 'Horthy henchmen' and counterrevolutionary mobs, and emphasizing the responsibility of the Governor, Miklós Horthy's for the bloody events happened. After 1956, the publishing of politically controlled documents continued, and the anniversaries were also used to glorify the agenda of the Soviet Republic. In 1959, the memory of the 21st of March was recorded by the Hungarian Parliament, and later based on the Revolutionary Youth Days, attempted to blend the memories of March 15 and March 21. Because the state power stigmatized the revolutionary events in October 1956 as a counter-revolution, the 1956 counter-revolutionary events were brought together and paralleled by the 1919 counter-revolutionary actions. In addition to the counter-revolutionary sign, it was not possible to depart from the Fascist classification of the Horthy system for a long time. In the representative summaries of the Kadar era, 5,000 deaths were reported to the White Terror account, which shows uncritical reception of the data's of Vilmos Böhm's.

3. Results

In the dissertation we examined in a separate chapter the complex impact of World War I on post-war violence. Although the roots of the First World War date back to the last third of the 19th century, these four years are resulting the appearance of new dimension of the violence

owing the number of soldiers in front-trenches, the quality of weapons designed to extinguish human life, the psychology of the masses of war, the top propaganda and the whole war infrastructure. During the research, we have also taken the view that, in addition to the major political and ideological antecedents of long-term change in the relationship to violence, the tangible war experiences of front-soldiers were very serious.

In the dissertation, we investigated the various levels of violence: the strict command system within the army, the atrocities against the civilian population, the complex effects of soldiers in the trenches, and the experiences of the prisoners of war – supplemented by the trials of the hinterland population. By virtue of the dominance of violence on the fronts everywhere, the use violence of war-related soldiers has become a general and legitimate problem-solving in the years following the war.

The 1918–1919 revolutions in Hungary fit into revolution wave which were started in Russia during the First World War and were followed in Central European Revolution. The next level of post-war violence may be imposed on armed soldiers who are gradually coming home from the frontlines. As homecoming, the disintegration was not a regular one: from the fear of the violence of armed soldiers, certain quotas were already decommissioned on the border; others, however, returned home fortunately, and only collapsed facing of the revolutionary situation in the country. But in several cases, atrocities happened against their superiors and civilians at their last station. The dissertation emphasizes using several examples that revolutionary violence has appeared in Hungary already in the autumn of 1918.

The Soviet Republic of Hungary, proclaimed on March 21, 1919, implemented Russian-Bolshevik type arrangements, state leadership and power-technical practices in Hungary. The class-approach validating dictatorship of the proletariat accused the former leader elite sole for the deprivations and sufferings under the war. In order to secure their power, shortly after the proclamation of the new order, new armed organizations were set up to maintain the order of the Republic of Soviet Republic. Because the leaders of the Hungarian Communist Party recognized the establishment of the secret police, the revolutionary rule, and the establishment of the secret police of the Bolshevik dictatorship up close in Russia it was axiomatic that the Russian Patterns provided the main pattern in creating them in Hungary as well. The structural deployment of the violent organizations, the mechanism of operation of the adjudicating tribunals meant the introduction of this previously known example on the domestic environment.

The intent of the terrorist groups formed alongside the Red Guard were to ‘keep citizenship and workers at bay’. These terror groups differed from other groups in their appearance as well: they had typical leather jacket, leather trousers, plate caps and military fittings. Their ideological commitment was undoubtedly influenced by anarchism, anarcho-syndicalism and communism, but this did not become a coherent world view, and their members were also characterized by the lack of party discipline. In addition to the terrorist groups, the Dictatorship of the Proletariat also established loyal political police.

I examined in this chapter the social stratification of the ‘Lenin Boys’, based on the records of the criminal prosecution of the Budapest Royal Criminal Tribunal and the Budapest Royal Prosecutor's Office from 1919–1922. My research covered litigation when the subject of the prosecution was ‘Lenin boy’, "murder alliance," or "an assassination of manslaughter". During the research, I managed to collect from 525 people more or less data. During the analysis it was revealed that their average age was 25 years. The youngest of them was 15 years old, the oldest being 54. The majority of the membership of the terrorist group was given by the 20 to 28-year-old men. We could identify nearly four hundred births, who came from 222 settlements. The members of the armed terrorist group were blinded out of all parts of the country, and most of them were born in historic Hungary. According to the indicated source, we found the following about their religious affiliation: Catholics accounted

for 58%, Jewish denominators 21%, Reformed 13%, Evangelicals 4%, Greek Catholics 3% the orthodox and the unitarians were 1–1%. Data on occupational activity were found in court documents for nearly four hundred people. According to our data, the overwhelming majority belonged to the lower classes of society. This was not only due to their working family background but also to their occupation. The locksmiths were at most 64. They were followed by iron smokers 28, and day workers / farmers with 25 people. There are also a number of carpenters (17), electricians (14), drivers (14), blacksmiths (12) and shoemakers (11). In the historiography, the sailor background has appeared several times, but here it was hardly apparent: we found only two people with a sailor's profession.

We are also dealing with hostage-collecting practice of the Dictatorships. The first hostage operations took place after the proclamation of the Soviet republic, but the largest wave of detention took place on the Easter in 1919. We summed up the number of victims – who were often cited about five hundred people – with national data and found that the number of hostages can be at least three times more, about 1500 people.

We have separately examined the data of the Váry Albert register of the Red Terror victims. By examining some of the local events of the Red Terror in Hungary and the violent actions of the terrorist troops that have led to counter-revolutionary actions, we believe this collection needs to be revised. According to our data, the number of executed victims of the Red Terror is about 365, and about 110 of those who were killed in the clashes against the Red Guard, a terrorist groups and members of the Hungarian Red Army. In the dissertation, we presented the decisive local counter-revolutionary movements that emerged against the order of the Soviet Republic and the violent actions to eliminate them. The pogroms of 'Lenin boys' were mostly targeted. The scenario was mostly the following: where the order of the Soviet Republic was threatened, there armed Red Guard members, red soldiers or terrorist groups were sent on the armoured train, and after the defeated counter-revolutionary movement, the perpetrators were executed – mostly statutory, without any legal proceedings. The victims of the Red Terror were mostly the supporters of the old regime: citizens, middle and small landowners, but even small and poor peasants, who were dissatisfied with the violent recruitments, the requisitions and anti-clerical measures.

Among the counter-revolutionary foci created during the Soviet Republic, after the short-lived Arad counter-revolutionary government the centre became Szeged. The city occupied by the French Army, became not only the starting point for recapturing the country and, but a cultic concept. The ideology associated with counter-revolutionaries was the so-called 'Szeged idea', the mix of the various conservative, anti-communist, nationalist, and partly anti-Semitic – emotionally over-heated – ideologies of counter-revolutionary groups.

The first violent action of the White Terror was already in Szeged, but it was really strengthened at the beginning of August 1919 when the National Army passed through from Szeged to South Transdanubia. The multi-directional officers' squadrons in the settlements on their voyages made simple executions – as they called 'spontaneous folk guilts', mostly against workers council leaders, Jews, directors and other people. In addition to executions, they often tortured their victims. The purpose of the judgments was exemplary and revenge, and the operation of the established law courts was similar to the revolutionary tribunals of the Soviet Republic: the most basic legal protection opportunities for victims were not secured this time either.

In Budapest, during this time, the Friedrich-government began to take charge of the persons involved in the revolutions, especially in the Soviet Republic. Friedrich, with his Prime Minister's decree issued in August 1919, introduced an accelerated criminal prosecution. On this basis, the death sentences of the courts in the Soviet Republic constituted an incitement to murder, and in addition, simply because of suspicion anyone could be arrested. The so-called 'communists causes' counted on the most common cases: through

these, between 1919 and July 1920, nearly 54,000 people were prosecuted. The overcrowding of the prisons shows, that in the cells of the greatest prison in Budapest, in which can accommodate 1000 prisoners, in September 1919, 2,500 people, in October more than 7,500 people were in prison. In contrast to the tens of thousands of left-wing emigrations, according to the estimate of Albert Váry, the number of detainees 8 to 10,000. Based on judgments made under accelerated criminal proceedings, 100 people were sentenced to death and 74 of them were actually executed. They belonged to the most horrible groups of the former Dictatorship and were mostly the members of the Lenin boys, the Red Guard or prosecutors. However, most of the People's Commissars and Deputy Commissary-Generals of the Soviet Republic left the country in good time and thus avoiding the impeachment. Ten commissars in the country were brought to justice and sentenced to life imprisonment or death. As a result of long negotiations with Soviet leadership, in 1922, they could leave the Soviet Union in the framework of a large-scale exchange of prisoners.

Preliminary censorship was restored, and the disciplinary committees set up were dismissing hundreds of teachers, officials and employees. All these repressive gestures made many to leave the country. Prior to entering the capital, Miklós Horthy, the commandos of the National Armies were focused around Budapest. On November 13, 1919, the Romanian army emptied the capital and the middle of the Danube-Tisza, and in the place of the retreating army, in addition to the local armed forces, to the city Kecskemét and its surroundings were separated by commandos of Iván Héjjas and Mihály Kiss Mihály.

On November 24, 1919, with the leadership of Károly Huszár, a coalition government of the right-wing majority was formed, which was already known by the peace conference as a negotiating partner. The most important task of the new government was to prepare for the upcoming January parliamentary elections and to prepare for the Paris Peace Conference. The members of the far-right wing Awakening Hungarians' Association (ÉME) and Horthy's separationists, however, several violent actions were made in the capital, which made impossible to peacefully prepare for the elections. In many cases, armed groups had shot or beat peaceful walkers on the open street, and worse, they arrested or executed many. This was legally assisted by the Government's Decree of Intervention of 5 December 1919, in which were declared that the elements dangerous to the state and society, or to public order and public security, could be arrested and interned. The victims of the atrocities were mainly social democrats, the sympathizers and the Jewish people, that's why the MSZDP boycotted the elections.

The euphoria of the forthcoming governor's election was overshadowed by two sad circumstances. On February 17, 1920, some members of the Ostenburg-Moravek commando were kidnapped and murdered two famous Social Democratic journalists of the journal *Népszava*: Béla Somogyi and Béla Bacsó. The two journalists were the most famous representatives of the critical journalism against Horthy and the White Terror. The murders have therefore a huge echo. Horthy stopped the investigation coordinated by Interior Minister, Ödön Beniczky, and he himself defended the perpetrators. The other blunder was directly linked to the act of the governor's choice. On the day of the election, Horthy's trusted separatists drew military cordon around Parliament, some of the them were grinded in the building. For more delegates, they barely prevented the access to the House of Commons.

In my paper, I examine the collections of the victims of the White Terror in Hungary.

The most important sources are the collection of the Hungarian Social Democratic Party's Lawyer Office (1919–1920), the collection of the journalist László Fényes, 1924–25 in the Archive of the Institute of Political History and the contemporary documents of the Legal aid Office kept in the Hungarian Jewish Archives. Compared the resources, we have data from nearly 160 settlements. From the sources I was curious about the names of the perpetrators, the scene of the murders, the reason for becoming a victim, the time of the

atrocities, and the identity of the perpetrators. The data revealed that most atrocities were committed in August and in December 1919, and in January 1920. It is a regrettable fact that the reason is not clear about 90% of the murders, 60% of the arrests and 62% of the murders. If, however, we're examining only the known causes, we would find the following. The proportion of those who had been executed for their Jewry was 31%, and about 50% of them killed because of their communist or social democrat attachment. Of the 1169 deaths from sources, nearly 400 are known by name.

The national election and the election of Miklós Horthy as governor – despite the shadowy sides of the election – were an important step towards the consolidation. In the summer of 1920, due to the terrorist attacks and the disturbances of the members of the ÉME and other terror groups in Budapest was decided the suspension of operation of the ÉME and the elimination of detention centres in the capital. The members of the officer-commandos were thrown into the wind or were deployed to the regular army.

The next step in restoring the legal order was the adoption of a bill on 'more effective protection of the state and social order'. The act no. III. 1921 committed every act as a crime when the goal of the endeavour and intention was the violent subversion or destruction of the state and society, in particular, the violent establish the rule of one of the social classes. These acts could be punished by a five-year jail. But if they leaders have also acquired weapons for the realization of their political endeavours, the punishment has passed from ten to fifteen years. Although this act didn't mention the Communist sign, the potential victims of the act were leftist politicians forced to emigrate, and especially the domestic communists who were practically illegitimate since then. According to the last paragraph of the Act, however, all these included officers and soldiers belonging to the army, so this law could be classified as a measure to restrain the commandos as well. Beyond that the governor did not appear against their former detachments. In fact, his amnesty regulation at Christmas on 1920 exempted every person who was sentenced for less than five years due to his behaviour under the Revolutions.

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