

BOOK REVIEWS

Louis Kossuth and Young America: A Study of Sectionalism and Foreign Policy, 1848-1852. By Donald S. Spencer. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1977. Pp. viii, 203. \$12.50.

In this well-written volume, Donald S. Spencer recounts the visit of Hungarian patriot, Louis Kossuth, to the United States in 1851-52 to secure men and munitions to renew his desperate fight against the Habsburg Empire and its Russian allies. The eloquent Magyar arrived in America at a time when many citizens were convinced that God had entrusted to their republic the mission of waving the banner of freedom over the entire civilized world. The European revolutions of 1848 had stimulated "Young America's" self-image of altruism, nationalism, and progress. Proponents of spread-eagled Americanism exalted Kossuth wherever he traveled, for his presence invited comparison between American and European conditions, and stimulated within the United States the feeling of assured superiority over, as well as sympathy for, less favored peoples.

Kossuth's was a difficult task. He had captured the hearts of most Americans, but winning their minds was another matter. In order to convince Washington to abandon its long-standing principle of non-intervention in order to defend the principle of non-intervention in Europe (a nice paradox), he sought to penetrate the "doctrinal myth" of George Washington's Farewell Address. Kossuth lectured his hosts as he would a world power. The time had come for the nation to flex its muscles on behalf of freedom. Advances in communications and steam technology had rendered isolation obsolete. America should not abandon the Monroe Doctrine but extend it to the portals of St. Petersburg. Kossuth suggested four specific steps that would allow the nation to direct its new energy into a vigorous foreign policy committed to liberalism, democracy, and the global struggle against Russian tyranny: Washington should recognize Hungarian independence; President Millard Fillmore should warn the Tsar that another act of aggression

would lead to American intervention; the U.S. navy ought to patrol the Mediterranean to protect vital trade routes from Russian interference; and, finally, Americans should fill his coffers and flock to his banner.

As Spencer reveals, however, the rhetoric of "Young America" could not keep up with reality. Despite his skill as a public speaker, Kossuth's cause was wrecked by domestic politics — sectionalism born of the slavery question — which forced political elites to confront the logical thrust of the adventurous rhetoric of their chauvinistic countrymen.

Radical Garrisonian abolitionists withdrew their support when Kossuth failed to condemn Negro slavery, hoping not to alienate the South. His neutrality implied support for the status quo, and in 1851, concludes Spencer, the status quo was the South's own program. Conversely, leading Southern politicians may have desired to uplift the peoples of the Caribbean, but the South lacked sympathy for the utopian vision of "Young America." Southerners rejected the assumption that moral force alone could liberate the Old World and pictured Kossuth as part of an abolitionist conspiracy against their peculiar institution.

National leaders, meanwhile, recognized the political dynamite inherent in Kossuth's appeal, arguing that to create policy out of sentiment was at best quixotic and dangerous to the national interest. Daniel Webster, who had done much to generate the original Hungary fever with his famous note in 1850 to Chevalier J. G. Hülsemann, chargé at the Austrian legation, admitted that the ensuing patriotic outburst aimed more to reunify a dividing America than to support a revolutionary Hungary. By March 1852, despite support from such leading Democrats as Lewis Cass of Michigan, Pierre Soulé of Louisiana, and Robert F. Stockton of New Jersey, support for interventionism had collapsed. Spokesmen for *realpolitik*, including John C. Calhoun and Whigs Henry Clay and William H. Seward, had informed Kossuth that sympathy could not be synonymous with policy. President Fillmore also remained aloof, proving more interested in promoting commercial interests in the Pacific and laying the groundwork for a transcontinental railroad.

This was cold cheer for Kossuth, who soon left America for exile in England, leaving behind him (in the felicitous phrase of Professor Thomas A. Bailey) "Kossuth beards, Kossuth hats, Kossuth overcoats, Kossuth cigars, the Kossuth grippe, and Kossuth County, Iowa."

Superseding previous studies of Kossuth's American journey, Spencer's volume is significant on three levels — as an account of the visit itself, as analysis of the conflict between idealism and realism in the

heyday of "Young America," and as evidence of the growing influence of the slavery controversy upon foreign policy. Nevertheless, the reviewer found it strange — and indicative of the author's tendency to stress politics at the expense of the American diplomatic tradition — that no mention was made of the pertinent controversy surrounding the celebrated visit to the United States in 1793 of "Citizen" Edmund Genêt of France. Spencer might also have accorded greater significance to Secretary of State John Quincy Adams' role in cooling American passions for intervention and recognition during the Greek rebellion and Latin American wars for independence during the early 1820s. Given this diplomatic tradition of non-intervention, one feels that Kossuth would have failed in his quest even had the whirligig of domestic political strife not confronted him. In terms of the domestic context of Kossuth's failure, finally, one wonders whether the Garrisonian wing of the abolitionist movement was as important by 1850 as Spencer thinks. According to Aileen Kraditor, for example, Garrison's radicalism had made him a pariah, and the movement had gone beyond him, into politics. If so, the shrewd Kossuth should have worried less about offending the abolitionists than Spencer argues. These questions of emphasis, and a few typographical errors, in no way detract from the author's demonstration that in the person of Louis Kossuth "Young America" confronted its own image — and ultimately recoiled.

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The Slovak National Awakening: An Essay in the Intellectual History of East Central Europe. By Peter Brock. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1976. 104 pp. \$12.50.

Professor Brock's essay on the Slovak national awakening is a welcome and important contribution to Western writings on the Slovaks. The author has left very few stones unturned in his research, examining not only available primary sources, but also the broad spectrum of essays and studies mostly in Slovak, that have appeared inside and outside Czechoslovakia in the last half-century.

Professor Brock has not written a complete history of the Slovak national awakening, but rather, as he indicates in his preface and subtitle, an intellectual history. In a way this is a pity, for as a result his essay raises a number of questions on the role and importance of intellectual movements in a predominantly agrarian society. This is best