

*Hungary in Early 1848: The Constitutional Struggle Against Absolutism in Contemporary Eyes.* By Edsel Walter Stroup. Foreword by Steven Bela Vardy. Buffalo, New York – Atlanta, Georgia: Hungarian Cultural Foundation, 1977.

“*Unmöglich*,” exclaimed General Hoffmann in 1918 at Brest-Litovsk on hearing Trotsky’s proposal of “neither war nor peace”; and the Hungarian-speaking reader of Mr. Stroup’s book is likely to cry “*hallatlan*” when he discovers that 1848 was not a turning point in Hungarian history, that rather than being a revolution it was a mere constitutional struggle against illegal Habsburg absolutism; that “thanks to the Hungarian nobility’s alert guardianship of the Constitution over many long and difficult decades, the 1848 demand for an independent and responsible Ministry under the Palatine was solidly based on law” (p. 125f) like the Golden Bull which according to the author was a manifestation of national consciousness; that the Magyar 1848 differed from its western counterpart in lacking intemperance and violence in mid-March. Professor Vardy, in his foreword, could not resist remarking, in all earnestness, that the reader “will *detect* the scholarly *effort*” (both emphases are mine) in Stroup’s work.

But in all fairness to the author, these theses are not entirely *unmöglich*. In the 1840’s Kossuth and his followers branded the rule of Vienna over Hungary illegitimate and blamed all the woes of Magyar-dom on Habsburg domination and misrule. The echoes of Kossuthite propaganda were last heard in the writings of Hungarian historians of the early 1950’s. Kossuth was rebuffed by Széchenyi who viewed the country’s Constitution not as a fortress of liberty but as a prison. Recent studies by G. Spira, J. Varga and I. Deák have contributed much to our understanding of the role of various social classes in the Revolution and the brilliant political maneuvers of Kossuth and his party while correcting the falsifications of the 50’s.

The very existence of the active Diet in Hungary in the *Vormärz* casts doubt on Stroup’s labelling of Vienna as absolutist. The impact of violence on the streets of Paris, Vienna, the constant threat of violence in Pozsony and Pest-Buda, the lingering ghosts of jacquerie in Galicia and Northern Hungary cannot easily be discounted and replaced by the image of a benevolent gentry and a peaceful constitutional deal between Austria and Hungary. Neither can one find national consciousness in Hungary before the reign of Joseph II or consider Hungary, regardless of the Law of 1790/X, “an independent kingdom.”

It is unfortunate that Stroup did not bother to counter the arguments

of Kossuth's contemporaries and twentieth century historians. He might at least have commented on Varga's thesis of the Great Fear (*A jobbágyfelszabadítás kivívása 1848-ban*. Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1971) rather than giving an inconsequential quotation, since Varga categorically denied the unselfish motives of the nobility. True, the author was unable to do research in Hungary; however, the materials for a good constitutional history of Hungary are available on this continent. An impressive collection on the subject is held at the University of Illinois. At least the parliamentary papers (Arch. Regn. Diaeta anni 1847/48) should have been made use of.

*Hungary in Early 1848* may be a labour of love, as Dr. Vardy claims, but it is not a noteworthy piece of scholarship. Maybe Stroup deserves more than the critic's ire. Graduate schools should protect their students from the unpleasant consequences of premature publication.

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