

Summary

FROM THE CONCEPT TO PROTECT THE HUNGARIAN RACE TO NATIONAL DEMOCRACY

Endre Bajcsy-Zsilinszky's political concepts for the revival of the post-Trianon Hungary
(1918–1932)

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Endre Bajcsy-Zsilinszky was one of the key political personalities of Hungarian history in the 20th century. His career was strongly associated with the history of the Horthy Era.

Bajcsy-Zsilinszky's political career was of high interests for his contemporaries and the historiography of the second half of the 20th century.

The keynote to Bajcsy-Zsilinszky's historical evaluation is determined by *ideologizing approach*. His career consisting of several small (4–6 year) phases was unbroken from rightist radicalism through national democracy to alliance with social progression. According to the authors representing this ideologizing approach, at the beginning of the 1920s Zsilinszky still did not have a firm ideology, any coherent political program for the rise of the nation. However, this ideologizing approach has caused some disproportionateness in the exploration of the career. Researches tend to concentrate on the period of his career after 1928.

In contrast with such an interpretation of the career, it can be documented that from the end of the 1910s Zsilinszky had a coherent program for the protection of the Hungarian race, rightist radical modernization (front ideology, *National Revival and the Press*). At the end of the 1920s, he broke off with the race-protection movement, but not the race-protection thought. Changes in his political ideas embraced a longer of time. His career can be divided into two phases, i.e. from 1918 to the middle of the 1930s covering the development from the notion of the protection of the race to national democracy and from the middle of the 1930s to his death, the period of struggle for national independence, the creation of co-existence with other people in the Danube Valley and the struggle for the civil democratization of the country.

Coming from a declassing gentry family of Slovakian–Hungarian origin, Bajcsy-Zsilinszky was the representative of the war generation. He perceived the Great War as a cataclism in his life and career. Therefore, he was personally concerned with the gentry issue; it was also a significant factor in the evolution of his thinking (nationalist advocate of independency, agrarian, neo-conservative, rightist radical values). As a consequence of his choice of values, he can be characterized by rightist modernization efforts. His adventures at the front, the final outcomes of the war, the revolutions were all serious inward burdens to him, and thus he realized: the one-sidedness of the Hungarian development of capitalism, i.e. “accelerated capitalism” had embroiled the country in the crisis. The dualistic system had arrived at its depression by the turn of the century. The *land* and *suffrage* issue, *state law problems*, the *nationality issue*, as well as the problems associated with *workers*, *Jews* and *gentries* called for urgent solutions, but as a consequence of the sharpening international situation and the war they remained to be problems to be solved in the Horthy Era, as well.

Bajcsy-Zsilinszky was a nationalist standing out for national independence, the leading personality of rightist, radical efforts built upon agrarian and neo-conservative ideas. His optimistic reform concepts set for generations and not short political cycles were shaped in critical periods of Hungarian history: First World War, revolutions, counter-revolution and Trianon, the economic crisis of 1929–33, Second World War. These concepts promised a breakthrough on the basis of the national and agrarian (social) thought.

The first intellectual construction in the creation of which he was involved was *front ideology*, a militant, rightist, radical, national program in the second half of the First World War (1917–1918). It was in fact a “pre-draft” of the later race-protection program. He broke off with the parliamentary conditions of the period of Dualism, and opted for dictatorial means to effectuate his modernization efforts. He was an advocate of land and social reforms, announced the need to broaden political rights, opposed large estates and large capital.

In the summer of 1917 he joined the right-wing radical group formed around *Budapest News*, and then contributed to work of the Home Defense League and the Hungarian National Defense Society. In the summer of 1919, he started to advance the rightist radical race-protection program in *New Generation of Szeged*.

In the first half of the 1920s, Zsilinszky was active in public, as well as secret and semi-secret organizations. A newspaper editor and member of the parliament at the same time. The shaper and propagator of the notion to protect the Hungarian race. The first

“product” of his programming activities was a study on press policy entitled *National Revival and the Press*, wherein he put down the plan of a militant, etatist governmental system.

This work examined current political events (dissolution, lost war, revolutions and counter-revolution, preparation for the peace pact) with respect to wide-ranging historical settings. He called for the development of economic life with special focus on agriculture, the implementation of the land settlement, as well as the restriction of mercantile capital. His concept saw the army – dictatorial state – in the core of the governmental organization. He would assigned the role to control the state to the Christian–national middle-class. Farmers were to be granted broader political rights with no obstacles to their rise. If they were willing to find their national roots, the working class could count on the support of the regime (work safety and health, social legislation).

He was looking for solutions for the land issue and the Jewish issue. On economic grounds, he was urging action against the Jewish large capital and the press controlled by Jews.

At the beginning of the 1920s, Bajcsy-Zsilinszky participated in the debate between Bethlen and the advocates of the protection of the Hungarian race, which resulted in the secession of the representatives of race protection from the leading party of the Government during the negotiations for the contracting of the governmental loans.

The supporters of race protection wanted to utilize domestic resources, whereas Bethlen foresaw solution for the squaring of the deranged financial matters of the country in the governmental loans to be taken with the assistance of the League of Nations, Pengő would introduced, and the restructuring of the Hungarian economy.

Being aware of the potential marginalization of rightist radicalism and perceiving the defenseless position of small landholders within the Unified Party, Zsilinszky called for the alliance of the Christian-national movement, smallholders and the advocates of race protection. Such an alliance would be based on the economic, social and cultural rise of farmers, while the underlying aim was to weaken the position of the government, as well as to enforce the reorganization of the government. Nevertheless, this attempt failed.

After the secession from the Unified Party, Bajcsy-Zsilinszky had no illusions. Bethlen’s consolidation efforts did not need either the services of the advocates of race protection, or his assistance. For some years, he remained a well-known public figure as an actor of public life, and then from the spring of 1928, he was editing *Espails*.

After the Ady debate in 1927, he started to establish contacts with various youth organizations and evolving popular movements. The emerging youth raised such questions in connection with the country's situation and the agrarian issue that were essentially similar to those of Bajcsy-Zsilinszky. They examined with the relationship of the peoples in the Danube Valley. Their approach to these problems also fertilized Bajcsy-Zsilinszky's thinking, and was reflected in the intellectual image of *Espails*, as well as in the national radical program.

At the end of the 1920s, Bajcsy-Zsilinszky connected the evaluation of Hungary's international position with the criticism of "Bethlen's regime".

There are a series of similarities between his objectives and the thoughts presented in his earlier writings. In the core of this approach, there lay the problems echoing the times of race protection: national unity, the Hungarian as the first and foremost soldiers of the world, land reform, action against "bankocracy", territorial revision. In the light of the social insensitiveness and anti-agricultural economic policy of the Bethlen Government, as well as the agricultural sales crisis throughout the 1920s, he continued to try to align the agrarian (social) concept with the national thought.

Formal similarities, however, hide material differences in contents. Due to the economic crisis, it was now not the national thought that was given a priority in his concepts, but the agrarian (social) issue. From the turn of the 1920s and 1930s, he was setting up the framework of his approach from internal sources. He looked to the economic growth of the "national society", the improvement of social conditions, moral, intellectual and political renaissance to lead to the betterment of the country's international positions.

He regarded the improvement of the situation of farmers as a part of a well-concerted reform process.

Since his secession from the advocates of race protection, Bajcsy-Zsilinszky had been preparing for the foundation of an independent party. The program of the National Radical Party is a third-way political program: the plan of a governmental and political system based on farmers in rejection of Western-type civil democracies and totalitarian regimes. It was in fact Bajcsy-Zsilinszky's second concept for modernization wherein he drew up the path to renewal alongside with the concepts of *national society*, *national state*, *national democracy*.

He saw the future of the Hungarian guaranteed in the framework of a *national state*. The national state was indeed an organization conceived to balance out political and economic conditions. It was to coordinate the activities of the individual production sectors and social

groups, the operation of legislation, governmental bodies, local and county governments, as well as professional representative organizations.

He interlinked the issue of the national state and national democracy. He interpreted democracy as a historical formation. *Practice*: special process for the *arrangement of consensus* and *equalization*. *Concept*: the spirit of this concept was to penetrate the constitution, legislators and the work of autonomous institutions. Bajcsy-Zsilinszky regarded himself as a democratically thinking and acting Hungarian.

From among the political movements and political parties of the day, it was the National Radical Party that had a program to embrace the whole of the agrarian issue. Accordingly, most of the progressive elements could be found in his proposals for the solution of the agrarian issue.

The objective of agrarian policy was land reform in association with a new wave of settlement. His land reform foresaw the distribution of three million morgens of land among people in need. The democratic nature of the land reform, as well as his aversion to large estates were reflected in the fact that he proposed to split up “private, church and parochial estates” in excess of a thousand morgens, as well as entails. Bajcsy-Zsilinszky wanted to grant lands primarily to landless villagers and micro-holders, and in addition wished to create viable small and medium-sized holdings.

This national radicalism contained *progressive* and *conservative*, as well as *realistic* and *unrealistic* elements. The notion of the national state was based on a neo-conservative, organic development concept. The civil liberal and Marxist class regime contrast the traditional with the individual, the rights and obligations of professional orders. That is how it intends to grant a leading role to farmers as keepers of traditions and the middle-class living in close spiritual–intellectual unity with them.

This combination of realistic and unrealistic elements is rooted in the Italian corporative system, a special amalgamation of historic Hungarian constitutionalism, and partly in the highly detailed nature (over-regulation) of the program.

Bajcsy-Zsilinszky’s vision of the future’s Hungarian social–political setup also contained progressive elements. The most significant ones were universal suffrage with secret ballot, civil liberties that were regarded as considerable political causes in the 1930s, in Hungary.