DOCTORAL THESIS

M. Róbert Drabancz

Disputes about Cultural Management

In Hungary's Press in the Second Half of the 1920's

University of Debrecen, Faculty of Arts
2007

1. Purpose of the Thesis and Description of Its Subject Matter

The pressure to come to terms with the disastrous historical events that had struck the Hungarian people was a recurring element in the public's political thinking in the 1920's. The effects of the commotion, moral shock and economic problems in the aftermath of the war on culture were a recurring topic of political journalism. The authors of political articles revealed the "window policy" of the cultural administration in the 1920's and identified the aspects of Hungarian culture that were threatened. The effects of the apocalyptic changes made the dangers that were abstract and hypothetical in the dualistic era very real. In society's self-assessment, issues like "Where did we get astray?", "Who was right?", and "Who are we?" were given priority. The nation's conscience was searching for scapegoats and the loss of the majority of the country's territory unleashed untameable emotions that surfaced in a variety of ways. In addition to sentimental nostalgia for the country's past, the possible ways of national self-examination and self-fulfilment started to take shape. It was up to politicians to answer society's questions such as "what happened to us" and "what kind of a world we want".

The interpretation of the new situation was a hard task because the country's political and economic scope for action was narrowed after the Trianon Peace Treaty and determined by external powers and the chaotic state of the value systems in the country. The regime had to search for ways out of the hopeless situation caused by the dismemberment of the country. The nation's atmosphere featured a desire for order and stability. The values of the former ruling elite became outdated and order was brought forth by the conservative reform that relied on a Christian-national ideology. The reform was a manifestation of a variety of interests since it not only included the privileges of traditional social classes and the Catholic Church but also the elements of capitalist development.

The Hungarian political elite were trying to find ways to create appropriate conditions for the nation's accommodation to the new circumstances. Cultural administration became one of the key branches of the newly organized autocratic political system. After coping with suffocating economic hardships, the state raised funds for the establishment of new educational and scientific institutions. The common national goal, that is, the restoration of the territorial integrity of historical Hungary, placed culture in the pivot of the political system. The regime re-interpreted its role in the development and maintenance of the cultural institutional system. The assumption of financial obligations, the radical increase of state expenditures and the large-scale institutionalization were a spectacular demonstration of the cultural administration's potential to promote interests.

My Thesis was intended to address the issue of what values and metaphors were the basis for the worldview and ideology of the new political regime and for its cultural administration. In my opinion, the Bethlenian consolidation would have been successfully accomplished had the entire society supported it. The cultural administration played a key role in the organization of the social support. According to my interpretation, the issue lends itself to being examined due to the fact that the political answers to the questions raised in the press clearly outlined the aspects of the public's self-definition in the 1920's. The ideologies presented in the era's press provided theoretical foundations for the strategies for actions. I found that the press was at the meeting point of culture, society and politics. With their help, I am reconstructing and interpreting the determining ideas and symbols of the second half of the 1920's.

2. Applied Methodology

The Thesis consists of two main units. The first presents the international and national literature available on the topic and outlines the conceptual framework of the topic. The

second unit presents the metaphors of power from the point of view of the history of ideology as well as the most important disputes in the light of articles published in the papers of the era.

Topics of research: the relationship between the regime and the press, the metaphoric environment that determined cultural administration in the 1920's, and the emergence of the issue of Jews in the press in the second half of the 1920's.

During the research, the following hypotheses were formulated:

• the goal of the political regime in the 1920's was to achieve national integration

• the conceptual framework of the integration was developed by the cultural administration

• in the second half of the 1920's, the press provided a channel for the regime to communicate with a broad segment of Hungarian society.

In order to prove my hypotheses, I examined the related literature as well as a broad spectrum of Hungary's press in the period examined. I was aware that the method that was designed to apprehend the political identity and cultural attitude of certain social classes and groups on the basis of the era's press required special precautions. I addressed this problem by dealing only with publications that were published throughout the period concerned. The papers, whose essential elements were the articles that dealt with political issues, were capable of forming popular feeling due to their large number of copies and their readership. I considered political value system an important criteria as well. Statistics concerning the press of the era distinguished between pro-governmental papers, which were generally conservative or liberal conservative, and oppositional papers, which reflected liberal thinking. Papers of other ideologies could naturally be published among oppositional papers but their influence was negligible in the second half of the 1920's. The two main aspects of my examination were the following: one concerned content and highlighted the underlying political ideology of the papers, and the other concerned the scope of influence of the papers and their integration into society.

After careful consideration, I selected the following publications:

Budapesti Szemle (1873-1944)

Magyar Szemle (1927-1944)

Minerva (1922-1940)

Napkelet (1923-1940)

Pesti Napló (1850-1939, from 1920 Est Lapkiadó Rt.)

Magyarság (1920-1944)

The following papers were consulted regarding certain issues:

Nyugat (1908-1941)

Széphalom (1927-1945)

Századunk (1926-1938)

Társadalomtudomány (1921-1943)

Toll (1929-1938)

In addition to the above publications, materials belonging to the cultural elite, available in the Archives of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and the Archives of Széchenyi Library, were also used. These documents enabled me to identify the possible interpretations of the disputes that accompanied certain issues as well as to explore personal interests.

An important element of the Thesis was the analysis and interpretation of the scientific activities and publications of the era's cultural politicians. In the cultural administration of the Bethlenian consolidation period, it was primarily Kunó Klebelsberg, Gyula Kornis and Zoltán Magyary whose activities and works provided the topics that enabled the formulation of the era's metaphors. I used these politicians' scientific and journalistic studies and articles to support my arguments. The literary and scientific works of the determining intellectuals of the

era's cultural life (József Huszti and József Balogh) also helped address certain issues because they clarified the views that were present in the era.

The Thesis approaches the metaphors of the political regime of the 1920's from the point of view of the history of ideology. The traditional descriptive approach is a natural element of my methodology because it renders the actions of the era's politicians interpretable in concrete historical situations. The emphasis, however, is not on political or institutional history. My goal is rather to apply hermeneutical viewpoints, which impart an exploratory and interpretative nature to the Thesis. I intend to explore the intellectual and emotional roots and specific areas of the symbolic policy that was manifested in the era's historical setting. In addition to classical source criticism, the method of comparison is also especially suitable to distinguish between mythical and rational elements.

3. Findings of the Research

1. My Thesis presents the ideological environment of the consolidation policy in the period examined. I showed that an important element of the actions of the Bethlenian political elite was their endeavour to make the value system of the new Hungary to be built available to the public. This task was not an easy one since everyday actions carry a different meaning in politics. Phenomena that appear to be neutral and spontaneous are in fact accompanied by emotions, wills and struggles that are indicative of the given political community's thinking and directions of action. Political symbols, which combine the elements of social reality and imagined reality, draw on the highlighted meaningful elements. The Thesis does not describe the world of concrete material and conceptual symbols but focuses on the situation where the political regime is forced to identify the major prospects of society.

2. I highlighted that it was the capitalized public of modern Hungary through which the political regime was able to communicate its ideology. This medium of social communication was suitable to involve millions of people regardless of their geographical locations. I consider it important for post-Trianon Hungary that as a general rule, the limits of public sphere very often coincide with the border of the nation state, and may even extend further than that. This fact enabled the political elite to communicate its ideology even beyond the national border. The public sphere's eligibility to address the entire politicizing community increased the regime's appreciation of the press. I pointed out that the controlled public sphere created the conditions for the potential social legitimacy of the Bethlenian consolidation.

3. I showed that the political elite of the Horthy era had to accommodate to the existing social order, emphasizing continuity, and also present the reasons for the changes as well as the new structure of power. I presented that the regime, which was under pressure for legitimacy, tried to establish the theoretical and ideological background of new Hungary through culture.

4. I pointed out that the system and tools of the cultural administration, which was at the meeting point of metaphoric communication and political power, were suitable for the representation of the new order of power in the period examined. My approach, which described culture and politics in terms of interests, showed that cultural systems were manifested in extremely complex structures and multi-functional institutions that covered a reality that was incorporated into almost all sub-systems of social life in several ways. In my opinion, this resulted in the failure of the regime to clearly articulate its political objectives. The opposing parties did not perceive each other clearly and there were no winners to the competition. Cultural administration featured, in addition to a large-scale representation of interests, an intense selection of interests. Due to the solid network of interests, the number of objectives that lent themselves to being converted into political power was rather limited, and the highly centralized power restricted the articulation of interests in the form of political wills.

5. I highlighted that in the authoritarian Horthy regime, which was based on civic values and integrated into the capitalist economic model, freedom of speech was observed in both the press and the Parliament. In the public sphere, which constrained the regime's power, the opposition and its papers were able to exercise freedom of speech on a regular basis. I have also noted, however, that the opportunity for a smooth and non-discriminatory competition for governmental power, which normally characterizes democracies, was non-existent in post-Trianon Hungary. Maintenance of control over the public sphere was a determinant of István Bethlen's work as the country's Prime Minister. The social and political elite that surrounded the regime represented substantial intellectual and financial potentials. In the period examined, the elite got to be able to form public identity and mentality and imparted a technocratic and conservative nature to Bethlen's consolidation policy. Due to their cultural capital, the persons close to the government represented the mentality of the political regime throughout the political, economic and social sectors. Still, in the controlled public sphere created by the conservative-liberal government of the 1920's, the press managed to retain its versatility despite all integrative efforts. The era's public sphere enabled both the regime to convey its ideology and the opposition to express its views.

6. The Thesis showed that in the press, the intellectual bureaucrats of the cultural administration naturally enjoyed a prominent role. They possessed the state administration's means to form public opinion and were continuously involved in political debates. The chapter on the ideology of neo-nationalism pointed out that the leading bureaucrats of the 1920's were most influenced by the moral scientific ambitions that were built upon the German historical-philosophical and neo-Kantian thinking. I showed that in addition to the emphasizing of idealistic values, the disintegration of historical Hungary was the other reason why actions against the pessimistic views of culture moved to the foreground. Political actions featured the common characteristic of the emergence of the concept of "declining era", which became the starting point to the new interpretation of the world. The perception of defensive European culture manifested itself as the depreciation of conventional values, which enabled the drawing of an analogy between the "destruction of Hungary" and the decline of the West.

7. The Thesis described the issues on the basis of which the political regime articulated its integrative efforts in the second half of the 1920's. One of the issues concerned what ideology Hungarians should apply when describing themselves amidst the changing political environment. Kunó Klebelsberg's neo-nationalistic system sought to address this issue. His system, which was built upon a neo-humanistic and idealistic philosophy, represented its goals in a typically propagandistic form. Instead of reason, emotions and the feeling of connectedness were given emphasis in the writings, and that provided impetus for action-oriented behaviour. Actions related to political situations are best interpreted in the context of practical work and goal-oriented attitude. In the neo-nationalistic ideology, the upgrading of emotion to a "sacred" thing created a new symbolic space which rendered the remote political objectives tangible. The ideas that were manifested in the metaphoric medium showed the possible order of social integration. In the writings, the strong and educated middle class appears as an ideal leader, which is capable of restoring the country's integrity. It is without doubt that in his political milieu, Klebelsberg's metaphors were valid because they provided opportunities for discourse. I also pointed out that the contradictions were clearly perceived because the reality did not support neo-nationalism, and that, in turn, created false identification. Ideological explications were unable to defuse the accumulated social tension. It was this fact on the basis of which the public judged Klebelsberg in the 1930's and that rendered his ideology invalid.

8. I highlighted that the ruling elite did not only have to specify what Hungarians should be like but also what the new Hungary should be like. An important aspect of Hungarian national

identity was the fact that culture provided the determining ideals for Hungarians' self-identification. In my opinion, in the Hungarian national identity, the sense of historical nation evolved from the attitude that existed towards national minorities. Consciousness of the ability to establish a nation suggested, albeit not always in a sovereign manner, the concept of a large nation. That gave momentum to Hungarians' commitment to organize and maintain control over the Carpathian Basin. In the second half of the decade examined, political journalism had to distinguish between two strongly marked viewpoints. According to one of them, the European analogies of Hungary's history had to be drawn. Christian, educated and civilized categories marked the limits to the scope of this viewpoint. According to the other approach, the determining politicians of the post-Trianon era had to create an image of historical Hungary that would have been accepted by the nationalities living on the territories to be re-annexed. I explained that in the neo-patriotic philosophical system of László Ottlik, a thinker in István Bethlen's circle, the starting point was *natio Hungarica,* the political community that was organized on the basis of medieval territorial principles. Ottlik deemed the state that is above the peoples an ideal organizational form for new Hungary. In my opinion, the plan revealed several aspects of the objectives of the conservative government. Firstly, an interesting element of Ottlik's work is that he neglected the power of identity created by origin, religion and native language and only explored territorial integrity. In the field of the concepts associated with Saint Steven, Ottlik promoted cultural unity, which symbolized Hungarian supremacy in the eyes of the minorities. Secondly, his assumption that a geographically united Carpathian Basin may only exist within a single political community (state) stemmed from a distorted interpretation of the political and social reality. Thirdly, the conservative political elite were strongly attached to romantic traditions because they deemed themselves (the Hungarians) superior to the minorities in every respect.

9. The third characteristic element of the integrative Bethlenian political ideology was the dispute over the *Numerus Clausus Act* modified in 1928. I pointed out that after World War I, the situation of Jews in Hungary as well as the country's official policy on Jews underwent drastic changes. Anti-Semitic ideology, which had existed on the political periphery, first became a determining element of the system after 1919. The provisions of the *Numerus Clausus Act* and their amendments were the talking points in the agitated political milieu. In my interpretation, the most important elements of the dispute were the ones which presented the possible directions of integration. I pointed out that the Jews that were willing to assimilate became involved in the discourse and found themselves in a fierce debate with the Orthodox Jewish community. The debate presented the views of groups that accepted assimilation as a natural process while handled their Jewish identity with liberty.

<u>The Author's Other Publications on the Subject Matter of the Thesis:</u>

2007. Efficiency and Functionality. A New Paradigm in Hungary's Scientific Policy in the 1920's. In: Inventárium. Edited by: Magdolna Láczay, Lajos András Kiss. College of Nyíregyháza, Nyíregyháza (accepted for publishing).

2006. Ideas and illusions. Politics and Culture in the 1920's. Krúdy Publishing House, Nyíregyháza.

2005. History of Hungarian Cultural Policy between 1920-1990. Csokonai Publishing House, Debrecen, pp 5-292. Co-author: Mihály Fónai.

2005. Politics, Power, Culture. The Nature of Political Power in Hungary in the 1920's. In: Inventárium. Edited by: Magdolna Láczay, Lajos András Kiss. College of Nyíregyháza, Nyíregyháza, pp 166-176.

2005. Masses and Their Age. Edited by and the introductions written by: M. Róbert Drabancz. Krúdy Publishing House, Nyíregyháza.

2002. Hungarians and Quality. New Conservative Thinking in Sándor Síks Works. In: Roles and Competitiveness of Regions in the European Union. Edited by: Dr. Lajosné Vass. Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg County Scientific Public Foundation, pp 149-151.

2002. Unbinding and Binding. Ottokár Prohászka's Modern Catholicism. In: Inventárium. Edited by: Magdolna Láczay, Lajos András Kiss. College of Nyíregyháza, Nyíregyháza, pp 56-62.

2001. Study of the Hungarian Nation and Cultural Diplomacy. In: The Role of Language in European Culture. Edited by: Dr. Lajosné Vass. Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg County Scientific Public Foundation, pp 107-110.

2000. A European Hungarian Cultural Politician. New Pedagogical Journal, 2000/7-8, pp 195-200.

2000. Berlin, Vienna, Rome. System of Relations of the Hungarian Scientific Policy in Central Europe between the World Wars. In: Inventárium. Edited by: Csaba Berde, Kálmán Gyuricsku. College of Nyíregyháza, Nyíregyháza, pp 12-16.