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FACULTY OF HUMANITIES

PH.D. THESIS SUMMARY

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Electoral behaviour in Pest, Hungary, in the 1875–1890 period

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Choice of topic and research objectives

The modernisation paradigm, much in the focus of Hungarian social historians' attention, looks into the temporality, nature and extent of development in Hungary of the characteristics of modern societies. In my dissertation I have analysed electoral behaviour not from a political historian's point of view, but from that of a social historian, within the framework of this paradigm. I wished to gain insight into the emergence of the modern forms of political participation and their roots, by determining the social status of the voters who gave the basis of contemporary parties and by analysing their behaviour. I decided to carry out the detailed analysis of the data of the parliamentary elections of 1878, 1881 and 1884 in Budapest's constituencies no. 4, 6 and 9.

Social history – and microhistory in particular – often uses the reactions of people and social groups to unusual or extraordinary events in order to gain a better understanding of their behaviours and motivations and thus tends to focus on deviant people and groups and unusual events. In contrast, my dissertation focused on a series of elections that were typical for the period in question – when practically nothing extraordinary happened. In my view, it can distort our image of contemporary voters' behaviour if historians only study atypical elections, strewn with extraordinary occurrences.

The other reason why I narrowed the scope of my study to these three parliamentary elections is that it enabled me to compare the voters of several subsequent elections – as in 1877 the borders of constituencies were significantly modified. I picked three typical constituencies from Pest: no. 4 being the old inner city of Pest, one of the residential hubs of the national and local elite and also one of the hotspots of the moderate opposition; no. 6, *Terézváros* being one of the focal points of the metropolitan development of Budapest, with a significant Jewish community; and no. 9 being the poorest district of Pest, comprising *Ferencváros*, *Kőbánya* and parts of *Józsefváros*. Moreover, in the latter, the 1878 elections saw the victory of a candidate with a program of independence (in the dominantly pro-government capital) who, however, lost his mandate to a pro-government opponent in 1881, and 1884 likewise brought pro-government victory. Metropolitan development was almost exclusively taking place on the Pest side of the capital, then recently unified into Budapest (in 1873 from its three composite parts, Pest, Buda and Óbuda), thus I didn't consider it fruitful to include any districts from the Buda and Óbuda parts in my research, due to their dissimilar social context.

Through studying the three elections in question, I wished to find out whether the political structure of the given period reflected the stratification of contemporary society. Although certain social groups were completely left out of this type of political participation and could not make their voice heard in parliament (I mainly imply industrial workers and the agrarian population with little or no landholding), my starting hypothesis was that it is possible to witness the articulation of different values and interests among those with participatory rights. This means that it wasn't exclusively a homogenous elite that got parliamentary representation: while the system made it impossible to articulate certain interests (basically those of the citizens with no property), some further social groups could realistically make efforts to give their interests at least partial parliamentary representation – or at least could feel that certain candidates partially stood for their interests.

In this respect I wished to examine whether there were significant dissimilarities between the party preferences of certain social groups with suffrage and whether these are explicable with some advocacy strategies, and also whether these allow us to gain insight into their respective level of 'contentedness' with the extant social order.

I also sought to answer the question what kind of differences were there between the social status and voters' behaviour of the three chosen districts and whether it is possible to make a distinction between constituencies along the lines of 'elite' vs 'plebeian' attitudes.

Also, I wished to examine whether the distribution of voters reflects any attempts on behalf of those in power to exert their influence on voting behaviour and to what extent the members of specific social groups found it risky to cast their vote against the intentions of those currently in power. Another, related set of questions is which persons and institutions can be considered the representatives of power in a given constituency and whether these persons could automatically be considered the local agents of a national power structure.

Sources and methods of research

In the period of the Dualist Era, in some constituencies – due to open balloting – lists of casted votes are available, as well as registers of voters and minute books of the elections. Surveys of political party preferences were naturally unknown in the period, still these lists enable us to uncover the political decisions of late voters: indeed, not only in the form of

statistical probabilities but by clear identification of each and every voter. As a result, open balloting (an antidemocratic form of political technique) became a special source of social historical research that aims at exploring the interrelations between political participation and social status. Nevertheless, these materials have so far scarcely been used for social historical analysis. One rare exception is András J Horváth who defined the social background of political parties by analysing the casted votes of the 1884 election of representatives in *Józsefváros*. Horváth's work has since served as a methodological model for similar researches.

For the examination of political behaviour I designed a database that includes all data available in the register of voters of the selected election years' (i.e.: title for voting, address, occupation – and also the age of voters' from 1884 onwards). Inaccuracies in the register were refined on the basis of other sources (address books, blue books). I also recorded the casted vote of each voter.

To reconstruct the history of elections I surveyed the contemporary press, using newspapers of different political background and I also researched in archival sources to collect further data on the elections and on the key figures of the events. For the subject, the minute books of the general assembly of Budapest and the Archive of the Ministry of Inner Affairs (kept in the National Archives of Hungary) proved to be the most useful.

Structure of the Thesis

For understanding the electoral background of the parties of the Hungarian Parliament in the age of the Dualism I first outlined the main characteristics of contemporary parties and identified their position among the categories used by political sociologists – Moisei Ostrogorski and Max Weber, eminently (Chapter 1). These theorists aim was to understand the new type of political party that emerged by the end of the 19th century, i.e. political party based on party organisation. By describing the genesis of this new phenomenon they also elaborated a conceptual framework available for describing 19th-century-parties as well. In Chapter 1 I reviewed historical works on the characteristics of parties of the Dualist Era and I highlighted the debates that argued on the effects of the emerging distortions in the electoral system. On the one hand, according to András Gerő the majority of Hungary's population was not ready to accept the system created by the

Compromise, thus governmental majority could only be maintained by manipulations and frauds in elections. Dániel Szabó, on the other hand argued against direct influence on government forming, saying that because of the high costs of electoral campaign typically only the most probable winners entered the elections at all, and only the governing party launched enough candidates to have the chance of majority in the Chamber of Deputies.

In Chapter 2 I reviewed the historiography of Hungarian political social history that deals with the relationship of politics and society. I further elaborated on the difficulties one should face when categorizing voters according to their social background, and in the course of structural analysis (Chapter 3.) Chapter 4 deals with the questions of source criticism in the case of electoral registers and the lists of casted votes.

In the following chapters I focused on different factors that influence electoral behaviour. In Chapter 5 I outlined the normative legislation on suffrage and electoral procedures in the period. In Chapter 6 I analysed the circumstances of the division into constituencies in time of the selected elections. In Chapter 7 I summarized the main characteristics of the population of Budapest, the population of the selected constituencies, and the voters in such districts in depth.

In Chapter 8 I expounded the history of campaigns during the selected elections, and I also described the course of voting and the most important events during this process. Analysing the events of campaign my theoretical starting point was the “spatial turn” in history. With a focus on the usages of space in society my main questions were: who (which authorities, which social groups) could shape voters (and Budapest’s population as a whole) behaviour during the course of elections in urban space, and how did these actors exercise their influence. My aim was to grasp and understand the interactions of power – groups excluded from elections – and voters.

Chapter 9 is the analysis of registers of voters and lists of casted votes. I classified each voter into occupational categories, taking into consideration contemporary society’s rank and prestige hierarchies, structure of economic activities, and income situation. In the case of the 1878 election in *Ferencváros* I also attempted to investigate voters’ segregation considering their place of residence. I particularly emphasized the analysis of bureaucrats’ electoral behaviour.

In the last part of my thesis I attempted to refine the results arising from the

statistically based analysis of electoral behaviour. It is a simplification to describe complex social stratification according occupational status *ab ovo*; and individual life courses, personal paths cannot be grasped in their totality by the schematic and general notes of registers or address books. Therefore, I shifted scale in order to get a closer understanding of individual actors' choices and decisions. Using the form of case studies, using mostly narrative sources I introduced Géza Csorba, a bureaucrat – an exception, since he was not a supporter of the governing party; and a typical Weberian *honoratior* family, the Prücklers.

Main findings

The analysis of the data in the registers of voters and lists of casted votes makes it appear that despite the divisions inside parliament being basically the result of disagreements in questions of constitutional law, through MP candidates well demarcated social groups were able to articulate their interests. Thus the proto-parties of Hungary, functioning before the birth of the modern party system, were not similar to modern parties in terms of their structure, yet they did perform the same function, i.e. they represented the needs of given social strata in the political space. Instead of a national power structure by and large based on the hegemony of a multi-party system, in the constituencies within the scope of my study we find a politically very differentiated and pluralistic society, where within certain social groups the force field of parties could be surprisingly balanced – even in the capital, considered mostly pro-government.

Needless to say, not everybody could make their voice heard to the same extent in the political system of the period, with the majority of society being excluded from suffrage – but the analysis of the composition of those groups that did have the suffrage shows that this population was fairly heterogenous, comprising widely dissimilar social strata (as also shown by the earlier analyses of the composition of the voting population).

Obviously, social status, occupation or housing can not, in and by themselves, explain the political decisions and individual choices of voters or those who abstained from voting. The reasons are always much more complex, with countless other factors – such as ethnic or denominational background, family relationships and individual life situations – having much greater influence on voter behaviour. The registers of voters registries, however, reveal no other types of data concerning this population. Nevertheless, that much can be safely

inferred from the available data that there was a correlation between the party structure and the social stratification of the given period, and there is an observable interrelatedness between the distribution of votes and the social status of the respective voters. (Thus the findings of the current research corroborate the conclusions drawn by András J Horváth concerning the parliamentary elections in *Józsefváros* in 1884.)

As for the three elections in question, the governing party was impossible to overturn on a national scale. The opposition parties organising themselves in this period didn't seriously consider the possibility that they might gain the majority of the votes. Their only aim was to keep or gain certain specific constituencies. (The situation is made more complex by the fact that some MPs would transfer from one party to another during a parliamentary cycle.) The elections, in this respect, promised no change – surprisingly, however, we see cut-throat competition in the constituencies with more than one candidate. The most fierce battles were not even fought along the same demarcation lines as those inside parliament, but rather in the districts where there was more than one party that had reason to believe they were going to be victorious. All this, in turn, seems to indicate that the real stake of these elections was not winning the majority of parliamentary seats, but the representation of certain social groups in the House. The majority of those who had the suffrage did wish to express their opinion and make their voices heard, even though nothing much was actually at stake. The relatively high participation rate (significantly lower, of course, than in previous elections, with really high stakes) shows that even though there were large groups of voters that cast their vote as a result of abuse of power (bribing or pressurizing of voters), the number of those who did vote according to their informed political opinion is not to be underestimated.

During the election campaign the canvassers collected information about their potential voters, deciding how approachable or coercible they were according to their occupation (see, for instance, the groups of bureaucrats who were coerced to vote for the ruling party's candidates). They made a distinction between more and less important voters. The research also shed light on the fact that on the day of the election not all potential supporters were approached – only as many as were needed for victory. This also implies that those who abstained were not necessarily politically neutral – they may have been part of the 'spare voters', only called on if the competition turned especially fierce. Looking at the campaign events and rallying tricks has also shown how the 'masses' excluded from the suffrage could, in fact, play a certain, if limited, role influencing who became a candidate

and making publicity for them, and also how the authorities and the parties who collaborated with them achieved that once inside the polling station, it was really only the wish of the actual voters that counted.

The net result of the individual elections basically depended on the circle of people who administered the voting. This, however, didn't automatically and in all cases bring the victory of the ruling party: the Weberian *honoratiors* and the power centres under their influence did not necessarily support the government, while their opinion climate did reliably predict the results. All this, in turn, didn't mean that the rally teams or the voters themselves considered these battles decided before they were fought. The political divisions within the local Weberian *honoratiors* as within some interest groups of those with the suffrage made it possible, at places, to have really cut-throat competition. We see examples of surprisingly fierce fights for the parliamentary seats, despite the hegemonic position and unquestionable stability of the power of the ruling Liberal Party. The difference between the overall political system of the country and the local election fights is best illustrated by the cases when these were fought between candidates who represented the same political party.

The period I have examined was a transitional one. It saw the emergence and early functioning of some elements of parliamentary democracy, modern political movements and behaviour, yet it can't be interpreted within the framework of modern mass democracy. The society of Pest had only just set foot on the way leading to modernisation, and the party structure of the time didn't show the characteristics of the organised parties we see in later historic periods. Even though by the elections studied in my research the deformities that later, by the turn of the century, became the norm hadn't even become widespread, certain signs already foretold the rigidification of the election system that rendered it resistant to reform. The very narrow scope of the population who were allowed to vote, the open ballot, the pressure applied by those in power, the unsupervised nature of campaign financing and the unsubstantiated yet widely held claims of corruption were well observable already in the examined period.

My published articles in relation with the topic of the thesis:

- Az 1878-as és az 1881-es országgyűlési képviselő-választások a budapesti IX. választókerületben. [Parliamentary elections in 1878 and 1881 in Budapest, 9th electoral district.] FONS 2008. 4. 375–424.
- A politika személyessége. [The personal(ity) of politics.] Budapesti Negyed 2010. 68. 181–209.
- A választás topográfiája. Az 1878-as pesti országgyűlési képviselő-választás korteshadjáratának térhasználata. [Topography of an election. The usage of urban space in the 1878 parliamentary election's campaign.] Korall 2011. 136–161.