

## THESES

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### **The Hungarian far-right elite from the beginning of the 1930s until 1945**

**Ph. D. Thesis**

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#### **1. The Subject of the Dissertation**

The far-right wing of the Horthy-period is a collective term for a rather heterogeneous political phenomenon. All those political aspirations can be classified as far-right, which demanded radical social, economic and – along with all of these – personal change, doing so on the basis of over-zealous nationalism and partly racism. Another common characteristic is that they defined themselves in opposition to groups: anti-Bolshevists, anticapitalists, antiliberals, antiparliamentarists, anti-Semites. If one looks through the political groups of the era which were called far-right, it can be clearly seen that the so-called counter-revolutionary organisations, the radical Christian-Socialists, the Racial Defenders, the Hungarian Fascists and the National Socialists and even the individual initiatives which cannot be classified in either of the aforementioned bigger groups, but drafted similar demands can be counted here.<sup>1</sup>

Examining the formation of the parties and the press linked to them, it is distinctly visible that in the beginning of the period the Hungarian far-right implied the counter-revolutionary groups, the Racial Defenders and the Christian Socialists. However, by the middle of the 1920s, their movements ran out of breath. Nevertheless, at the time of the Great Crash, Hungarian National Socialist groups appeared which copied the Italian and later increasingly the German pattern. In the second part of the period this tendency became stronger and stronger inside the far-right wing, although none of the former groups disappeared entirely. However, by the elections of 1939 most far-right parties declared

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<sup>1</sup> They are reviewed by Rudolf Paksa: Szélsőjobboldali pártok és mozgalmak a Horthy-korszakban. [Far-right parties and movements in the Horthy-period.] = *Kommentár*, 2007/5. 68–75.; and Rudolf Paksa: Szélsőjobboldali pártprogramok a Horthy-korban. [Far-right partyprogrammes in the Horthy-period.] = *Politikai pártok a 19–20. században. Tanulmányok*. [Political parties in the 19-20th century. Studies.] Edit. Attila Réfi – István Sziklai. Bp., 2008, MTA–ELTE Pártok, pártrendszerek, parlamentarizmus kutatócsoport. 85–106.

themselves National-Socialists. It is shown by a competent article published in July, 1939 by Tibor Kórody, a member of the Parliament and one of the most active publicists of the Arrow-Cross Party.<sup>2</sup>

„We have to make it clear that we, the far-right wing have sharply separated ourselves in our worldview and our program from the so-called right-wing and we stand up against the belief that we are distinguished by mere degrees of difference, or by the speed of the realization of our program – meaning that only a temporal difference would distinguish us. According to the standpoint of the 'conservative middle', the present order [i.e. socio-economic-political settlement – R. P.] is good and suitable for the assurance of the development of the nation. [...] According to the view of the right-wing and the far-right wing, life is full of failures and injustice which must be changed and mended. [...] According to the right-wing's worldview [...] the system needs improvement, because while it is the engine of the liberal-capitalist order of life and its machinery still functions, it allows the malicious engineers by means of these features to lead the economic life of the nation in the wrong direction. [...] So it is the engineer and the beneficiaries of the system that must be changed.”

On the other hand, he has defined the far-right wing as not being satisfied with the 'social drops of oil' of relief programs, but as supposing that

„not only the engineer is bad and the machinery itself is good – as the right-wing proposes – but the whole machinery needs replacement. [...] In virtue of this, we pose the question: can this crisis be solved without radical changes and actions fulfilled by a thorough and courageous hand? Yes or no? If you respond to this question with yes – you are not a far-right – if your answer is 'not', by reason of your aspect of life you belong to us. This question is essential, because the answer determines if the unemployed shall get a job or 'free soup', if the peasant shall get land or promises; that finally the politics of the social drop of oil would be replaced by a socialism that acts in the interest of the nation.”

The views of Kórody were completed by a writing, published in the fall of 1941 by Károly Maróthy, whose title is already expressive: 'Today the right-wing is – National Socialist'.<sup>3</sup> In this question, Maróthy already exceeds Kórody by declaring that in 1941 someone is indeed considered to be right-wing, who demands joining the National Socialist Europe in its foreign policy, and demands riddance of Jews and a 'social transformation' in its internal affairs.

In our dissertation we have made an effort to make a careful survey of the Hungarian National Socialist movements – in particular through the achievements of its elite. This subject was

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<sup>2</sup> Tibor Kórody: Mi választja el a „szélsőjobbot” a „jobbaldaltól”. [What separates the 'far-right' from 'right-wing'.] = *Magyarország*, 20. July 1939. 3.

<sup>3</sup> *Pesti Újság*, 1. October 1941.

examined in four aspects. Firstly, the subject's history of research. The bibliography at the end of the paper, aiming at completeness, is closely connected to this chapter. After this, we collected the main features of the history of the Hungarian National Socialist movements. The separation of the rather complex, at the first sight often seemingly chaotic National Socialist movements is indispensable to circumscribe the political elite of the National Socialism. Based upon this knowledge, in the third chapter we analysed the sociological composition and the characteristics of the paths of life of the National Socialist political elite (Members of Parliament, ministers, party leaders). After this prozopographical examination, we carried out a research on the intellectual achievements of the National Socialist elite through its own press. For this, first of all we had to examine the circle of the National Socialist journals, and their relations. After this, we introduced the main characters (owners of the newspapers, editors, journalists) of the the National Socialist press. Finally, we tried to form a notion of the intellectual hinterland of the National Socialist by presenting a concrete printed matter – a National Socialist journal that we judged to be of the highest standard.

Accordingly, in our paper we want to give a general idea of the the activity and achievement of the Hungarian National Socialists by means of four different ways of approach (historiography, history of politics, sociology, history of ideas). Thus, the various chapters enabled us to answer different questions. In the frame of the historiographical overview we aimed to extensively review the literature of the subject, and with the help of this to reveal the main trends of research and their results. In the history of politics section we outlined the history of the Hungarian national-socialism and its internal configuration based on the subject's bibliography and our own research. In the prozopographical chapter, we tried to find the common features of the leading National Socialist politicians (ministers, Members of Parliament, partyleaders) and what distinguished them from the representatives of other political trends in the period. Finally, in the chapter of the history of press we studied who were the leaders of the National Socialist opinion and if it was a serious intellectual hinterland for the Hungarian national-socialism.

## 2. Conceptual frames

The deeper investigation of the rather heterogeneous far-right wing required the conceptual separation of the even the smaller subcategories. Hence, in our paper – contrary to the Hungarian historiographical tradition - we did not use the following expressions as synonyms: Fascist, Arrow-Cross Man, National Socialists, Hungarist etc. They denote different contents, the tendencies inside of the National Socialist movement. The broadest concept we used was the concept of 'far-right'. This included the counter-revolutionary organisations, such as MOVE and ÉME, furthermore the Racial Defenders, the radical Christian Socialists and the Hungarian Fascists and National Socialists.<sup>4</sup> Within this concept, we dealt with the 'new far-right' which appeared in the '30s i.e. the national-socialism.

Inside the Hungarian National Socialist movement, we can separate (and they separated themselves as well) the Hungarian Fascists, who followed the Italian pattern and those who followed the German pattern. Initially, the Hungarian National Socialists, who copied the German pattern were called Swastikas. After the forbidding of the use of the swastika in Hungary after Hitler's accession to power, a new symbol spread: the arrow-cross. In the first half of the '30s, two important movements emerged in the camp of the Hungarian National Socialists. The groups organised in the capital and in the Transdanubean Region called themselves Arrow-Cross Men (in short form: Arrow Men) while in the Great Plain the followers of Zoltán Böszörményi called themselves Scyth-Cross Men. However, the latter disappeared by the middle of the decade, and the Arrow-Cross movement took over its place. This was the time that the expression 'arrow(-cross)' came into general use to denominate the Hungarian National Socialists.

In the middle of the 1930s newer groups emerged who wanted to separate themselves vigorously from the previous constitutions. As time passed, those who gathered around Ferenc Szálasi became the best-known group, they called themselves Hungarists. A provisionally successful party was also formed: the National Front, whose devotees called themselves Hungarian Socialists – however, this party could not strike root because of its feebleness. Thus, at the beginning of the 40s we could detach two sides of the Hungarian

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<sup>4</sup> For these, see Rudolf Paksa: *Jobboldali radikalizmus a Horthy-korszak első éveiben*. [Far-right radicalism during the first years of the Horthy-period.] = *Rubicon*, 2010/4–5. 116–124.; Rudolf Paksa: *A Magyar Nemzeti Függetlenségi Párt megalakulása és a fajvédők programja*. [The foundation of the Hungarian National Liberation Party and the program of the Racial Defenders.] = *Sic itur ad Astra*, 2005/3–4. 58–88.; Rudolf Paksa: *Szélsőjobboldali mozgalmak az 1930-as években*. [Far-right movements in the 1930s.] = *A magyar jobboldali hagyomány 1900–1948*. [The Hungarian right-wing tradition 1900–1948.] Edit. Ignác Romsics. Bp., 2009, Osiris. 275–304.

National Socialists. At this time the adherents of Szálasi were called either Hungarists (since this was the name of Szálasi's system of conception) or Arrow-Cross Men (the official name of the party was Arrow-Cross Party). The National Socialists external to the party of Szálasi called themselves simply National Socialists or Arrow Men which had taken root in the '30s (but not Arrow-Cross Men in order to avoid misunderstanding). This dichotomy between the adherents of Szálasi (Hungarists or Arrow-Cross Men) and the others (National Socialists or Arrow Men), existed all along and understandably embarrassed posterity on account of the apparent similarities. In favour of historical loyalty and discernment we wanted to use these expressions in their original meaning in our dissertation.

### **3. Results**

Above all, we can draw the conclusion from the entire review of the historiography of the subject that it is not only the barely dozen works (the most quoted in the literature) that handled the issue of the Hungarian National Socialists, but more than three hundred papers reported at least partly useful items. It turned out from these that the literature often repeats false statements, created before and after 1945, with the intention to discredit the movement. These are the statements that were reiterated and transmitted into the public after 1949 by the state historiography which was already standing on dogmatic grounds. Although from the 1960s more and more expert works appeared, the widely known summaries published in this period now have to be revised in some aspects and we have to handle their statements with suspicion, since aspersions and derogations – by this time handled as facts – appeared often in them. It is conspicuous that writings examining smaller subtopics or local affairs (and often published in hidden places) were much less conceptual as the bigger and better known summaries. Even though it is indisputable that many among the authors of the 1960s, revealed the past on an astonishingly extensive source base, it is still perceptible that occasionally the historians had to set their own gained knowledge to the expectations of the period. On the other side, we have the memoirs published in Western emigration and republished in Hungary after the change of regime and the historical evaluations based on these. These are supposed to be treated at least with as much criticism as the state historiography. After the change of regime – especially from the beginning of the millennium – studies were published with brand-new aspects (based on the application of newer sources and essays freer from ideological

encumbrances). According to these results, the history of the far-right can and should be rewritten from several aspects.

In the second chapter of our dissertation we have made an attempt to achieve this goal on the grounds of the outcomes of the literature on the topic and our own research. In the meanwhile, we aimed at separating the political trends the best conceivable. Hence we tried to avoid deliberately the interfusion of the right and the far-right wings and we exerted to express with their original appellations that also inside the far-right wing, more subcategories can be dissevered.

Although from the second part of the '30s, the far-right declared themselves principally Hungarian National Socialist, in the 1940s, the two camps were furcated markedly: one was the Hungarists bunched around Szálasi, the other was essentially a self-confessed racist program of Imrédy–Pálffy's *Alliance of Party*. Besides them smaller far-right groups existed throughout (for example the ancient Racial Defenders or the Christian Socialists). Their separation is not useless also because it points out that rival trends existed inside the far-right. Accordingly it is absolutely unsubstantiated to speak about the continuity of the far-right from 1919 to 1944. Neither personal, nor ideological continuity is demonstrable for example between the movement of the racists in the 1920s and the Arrow-Cross Men. For instance it is revealing that the leader figures of the Racial Defenders (Gömbös, Dezső Szabó, Eckhart, Bajcsy-Zsilinszky, Ulain, Lendvai, Héjjas) turned against the Arrow-Cross Men in the '30s without exception. The canvassing of their programs pointed out that the National Socialists of the '30s demanded much more radical socio-economic changes and the entire reformation of the role of the state, while the Racial Defenders wanted just token restraints and the reinforcement of the role of the state and besides they required positions for themselves and for their devotees. (For that matter Miklós Lackó pictured this distinction by introducing the expression of 'genteel fascism' It is remarkable that the significant part of the National Socialist politicians who got into the Parliament in 1939 gradually returned to the much less subverter racial defender views.

The more particular review of the history of the far-right made an opportunity for us to control and often to confute some prevailing banalities. Accordingly, it can apparently be relegated to the circle of myths that the movements of the Hungarian National Socialists of the '30s would have been financed by the Third Reich. The accusation of the 'rolling marks' was a part of the discrediting political campaign. And though the precise economic background of the National Socialist movements are to this day undiscovered, from the sparse data – and from the fact that the conceivers of the accusation have never been able to draw

up with an evidence of German support – it is obvious that at an early stage they could have depended only upon the capital (money, press, relations and acquaintance) of the leaders of the party. From the middle of the '30s, they economised from the membership fee of the expanding movement, and from the end of the '30s came to it the profit of the high sales journals. Compared to these, the 'German subvention' must have been infinitesimal, and if there was any, it probably did not derived from any statal source. But one thing is absolutely clear: until the fall of 1944 Szálasi did not obtain Hitler's confidence and support.

Another, current question is how much can the Arrow-Cross Men be regarded as 'green Bolsheviks', as they were called even before 1945 by their right-wing and liberal enemies. In this question we bend to acknowledge the similitities, as long as the National Socialists became successfully the alternative political power that seemed to promise the replacement of the actual system. (By the way, this partly derived from the fact that in the Horthy-period the left-wing opposition could only operate within strait borders, so the radical changement of the system could be suggested only from the right-wing in the hope of success.) Thus was it possible that their watchwords, and often even their voters came from the left (especially from the trade-unionism). Nevertheless, eximining the walk of life of the members of the elite of the Hungarian National Socialist, it is notable that in their circle hardly anybody had a past of being left-wing. Ferenc Kassai-Schallmayer and Ödön Málnási belonged to the few exceptions. What is markable that they became the ideologists of the Arrow Men Parties. On the whole it can be said that in the elite of the Hungarian National Socialist, the left-wing past was not typical, but the trade-unionist and marxist grounding wasn't not admitted disadvantageous for the ideologists of the party. Datas that sparsely turned up in the course of our research prove that in the second part of the 1930's, provisionally on the middle manager and local levels (in particular among the workmen-enlisters), there were several people with a past of labour movement. But the majority could not take their share from the success of 1939, because by that time they became marginalized.

The results of the elections of 1939 are remarkable also in themselves. Namely, they point it out that a significant part of the society was discontent with the actual system, and wanted radical changes. Lots of them hoped these changes from the Arrow-Cross Men. However, it shortly became clear for them that the Arrow-Cross Men oppositionist fraction – even if it was ranked large in the Horthy-period – is not able to take its program through the majority of the government. Sensing this, several sympathizers touned away from the Arrow Men Parties, which generated a process of dissolution inside them. These processes were firmed by the constant pressure of the government and the statal organisations (especially the

court, the gendarmerie and the local administration), which the bigger civil organisations often joined. The antipathy against the Arrow-Cross Men of the official bodies and the leading civil organisations can be demonstrated unambiguously starting from the government of Gömörbös, and it characterized every later government. Consequently, it is wrong to consider the Arrow-Cross Men as the 'last reserve' of the elite of the Horthy-period, or as a political group supported by the government. As a matter of fact they were attacked severely: their public assemblies were prevented, their journals were regularly banned, their parties were dismissed, judicial procedure was launched against the active members, and the party membership of the civil servants and soldiers was banned in a decree. Moreover, the aimed political discrediting campaigns were regular against them.

However, in a peculiar way, this kind of administrative behaviour (essentially political persecution) first reached just the opposite effect: it dedicated them martyrs and confirmed their sense of interdependence. Besides the electoral system, this governmental policy also contributed to the fact that in the Horthy-period not one delegate of the oppositionist political force could gain significant administrative experiences. Therefore, in 1944, then in 1945, at the time of the change of regime the former governing elite was followed by a fresh-new political company. The administrative measures proved to be effective so far that the standpoint of many National Socialist politicians softened to Racial Defenders. This one and the tact of 'turning to the wind' lead collectively to the situation that by the year of 1944 the former Racial Defenders-program got a fairly wide base.

The examination of the sociological composition of the National Socialist political elite showed that their leader politicians were not more unqualified than their rivals. Regarding both their origins (family background, religion, social status) and their qualifications (structure of employment, highest reached qualification) showed similar picture to the ones within the governing party. Both groups were 'collector parties': within them all the social classes, professions, religions, careertypes were represented. It can be considered a significant difference, though, that the National Socialist politicians did possess neither relevant political experiences nor social prestige, since they were monopolized by the members of the governing party. Confronting the National Socialist with the other, more serious oppositionist groups (Social Democrats, Smallholders, Civil Liberals) it is remarkable that among those it is only them who organised themselves into a collector party, while the other oppositional formation remained specifically layerparty in nature. In the light of this, it is more understandable why could many regarded the far-right as the alternative to the governing party. At the same time it is clear as well why was the unsuccess so certain in the

case of their ascension to power: their lack of experience did not enable them to take over the governance of the state smoothly. However, it cannot even be forgotten that the precondition of their ascension to power in 1944 was not competence, but the most entire serving of the Germans's demands possible.

Examining the intellectual hinterland of the far-right two things could be stated. Firstly, it has to be emphasized that in the second part of the 1930s that press which gave ground to their opinions and maturation of their program was built up gradually. And this at the same time attracted gradually the intellectuals into the camp of the National Socialist. The examined National Socialist journal (called Új Európa [New Europe] edited by Mátyás Matolcsy) proved even that that a considerable intellectual hinterland existed behind the National Socialists. Consequently, this is a sharp disproof of the myth of the Arrow-Cross Men's unqualification. That is true, however, that in the '40s this intellectual base separated from Szálasi, and after a temporary independence it orientated itself towards either the more moderate *Party Alliance* or the radicals of the governing party.

The precise number of supporters of the Hungarism of Szálasi cannot be estimated. The only certain fact is that their reign collapsed chiefly on account of the defeat. Based on their programmes and decisions made during their governance, it seems that the totalitarian one-party state they developed was similar in numerous aspects to the system evolved after 1949. And it also can be taken for granted that they would have eliminated their political opponents and fictitious enemies (especially the Jews). Nevertheless, their political inaptitude is ascertainable so long as their dogmatic thinking and fanatic conviction close the door upon any (real)politics.

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