

## Book Reviews

Count István Bethlen, *Hungarian Politics During World War II. Treatise and Indictment*. Countess Ilona Bolza (editor). Munich: Rudolf Trofenik, 1985.

For the historian of interwar Hungary, the discovery of a previously unknown manuscript of Count István Bethlen creates a sense of anticipation and curiosity. Hungary's Prime Minister for a decade beginning in 1921 and a leading political figure in the 1920s and during World War II, Bethlen left behind no memoirs or first-hand accounts of the key events in which he participated. Unfortunately, this 27 page treatise, written in July, 1944 by Bethlen while in hiding during the German occupation, contributes very little to our knowledge of specific events of interwar Hungarian history. It does, however, offer insights into Bethlen's political philosophy and his state of mind at a time when Hungary was plunging headlong toward disaster.

Bethlen's treatise, which was entrusted in 1944 to a family friend, Countess Ilona Bolza, is a thorough indictment of the policies of those Hungarian leaders who had advocated that Hungary join with Nazi Germany in the war against Soviet Russia. In 1944 Count Bethlen could feel fully justified in producing such an indictment. Ever since 1939 he had argued privately that Germany could not win the war and that Hungary could best protect its national interests by a policy of armed neutrality. In 1940 he had opposed Hungary's signing of the Tripartite Pact and in 1941 he had urged that Hungary refrain from joining the campaign against the "Bolsheviks." In his 1944 treatise Bethlen argued that these decisions in 1940–41 were the "fatal blunders" that pushed Hungary down the

“slippery slope” that transformed the country into nothing more than a German “Gau” or protectorate.

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of Bethlen’s treatise are the thumbnail sketches he offered of the leading political figures of interwar Hungary. Although Bethlen’s assessments seem generally to be balanced and insightful, he did not hesitate to point out the shortcomings of his colleagues. Count Gyula Károlyi had “very little imagination.” István Csáky was too naive and László Bárdossy was “too weak.” Béla Imrédy lacked a “balanced judgment or balanced character.” Even Pál Teleki, whom Bethlen in general praises, is described as “no great judge of men.” The reader is left to draw the inference that Hungary would have been in much more capable hands if Bethlen had been prime minister during the critical years before and after 1941.

Bethlen’s sketch of Gyula Gömbös merits special mention, for the two men were often bitter political rivals who represented the two dominant wings of right-wing politics. Yet Bethlen wrote a remarkably balanced appraisal of Gömbös, who is depicted as a man of “lively imagination” and a “great deal of political appeal.” His anti-Semitism is described as comparable to that of “any decent Hungarian” who reacted with disgust to the events of 1918–1919. Looking back from the perspective of 1944, Bethlen found little fault even with Gömbös’s foreign policy. Collaboration with the Axis powers, Bethlen argued, was the correct policy at the time, since Hungary’s aspirations for territorial revision could not be fulfilled in any other way. No one could have predicted the unfortunate policies Germany and Italy would follow in later years. Of course, Bethlen found much to fault in Gömbös’s political style. Gömbös, he wrote, was the personification of a condottiere, reveling in conspiracies and secret societies and undermining parliamentary government. This kind of activity poisoned Hungarian political life and made possible the kinds of irresponsible acts that were committed in later years.

Bethlen’s treatise reflects the thinking of perhaps the most capable and perceptive of all interwar Hungarian statesmen. His condemnation of the “barbaric persecution of the Jews” and his spirited defense of freedom of the press and parliamentary government reveal a commitment to humanitarian and liberal principles. Yet the reader will be struck by the degree to which even Bethlen remained in the grip of a highly emotional nationalism and certain right-wing ideas. In the summer of 1944, when the very independence of Hungary was in jeopardy, Bethlen was still searching for a way to preserve Hungary’s territorial gains from the period 1938–1941. He seemed to believe that the Vienna Awards and the

Hungarian occupation of parts of Yugoslavia had been carried out "in accordance with international law," and that the victorious great powers should be able to understand this. That as late as July, 1944 even István Bethlen should suffer such an illusion is a striking demonstration of the way in which hatred of the Trianon Treaty and belief in the justice of Hungary's cause had pervaded the thinking of Hungarians in the interwar period.

Thomas Sakmyster  
University of Cincinnati

Egon F. Kunz. *The Hungarians in Australia* Melbourne: Australian Educa Press, 1985. Australian Ethnic Heritage Series. 148 + viii pages.

In the 1970s the Government of Australia, much like its Canadian counterpart, intensified its efforts to emphasize the multicultural nature of the country's society. One of the products of these efforts was, like in Canada, the start of publication of histories of the country's ethnic groups. The volume on Australia's Hungarians appeared in 1985, three years after the Canadian equivalent was published by the writer of these lines (in collaboration with M.L. Kovacs, Paul Bódy and Bennett Kovrig).

In selecting E.F. Kunz to write the volume in question, the editors of the Australian series had made a wise choice. Kunz is a long-time student of ethnic and immigration history, and is an experienced researcher. One of his fields of expertise is nineteenth century Hungarian migration to Australia, the story of which he had told before, in *Blood and Gold: Hungarians in Australia* (Cheshire, 1969). This story is summarized and updated in the present volume, offering fascinating reading on the careers, fortunes and misfortunes of the refugees of the 1848–49 revolutionary war (and even a few of their predecessors) in a distant and developing land. The chapters dealing with such early migration are followed by those covering the last decades of the nineteenth century, and the first decades of the twentieth. In this period only a few hundred Hungarians made it to the south seas continent. They ranged from poor peasants (attracted by offers of free land), to highly educated or trained individuals. Many of them were refugees from the territories that had been detached from historic Hungary by the post-World War I peace settlement.

The book's second half is devoted to a study of the waves of