

[Michelson on Lukacs, 'Chapters on the Hungarian Political Emigration, 1849-1867'](#)

Review published on Tuesday, June 30, 1998

Lajos Lukacs. *Chapters on the Hungarian Political Emigration, 1849-1867.* Budapest: Akademiai Kiado, 1995. 188 pp. \$29.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-963-05-6838-8.

Reviewed by Paul E. Michelson (Huntington College) **Published on** HABSBUrg (June, 1998)

Chapters on the Hungarian Political Emigration, 1849-1867

This is a fascinating book that provides the English reader with access for the first time into one of the nineteenth century's most interesting "behind the scenes" stories: the activities of the Hungarian emigration of 1848-1849, which Lajos Lukacs has been painstakingly exploring over four decades. [1] Despite its virtues, however, it is also a somewhat disappointing work because it is a selective, condensed version of the author's much fuller monograph *Magyar politikai emigracio: 1849-1867*; thus its modest title.[2]

The organization of the present work is reasonably straightforward: Chapter I deals with the background to the Hungarian emigration, which started even before the events of 1848-1849 had worked themselves out, and then moves on to detail the development of the three principal Magyar political centers in Turkey, France, and Great Britain. This is followed in Chapter II with an analysis of the relationship of Napoleon III and the Italian war of 1859 to the Hungarian emigration. (Unfortunately, almost nothing is said here about the pivotal Crimean War era.) Chapter III concentrates on the ultimately fruitless 1862 proposals for a possible Danubian confederation. Chapter IV moves on to trace the emergence of new groupings within the Hungarian emigration between 1863 and 1865. This culminates in Chapter V, which describes the Magyar emigration's involvement in the complex events connected with the Austro-Prussian-Italian War of 1866. A brief "epilogue" summarizes the aftermath as well as some of the author's principal conclusions.

The tale of the Magyar emigration actually begins before the defeat of the Hungarian 1848 since numerous emissaries were sent abroad as part of the diplomatic efforts to support the revolution. In many cases, these Hungarian agents became part of the emigre effort after 1849, especially in London and Paris. The primary goal of the emigration was to prepare for and achieve the national independence of Hungary. This implied a three-fold task: 1) organizing the independence movement, inside and outside the Habsburg Monarchy; 2) developing support in European public opinion; and 3) finding allies among European democratic movements and the anti-Austrian powers.

These tasks were complicated by the confusing context in which the Hungarian emigration operated, owing to the rapid changes that took place in European political life after 1848 and to the local vicissitudes impacting the three principal centers of the emigration: the Ottoman Empire (Kutahia), France (Paris), and Britain (London). They were also complicated by the conflicts that broke out among the emigres over leadership primacy (especially the role of Lajos Kossuth), the inevitable disputes and recriminations over the failures of 1848-1849, and the debates over strategies for the

present and future.

The western wing of the emigration, as Lukacs shows, tended to be more moderate and more circumspect. Thus, Laszlo Teleki in Paris was always careful to keep his activities strictly within legal bounds to avoid alienating French officials. At the same time, he was aware that Hungarian policy had to avoid antagonizing more conservative exile forces (such as the Poles led by Adam Czartoryski) or those of other nationalities with reason to suspect Magyar aims (such as the Romanians and Croats). [3] In addition to Teleki, other leaders of the western emigration included General Gyorgy Klapka, the diplomat Ferenc Pulszky (primarily in London), and the former revolutionary Prime Minister, Bertalan Szemere.

The eastern wing of the emigration was composed of those who fled or were exiled to Turkey. They tended to be more radical than the western wing, though their status as detainees under Ottoman control (until 1851), continuing fears of Tsarist or Habsburg extradition, and their much more tenuous material position limited their options. [4] They were dominated by the leading personality of the Hungarian emigration, Lajos Kossuth, who always thought of himself as the unquestioned leader of "free Hungarians" everywhere. In many respects, Lukacs' account of 1849-1867 is the story of how little Kossuth really led the emigration and how he progressively became isolated and in the end even irrelevant to Hungarian national history.

The need of the various emigration groups to maintain a viable position in the changing conditions of the several host countries created serious misunderstandings and gave rise to charges of opportunism and worse. In addition, the emigres came from widely varying backgrounds, situations, and positions. All this created, in Lukacs' view, a "burden of grave and unsolvable contradictions" (p. 11) for the emigration that produced incompatible strategies, bitter internal conflict, and, ultimately, failure.

Lukacs' account of Napoleon III and the Hungarian emigration in Chapter II is focused on the events involved in the Italian war of 1859. In contrast to his usually neutral approach, the author is highly critical of the French emperor and his policies, which he sees as primarily manipulative and deceptive. Though much of this is merited, Napoleon the Less does not deserve all of the cynicism with which he is judged here: in the end, he did make it possible for both the Italians and the Romanians to achieve national desiderata.

On the other hand, as Lukacs argues, though emigration leadership began to realize that their policy of trying to work with and through official circles in the West was not paying appropriate dividends, they were unable to appreciate the longer run implications of the events of 1855-1859. Since they were dependent on material support from Paris and Turin, this is not surprising. Ironically, Lukacs shows, Napoleon's policies in 1859, while dashing most of the hopes of the emigration leadership, opened up new prospects for a Hungarian national revival inside Hungary itself, and led eventually to the Austro-Hungarian compromise of 1867. It was even more ironic that this movement was to be led by conservative Magyar aristocrats and landed gentry in the Monarchy who had little or nothing to do with the emigration.

Lukacs' discussion of the 1862 attempt by Klapka to promote the idea of a Danubian confederation is instructive and depressing. Klapka's idealistic and well thought out federal plan went out of its way to

guarantee the rights, both national and political, of member states and constituent groups. The old Hungary disappeared in a confederation composed of Hungary, Croatia, Slavonia, Dalmatia, Transylvania, Romania, and Serbia. However, Kossuth managed to substitute a plan of his own that, Lukacs says, appears to have been primarily aimed at "preserving the territorial integrity of the Historical Hungary" (p. 116).

The problem with any confederation (even Kossuth's extremely modest version) was that "(o)nlly a faint allusion to a potential future independence of Transylvania, or to the mere possibility of its becoming an independent member-state of the Confederation, was enough for the leading Hungarian politicians to find serious offenses and grievances hidden in the proposal, which, therefore, had to be immediately rejected. It may well be stated that the Transylvanian issue was the most vulnerable spot, heel of Achilles, of the whole complex problem" (p. 118). In the end, both the Magyar nationalists and the non-Magyar Danubian nationalities were soured on the idea of confederation, the one because it went too far, the other because it came to be seen as a Magyar ploy that didn't go far enough. This bode very poorly for any such concepts in the future.

The culminating chapter deals with the Hungarian emigration and the climactic events of 1866. The principal change was the emergence of Prussia as the dominant element in the calculations of all involved. As Lukacs clearly demonstrates in the Hungarian case, Bismarck now became the decisive factor. Kossuth attempted to use this transition in power realities to reestablish his position, but merely became another pawn in Prussia's diplomatic game. In the end, only his rivals turned out to have influence in Berlin. When war broke out in June between Prussia and Austria, "serious decisions, which really mattered, were made in Berlin, from where, however, Kossuth was fully excluded" (p. 155).

Once again the powers left the Hungarian emigration high and dry as soon its usefulness was past. In the end, Napoleon III's self-serving mediation not only helped prevent further initiatives by the Magyar emigration, it also completely undermined any gains they had made in 1866. In the following year, the internal Hungarian national movement was able to engineer the Ausgleich with the Habsburgs and the emigration became mostly moot as a force, though its failures in 1865-1866 provided fertile ground for Kossuthist myth making thereafter, something which Lukacs deplors, but does not really discuss.

This book is an important one because it (and its Hungarian predecessor) is the first attempt to treat the history of the Magyar emigration between 1848 and 1867 in a comprehensive context. Given the obvious difficulties with the historical study of conspiratorial and quasi-conspiratorial activities, Lukacs succeeds reasonably well in delineating the activities and evolution of the post-1848 Hungarian emigration during the period of Habsburg Absolutism and the wars of Italian and German unification. The main lacunae occur where the English version abbreviates or omits aspects elaborated in his other work.

The author's effort to establish the place of the emigration in the history of Hungary and East Central Europe is also successful, though the extent of its actual impact within Hungary in this period remains problematic. The emigration did contribute to the emergence of a more independent Hungary by organizing anti-Habsburg opposition, especially outside of the Monarchy, by gaining support in European public opinion and by participating in the work of European democratic

movements, and anti-Austrian diplomacy in 1849-1866.

On the other hand, Lukacs clearly shows that the Hungarian emigration was more or less a failure because the European powers, especially Napoleon III and Bismarck, never really went beyond using the Magyars (and other smaller nationalities) as pawns in their own games. Within Hungary itself, the emigration had limited influence. In the end, the Austro-Hungarian Compromise of 1867 turned the road pursued by the emigration into a dead end, a hopeless path symbolized by the marginalization of Kossuth and his closest associates. These failures were due not only to circumstances, but also because the emigration was never a coherent whole, territorially, politically, or ideologically.

Still, the emigration did play a significant role in the history of Hungary, as the author concludes: "when we consider the emigration as having been the better self or conscience of the nation, a living protest against the country' situation...the representative and advocate of the rightful demands, desires, and endeavours of the Hungarian people before the wide international public at a time when these national aspirations were fully ignored, suppressed and forced underground in the home country. It was the emigration that preserved and maintained the noble values inherited from 1848, though it was not always free from one-sided views" (p. 175). Lastly, the very fact that such an emigration movement existed was a threat to the Habsburgs and a factor in internal developments prior to 1867.

Lukacs' other goal, that of evaluating the activities of the emigration, is only partly achieved, both because of the subjective nature of the evidence and because he has a tendency to avoid assessment. A more lengthy balance sheet could have been drawn up. On the other hand, the work is refreshingly free from the all too common penchant of East European historiography to engage in continuous polemics with real or imagined opponents. Overall, it is well worth reading, not only for the specialist, but for anyone interested in the period in question.

One final note: though the translation is mostly acceptable, it does contain a number of infelicities: e.g., the use of "Sard" for "Sardinian" (p. 52); odd phrasings such as "at the moment his person could not fully meet the actual demands of Napoleon III" (p. 80), "Kossuth would demarcate himself from the Orsini-type attempts" and "sending Kossuth a great number of news" (p. 81); as well as some obvious dictionary betrayals as in the reference to "a collection in support of the aridity-inflicted people" (p. 135).

Notes

[1]. Among other works: *Magyar fuggetlensegi es alkotmanyos mozgalmak 1849-1867* (Budapest: Muvelt Nep, 1955); *Garibaldi magyar onkentesei es Kossuth 1860-1861-ben* (Budapest: Akademiai Kiado, 1962); *A magyar garibaldistak utja: Marsalától a Porta Piaig 1860-1870* (Budapest: Kossuth Konyvkiado, 1971); *Magyar politikai emigracio: 1849-1867* ([Budapest]: Kossuth Konyvkiado, 1984). Also relevant is his article on "Gusztav Frigyesy, the Hungarian Volunteers, and Garibaldi in 1866-1867," in: Anthony P. Campanella, ed., *Pages from the Garibaldian Epic* (Sarasota: International Institute of Garibaldian Studies, 1984).

[2]. What is omitted by comparison to the 1984 study? The earlier book gives more attention to and provides more detail on the wider context of the Magyar emigration (such as its links to European

revolutionary movements, which are only alluded to in the present work), on the history of the various Hungarian emigre military forces, on Hungarian volunteers in the American Civil War (omitted entirely in the condensation), and on the conflicts between the various centers and leaders of the emigration (p. 7).

[3]. Teleki was even willing to recognize that in 1848-1849, "Not only Austria, but St. Stephen's Hungary also died....Liberte, egalite, fraternite by themselves are no longer sufficient. Peoples also want to live their nationality life" (p. 24). Unfortunately, Lukacs notes, Teleki's prescient position was "a rather uncommon and quite modern one which virtually broke with both the older and the newer governmental practice of the historical Hungarian state" (p. 45).

[4]. Their numbers were also significantly diminished by the more or less voluntary conversion to Islam of several hundred Hungarian and other emigres, the most notable of which was that of General Jozef Bem, who became Murat Pasha and commander-in-chief of the Ottoman artillery.

Copyright (c) 1998 by H-Net, all rights reserved. This work may be copied for non-profit educational use if proper credit is given to the reviewer and to HABSBUrg. For other permission, please contact <reviews@mail.h-net.org>.

Printable Version: <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showpdf.php?id=2142>

Citation: Paul E. Michelson. Review of Lukacs, Lajos, *Chapters on the Hungarian Political Emigration, 1849-1867*. HABSBUrg, H-Net Reviews. June, 1998. **URL:** <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=2142>

Copyright © 1998 by H-Net, all rights reserved. H-Net permits the redistribution and reprinting of this work for nonprofit, educational purposes, with full and accurate attribution to the author, web location, date of publication, originating list, and H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online. For any other proposed use, contact the Reviews editorial staff at hbooks@mail.h-net.org.