

Preface

Perhaps an art will come which, without words or even gestures, can convey the experiences of a people by looks alone.

Stanislav Jerzy Lec

Behind the widespread cliché of Hungary as a land of romantic steppes, grazing cattle herds, village wells, operetta melodies, gypsy ensembles, *csárdás*, *paprika* and *tokajer* lies a country whose historical development has witnessed a number of breaks in continuity and periods of decisive change since the abortive revolution of 1848–49, while at the same time displaying an astonishing capacity for renewal. While the Compromise of 1867, which regulated the status of the historic kingdom of St Stephen in the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, the collapse of the Habsburg Empire and the effects of the 1920 Trianon Treaty, Hitler's attempts to incorporate Hungary into his vision of a 'New European Order', its integration into the Socialist Bloc after the catastrophe of the Second World War and Kádár's independent 'Hungarian path towards Socialism' are generally known, a detailed knowledge of these developments and their context tends to be lacking. Although the past few years have seen a number of western tourists to the country straddling the Danube steadily increase, its history, ongoing traditions and the motivating factors behind the 'Hungarian model' of the present tend to remain obscured from view on these holiday trips.

Since 1956–57, when Gyula Miskolczy's lectures first introduced me to nineteenth-century Hungarian history during a year spent studying at the University of Vienna, I have repeatedly occupied myself with specific aspects of Hungarian history. This interest has been nurtured and strengthened by my own family's connections

with Hungary on my paternal side. Since the thirteenth century the family enjoyed the right of abode in the relatively isolated German-speaking area of Zips in the High Tatra mountains in the Kingdom of the Holy Crown of St Stephen. Towards the end of the nineteenth century some members of the family became fully assimilated into Magyar culture and after the Second World War my paternal uncle, together with his wife and children, felt obliged to take Hungarian citizenship. Hungarian was used quite naturally as a normal means of communication within the family circle.

With this personal background as my starting point, but also aware of the inherent pitfalls, I gladly embarked upon the task of writing a history of Hungary over the past 125 years. Unfortunately, owing to lack of space, I have had to neglect most of Hungary's cultural history. Alongside an account and interpretation of Hungary's political development, the book's main focus of interest is, above all, the country's frequently neglected social and economic history. Over the past thirty years, Hungarian scholarship has produced a number of valuable historical studies, some of which have appeared in translation in the West. Highly illuminative accounts have come from the pens of both Hungarian émigrés and western specialists, who have covered both long-term developments over a substantial period of time and more detailed issues of historical interest. Since, however, a factually accurate, informative account, free of ideological or apologetic tendencies, has not been available recently, I felt justified in embarking upon the task of writing this book, for the English edition of which the final chapter has been updated and expanded.

I am indebted to my colleagues at the School of Eastern European History at the University of the Saarland in Saarbrücken for their help in overcoming the technical problems involved in producing this volume, to Kim Traynor for his translation and to Dr John Leslie for his helpful comments on the latter. My wife constantly helped in the preparation of the manuscript. Without her participation and active assistance I could scarcely have managed to complete this task over and above my normal teaching duties. I alone am aware of the extent to which I am indebted to her. To my father, who lived through most of the events described in this book, and who also suffered to some extent, this book is dedicated with the warmest affection.

Nothing brings nations closer together or separates them more than contemplation of the past. The purpose behind this history of Hungary will have been served, if it succeeds in helping dispel

clichés and prejudices, and if, across borders which are fortunately becoming less impenetrable, it arouses a sense of our shared responsibility for maintaining the peace.

Saarbrücken, 4 November 1986,
the thirtieth anniversary
of the crushing of the
Hungarian Uprising

Jörg K. Hoensch

Preface to the Second Edition

After a peaceful revolution initiated and carried out systematically amid growing popular support by reformers within the all-powerful Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party (MSzMP), Hungary has, by its own efforts, embarked upon a course leading to parliamentary democracy and a market economy. The holding of the first free, equal, secret and direct elections in the spring of 1990 and the formation of a coalition government led by József Antall closed a chapter on 43 years of Communist dictatorship.

In the following four years Hungarians had to make major sacrifices in their efforts to overcome the legacy of the misguided social and economic policies of the Stalinist era. Hopes of reducing economic and social burdens to a tolerable level by seeking rapid integration with the West have not been realised. Despite its best efforts, Hungary's conservative government has worn itself out trying to develop a new constitutional power structure, privatising run-down state enterprises, fighting inflation and reducing the national debt. A fall in living standards, high unemployment and the loss of cherished privileges have left many Hungarians feeling disillusioned and caused them to turn their backs on politics. In May 1994 the general disappointment and dissatisfaction felt by the population was expressed when Hungary's former Communists, in the shape of the Socialists, won an absolute majority in the elections and were entrusted with continuing to reform the system pragmatically and efficiently, while at the same time attempting to avoid painful social consequences.

This revised edition of the *History of Modern Hungary* covers the period leading up to the formation of the Socialist-Liberal coalition led by Gyula Horn. It provides a detailed explanation of the

A History of Modern Hungary 1867–1994

background to the successful reforms carried out before 1990, the problems encountered during Hungary's subsequent transition to a parliamentary democracy and the return to power of the former Communists in 1994.

Saarbrücken,
20 August 1994 (St Stephen's Day)

Jörg K. Hoensch