

Jaszi as the Organizational Leader of a Reform Movement

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Judging merely by the method of counting the number of times Oscar Jaszi's name occurs in certain Hungarian books, one can draw conclusions about his historical significance: he is among the key figures in the Hungary of the early twentieth century. Volume 7 of the 10-volume *History of Hungary*¹ contains more references only to Gyula Andrassy Jr., Albert Apponyi, Dezső Bánffy, Gyula Justh, Ferenc Kossuth, and of course Francis Joseph and Prime Minister István Tisza; about the same number to Endre Ady or Mihály Károlyi; and fewer to the Habsburg dynasty in general, to leading Social Democrats, Francis Ferdinand, and countless others. In the 4-volume *Chronology of Hungarian History*² Jaszi rates a creditable, middle-ranking ten mentions in a work that spans the whole of Hungarian history.

How did this son of a country doctor come to play so central a role on the crowded stage of Hungarian history between 1900 and 1918?

The Periodical *Huszadik Század* and the Society of Social Sciences

The story begins in the 1880s, in the law faculty of Budapest's Péter Pázmány University of Sciences, and in one or two of the city's salons. Here a circle of friends formed. Jews, Catholics and Protestants from noble, gentry, and bourgeois families alike were among them, but the commonest type had a middle-class or petty-bourgeois background, hailed from areas of Transylvania and Upper Hungary with their sizable minority populations, and had exchanged their native land for the capital. In Budapest, members of this group became disillusioned by the emptiness of the patriotic sloganeering that permeated political and social life. They loathed the tub-thumping nationalism of the day mainly for its intellectual poverty.³ For the time being, however, they by no means offered a social, national or minority reform programme of their own. At first their main demand

was that social problems should be approached scientifically. Accordingly, the group sought to provide a forum for the scientific analysis of society, and succeeded in doing so in the shape of the periodical *Huszadik Század* (Twentieth Century), the first, and perhaps the most lasting tribute to Jaszi's talent as an organizer. From the publication's very inception, Jaszi appears to be the ablest editor on the staff who was capable, through the force of his arguments and personality, of asserting his views in the debates that arose.

Of debates, there were plenty. The reason for this was that the people that gathered around the *Huszadik Század* were extremely heterogeneous in political outlook. The group, under Jaszi's intellectual and practical guidance, considered it vital to examine the general laws governing social development in order to arrive at effective solutions to day-to-day issues. Jaszi's own theoretical investigations by 1904–05 had led him to conclude that however day-to-day politics might develop, the future would belong to socialism. The path to this would be through general social reform, through the cleansing of Hungary of the nobles' nationalism. The feudal elements in the country's economy, politics and social affairs would be eliminated through a new kind of socialism, one that eschewed the idea of class struggle but respected patriotism and favoured the unity of mankind.⁴ Apart from the columns of the *Huszadik Század*, which served as a forum for such ideas, and for the debates surrounding them, there was the *Társadalomtudományi Társaság* (the Society of Social Sciences) formed in 1901. Jaszi cannot be credited with founding it, but he soon became involved in choosing the themes for the Society's debates, as well as the people to be invited for lectures.

Suffrage and Socialism

Like many members of his generation, Jaszi saw a need, and a realistic chance for, urgent political action, especially during the crisis of 1905–06, which turned political life in Hungary on its head. Having considered the political front-lines—on the one hand the nationalist nobility demanding constitutional change, and, on the other, reformers calling for an expanded franchise and effective social policy—Jaszi's decision was clear: if the Imperial Court in Vienna stood for the latter, it had to be supported. On returning from an extended research and study trip to Paris, he began working towards organizing the League for Universal Suffrage by Secret Ballot. On August 26, 1905, a joint declaration was issued by four organizations of reformers, including the *Huszadik Század* and the Society of Social Sciences. The emphasis was placed on the potential of the suffrage issue to unite the nation. Universal suffrage by secret ballot was declared a *sine qua non* “for our national liberty and material and intellectual prosperity.”⁵ However, it soon became evident that under the prevailing political cir-

cumstances the struggle for suffrage could not, after all, be elevated above the level of day-to-day politics. As soon as September 20, Jaszi had to admit to a friend of his that the League would collapse and that, in the future, the reformers would have to change their tactics.⁶ The new tactics required new organizations and forums. Accordingly, in the same year Jaszi helped to establish the Társadalomtudományi Szabadiskola (Sociological Free School).

Jaszi outlined the reformers' objectives in 1907 in his work *Az új Magyarország felé* (Towards a New Hungary). The traditional political slogans of 1848 and 1867, he argued, no longer provided realistic political platforms. The only way to true independence for Hungary was through land reforms, progressive taxation, universal suffrage by secret ballot, freedom of assembly and the press, the guarantees of minority rights, the abolition of *latifundia*, and the secularization of church property. From such changes, Jaszi believed, constitutional and military independence would follow automatically.⁷

The Independence Party

In rethinking the concept of independence and relating his theoretical notions to daily politics, Jaszi arrived inevitably at the problem of clarifying the relations between the radical movement and the Independence Party. He pointed out in an article in 1910 that the "Independentist," or *kuruc* [*kuruc* refers to the anti-Habsburg freedom fighters of early modern Hungary — ed.] policy had, historically, "taken two directions. One was a wholly constitutional policy of protest against the infringement of constitutional rights, representing the interests of the armed nobility. The other supported the interests of those whom the nobility had harmed . . . and thus was democratic and social . . . The Independence Party had inherited both policy currents from the by-gone era of the *kuruc*."⁸ In another article Jaszi called this party "the missing link between *kuruc* Hungary and modern Hungary."⁹

Jaszi was working towards long-term cooperation with the Independence Party people who were inclined towards democratic reforms within the framework of organizing all political forces willing to stand up for universal suffrage. The publication of an "open letter" by Hungarian intellectuals to István Tisza, demanding democratic suffrage,¹⁰ the foundation of the Suffrage League and the Reform Club in 1910, were important milestones of this work. A new, still more important forum for Jaszi's ideas would be the establishment, at the end March 1910, of the daily newspaper, the *Világ* (World).¹¹

Freemasonry

The paper was launched by Hungarian freemasons as a forum for "ex-

treme liberalism.” Jaszi was not its founder, but was largely responsible for the internal stirrings among the 67 lodges (with 6,000–7,000 active members) that operated in Hungary at the time. Jaszi believed that the freemasons, who in principle eschewed day-to-day politics, could establish a liberal or, more precisely, a freethinking daily paper that proclaimed radical principles.¹² As early as September, 1905, Jaszi had remarked in a letter to a friend that Hungarian freemasonry, influential in so many ways, might come to serve the ideas he was forming: “freemasonry can only regain its old shine if it considers the cause of the working-class struggle for liberty as its own, as it once did the cause of the bourgeoisie . . . Those familiar with the situation believe that by displaying appropriate determination we could soon gain a dominant role and deploy a vast organization behind us.”¹³

The plan was put into practice; in 1906 Jaszi and a few of his followers joined the Democracy Lodge, with the momentary aim of gaining financial support for the establishment of the Sociological Free School. But the group, which urged political, scientific and cultural action, had difficulty adjusting to the lodge. Shortly afterwards they were to be found in another lodge, this one named after Martinovics,¹⁴ in which the foremost progressive figures of the day soon gathered. In most cases it was Jaszi and his friends who organized activities aimed at bringing freemasonry and the circle around the Society of Social Sciences and the *Huszarodik Szazad* closer together. These activities took the form of debates on fundamental issues such as the agrarian question, clericalism, or the minority problem. Jaszi and his friends, and their new-found freemason allies also helped to bring into being the Galilei Kör (Galileo Circle), an association of freethinking, socially and progressively-minded students.

Other partners and allies

One of Jaszi’s greatest enterprises of the time was the preparation (from about 1906 until its publication in early 1912) of his book on nationalism, the rise of nation states, and the nationality problem.¹⁵ In the course of collecting material for this book, he made much use of his contacts with some leading personalities of Hungary’s nationalities. Some of these contacts had been established while Jaszi had been looking for allies in the struggle for universal suffrage. Not only did Jaszi correspond and maintain good personal relationship with these people, but he also helped to publish the articles of minority writers in progressive journals, reviewed their works, contributed to their press, and visited the regions inhabited by nationalities. We know best his relations with Slovak¹⁶ and Rumanian¹⁷ politicians, writers, journalists (e.g. M. Hodza, A. Stefanik, and E. Isac) but some of his correspondence with Serb and Croatian intellectuals has also survived.¹⁸ During this period Jaszi was doing his best to make representatives of the

nationalities allies in the struggle for a truly democratic Hungary. In spite of numerous conflicts, and the final outcome, I don't think the daily *Világ* was exaggerating in the middle of October, 1918, when it proclaimed that Jaszi was the "Hungarian to be trusted by Rumanians, Slovaks, as well as by South Slavs and Czechs. . ." ¹⁹

Jaszi's book, his most important scholarly output of this pre-1918 period, was most enthusiastically received by Endre Ady, the great Hungarian poet of the age. There had been a long-standing mutual respect and friendship between the two for some time. Jaszi was a devoted admirer of Ady's poetry. He considered Ady to be the poet of the Hungarian renewal. Ady, the regular reader of *Huszadik Század*, had always carefully followed Jaszi's activity and defended the radicals in the press against conservative attacks. ²⁰ For Ady, Jaszi's book was the greatest, most daring and most Hungarian deed of the decade. According to Ady, Jaszi gave new content to the corrupted concept of Hungarian liberty by working out a well-grounded, long-term project for the transformation of the country. ". . . his stream assumed riverlike width," wrote Ady about his friend, "the other tiny little blind paths of honest Hungarian intellectuals. . . , now flowed towards him, towards a happy communion. . ." ²¹ Jaszi's great significance is that he offered a way worth following in a country which seemed to lack any possible way out of its desperate situation. Though, of course, Jaszi cannot be credited with being the organizer of the Hungarian literary renewal, when surveying his organizational activity, we have to keep in mind that modern literature (and of course the new painting and music as well) were Jaszi's natural allies in the struggle for a thoroughgoing renewal of Hungarian society, politics and culture. As Jaszi put in an article on Ady in 1914: "Both Petőfi and Ady are unique among poets of their times: they make the gravest social issues relevant in a most passionate way. They offer programs . . . becoming orators or politicians." ²² Ady reciprocated the compliment in a speech—made in June, 1914, at one of the founding rallies of the Bourgeois Radical Party—by calling Jaszi "his leader."

The Bourgeois Radical Party

The debates that paved the way for this party's establishment took place in the Martinovics Freemasons' Lodge. In these debates, during the final months of 1913, Jaszi argued for the creation of a party. He pointed out that—because the slogans of 1848 and 1867 had been thoroughly compromised, and were shorn of their credibility—there was good chance for the creation of a party structure that would reflect the actual interests of society. Jaszi's arguments came in for plenty of criticism. ²³ His critics doubted that the small Hungarian middle class could be organized to champion bourgeois interests in a consistent fashion. They also questioned the likelihood of a bourgeois party ever enlisting the support of the peasant masses. At

most, they said, one could count on a small group with anticlerical, radical opinions.

These doubts were not unfounded. Although the new party soon attracted the most prominent personalities of the bourgeoisie and of the intelligentsia, it never developed into broad political movement. The decisive obstacle, undoubtedly, was the war, yet one cannot duck the question: Did the establishment of the Radical Party strengthen or weaken cohesion among progressives? Was Jaszi right in 1914, or was he right in 1938 when he described the founding of the party as the biggest blunder of his life? For the party was rebuffed in almost every quarter, including Jaszi's comrades-in-arms in the struggle for universal suffrage. With hindsight one can say it would certainly have been more helpful to the immediate cause of electoral reform to have retained the old framework, in view of the fragile unity within the progressive camp. Viewed from a historical perspective, however, the foundation of the party was a milestone in the democratic transformation of public and political life in Hungary. By its very existence the party in time would have provided an impetus for the creation of a modern party structure able to reflect and express the actual interests of Hungarian society.

The Great War, Mihály Károlyi

The use of the conditional tense is appropriate, of course, because before the party could begin functioning the war broke out. Even before hostilities had started, Jaszi wrote that resolving the South Slav question through war could only infect fatally the wounds that the Monarchy had already received: "The call that should be trumpeted with renewed force from the tragic bier of the heir apparent [the assassinated Francis Ferdinand] is that of universal suffrage and a democratic people's state, not armed vengeance."²⁴ But it only became possible for the progressives to organize against the war once others had recognized the deadly peril as well. On July 17, 1916, Mihály Károlyi founded a new Independence Party with an anti-German, democratic platform that included support for universal suffrage. By this time Jaszi had started to distance himself from the Naumann plan for Central European integration under German influence. Although Károlyi's paper chose precisely this juncture to accuse him of unbridled chauvinism, Jaszi's article in reply called, in fact, for alliance: "Honourable pacifism has two other pillars apart from general democracy: the first is national freedom, and the second commercial freedom. Mihály Károlyi must finally become clear on these matters if he desires a fruitful working atmosphere for his noble endeavors . . . But this requires, above all, a strict stock-taking of his principles and friends."²⁵ Shortly afterwards, Jaszi sent Károlyi a copy of his 1912 book: *A nemzeti államok kialakulása és a nemzetiségi kérdés* (The formation of the Nation States and the Minority Question).

This great theoretical work played a part in transforming Károlyi's political views. Jaszi himself was astonished to learn – at the pacifist congress in Berne at the end of 1917 – that Károlyi, when asked by a British politician how he thought the peoples of the Danube and the Balkans might live together in the future, expressed his support for a federal solution.

From 1917 onwards, significant cooperation developed among Jaszi's radicals, the Social Democrats, members of Károlyi's party, and other left-wing forces. There is more than symbolic significance in the fact that Jaszi, who had done such manifold theoretical and practical work to bring the various strands of progressive Hungarian thinking together, drafted the programme for the National Council – the common organization of the Social Democratic, Independence and Bourgeois Radical Parties – on October 25, 1918, opening a new, albeit short chapter in Hungarian history.²⁶

I have considered Jaszi's organizational activity in the Hungarian progressive movement up until October, 1918. This was not a movement that slowly spread or steadily gained greater influence, but it undertook a series of greater or lesser, more-or-less successful actions. Jaszi's greatness as an organizer lay precisely in his ability to adapt the concept of a national democratic state – which he had carefully matured in theory – to prevailing circumstances. He was also able to recognize opportunities for potential alliances, and to put them to use when it was possible. He was not a political manager eager to score day-to-day successes, but was one who matched the rational, ethical content of his political concepts with an equally rational and ethical search for a way to realize them. His rational expectations were often belied by history, but through his great abilities and energy as an organizer, his reputation as a scholar and, last but not by any means least, his moral integrity, he became the central figure of the Hungarian progressive camp. Most of the achievements of the Hungarian progressive movement in the early part of this century were in some way connected to his name.

NOTES

- 1 Péter Hanák (editor in chief) and Ferenc Mucsi (editor), *Magyarország története, 1890–1918* [A History of Hungary, 1890–1918] (Budapest, 1978).
- 2 Kálmán Benda (ed.), *Magyarország történeti kronológiája* [A Historical Chronology of Hungary] I–IV (Budapest, 1981–82).
- 3 György Litván and László Szücs (eds.), *A szociológia első magyar műhelye. A Huszadik Század köre* [The First Hungarian Workshop of Sociology. The Circle of the Review Twentieth Century] I–II, (Budapest, 1973), vol. I, pp. 6–12; and Péter Hanák. *Jászi Oszkár dunai patriotizmusa* [Oszkár Jászi's Danubian Patriotism] (Budapest, 1985), pp. 14–16.
- 4 Cf. Jaszi's study "Szocializmus és hazafiság," [Socialism and Patriotism] *Huszadik Század* [Twentieth Century] VI, 1 (1905) 11, republished in György Litván and

- János F. Varga (eds). *Jászi Oszkár publicisztikája* [Oszkár Jászi's Publicism] (Budapest, 1982), pp. 49–61, and his letter to Ervin Szabó of 16 October 1904 in György Litván and László Szücs (eds.), *Szabó Ervin levelezése, 1893–1904* [Ervin Szabó's Correspondence, 1893–1904] (Budapest, 1977), pp. 577–583.
- 5 The appeal was published in *Népszava* [People's Word], 27 August 1905, and *Huszedik Század* VI 2 (1905), 249–251.
 - 6 In György Litván and János Varga (eds.), *Jászi Oszkár válogatott művei. Levelek*. [Oszkár Jászi's Selected Works. Letters] Manuscript, available at the Institute of History of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.
 - 7 *Huszedik Század*, VIII (1907) 1–10, republished in *Jászi Oszkár publicisztikája* pp. 89–106.
 - 8 "Justh Gyula," *Világ* [World], 5 June 1910, republished in *Jászi Oszkár publicisztikája*, pp. 470–474.
 - 9 Quoted by György Litván in *Magyar gondolat—szabad gondolat* [Hungarian Thought—Free Thought] (Budapest, 1978), p. 96.
 - 10 *Világ*, 10 April 1910.
 - 11 On the history of the *Világ* see György Litván, "A Világ 1910–1926," [(The Világ /World/), in *Világ, 1910. III. 30—1926 IV. 30. Repertorium* [The Világ . . . a Repertory] (Budapest, 1984).
 - 12 On freemasonry in Hungary see Zsuzsa L. Nagy, *Szabad-kömvűesség a XX. században* [Freemasonry in the 20th Century] (Budapest, 1977). For further literature see the notes of this book.
 - 13 Jaszi's letter to Bódog Somló of 27 September 1905 in *Jászi Oszkár válogatott művei, cit.*
 - 14 Philosopher Ignác Martinovics (1755–95) was the leader of the struggle for an independent and republican Hungary during the French revolutionary era (ed.). On the Martinovics Lodge see György Fukász, "Szabadkőművéség, radikalizmus és szocializmus az 1918 előtti Magyarországon: A Martinovics-páholy története" [Freemasonry, Radicalism and Socialism in Pre-1918 Hungary: The History of the Martinovics Lodge] *Párttörténeti Közlemények* [Communications on the History of the Party] VII, No. 2 (1961), 55–84.
 - 15 *A nemzeti államok kialakulása és a nemzetiségi kérdés* [The Formation of Nation States and the Minority Question] (Budapest, 1912).
 - 16 László Szarka, "Jászi Oszkár szlovák kapcsolatai" [Oscar Jaszi's Slovak Connections]. Manuscript, available at the Institute of History of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.
 - 17 Erzsébet Vezér, "Emil Isac és a magyar progresszió. Levelezése Jászi Oszkárral" [Emil Isac and the Hungarian Progressives: His Correspondence with Oszkár Jászi], *Korunk* [Our Age] XXXVII No. 8 (August, 1978), 642–643.
 - 18 In the Manuscript Collection of the National Széchényi Library in Budapest, Fond 114/9, 22, 23.
 - 19 Lajos Bíró, "A Dunai Egyesült Államok, Jászi Oszkár új könyve" [The Danubian United States. Oscar Jaszi's New Book] *Világ*, 13 October 1918.
 - 20 For Ady's political views see Tibor Erényi, "Ady, a szociáldemokrácia és a szocializmus" [Ady, Social Democracy and Socialism] in Tibor Erényi, *Szocializmus a századelőn* [Early Twentieth Century Socialism] (Budapest, 1979), pp. 260–342 and the literature in the notes of this study.

- 21 Endre Ady, "Jászi Oszkár könyve" [Oscar Jaszi's Book] *Nyugat* [West] 16 May 1916. Republished in József Láng and Erzsébet Vezér (eds.), *Ady Endre összes prózai művei* [Endre Ady's Collected Prose] (Budapest, 1973), pp. 191–194.
- 22 Oszkár Jászi, "Egy verseskönyvről" [On a Book of Poems] *Világ*, 15 February 1914. The article is analysed by András Veres, "Jászi Oszkár 1919 előtti munkásságának megítéléséhez" [On the Evaluation of Oscar Jaszi's pre-1919 Activity] *Irodalomtörténeti Közlemények* [Journal of Literary History] LXXIX, Nos. 5–6 (1975), 633–634.
- 23 The minutes of the debates in the Martinovics Lodge on 15 and 31 October 1913 are in the Magyar Országos Levéltár [Hungarian National Archives], P 1123.
- 24 "Háború vagy béke" [War or Peace] *Világ*, 19 July 1914. Republished in *Jászi Oszkár publicisztikája*, pp. 224–225.
- 25 "Csinálják már az új háborút" [The New War is in the Making] *Világ*, 29 October 1916. Republished in *Jászi Oszkár publicisztikája*, pp. 250–251.
- 26 Another area of wartime organization by the progressives in which Jaszi played an important part was the work of the Society of Social Sciences. Particularly important was the debate within this society in the spring of 1918 on conservative and progressive idealism. At a critical juncture in history, this debate made a very small, but extremely valuable group among the young Hungarian intelligentsia, the Vasárnapi Kör (Sunday circle) conscious of its progressive commitment. For György Lukács and his companions sensed the troubles that weighed on Hungarian society at the time just as much as the politically active progressive groups. But in this debate Lukács and his friends – instead of seeking the answer in the transformation of political, economic, social and cultural institutions – sought it in a moral transformation of the individual, and considered this the point of departure. The debate in the Society of Social Sciences helped to clarify the fact that at this historical moment, in spite of their disputes, the "progressive idealists" and the "progressive materialists" belonged in one camp.
 On the Sunday Circle see Zoltán Novák. *A Vasárnapi Társaság* [The Sunday Society] (Budapest, 1979); Éva Karádi and Erzsébet Vezér (eds.) *A Vasárnapi Kör* [The Sunday Circle] (Budapest, 1980).