

farmer, the peasant, dominated the social fabric of the countryside. In both Germany and France, the agricultural enlightenment encompassed ambitious attempts to reach out to the ordinary farmer with information. Nevertheless, in these parts of Europe as well, the agricultural literature was read mainly by wealthy estate owners, and gradually also by large farmers, who made up a social stratum of increasing importance.

One last critical point: instead of merely a division between head and hand, the great stride forward was an acceptance of practical knowledge as the foundation of agricultural science and theory. This is already apparent in some of the quotes in Fisher's book, but there is another book that explores nearly the same theme, the social history of knowledge: Verena Lehmbrock's, *Der denkende Landwirt. Agrarwissen und Aufklärung in Deutschland 1750–1820*.³ She goes deeper in her analyses and shows that there was a true cleavage between theory and practice in the German debate, but that this eventually evolved into an acceptance of the melding of hand and mind. With the arrival of German agronomist Albrecht Thaer, this became the model in the early nineteenth century. Lehmbrock also explains that this experimental, hands-on agriculture was established first in England and later became dominant in Germany.

Fisher's book has important assets. He shows that the agricultural literature reflected farming as it was rather than led it, and that the gentleman farmer wanted to gain control over knowledge when agriculture became an honourable pursuit for elite landowners. However, Fisher's interpretation of a split between theory and practice needs to be further developed. I would argue that it could be understood as a dialectical process in which the reuniting of hand and mind was turned into a synthesis: the applied science that later became of paramount importance to technological and economic change.

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KENEZ, PETER. *Before the Uprising. Hungary under Communism, 1949–1956*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge [etc.] 2022. viii, 281 pp. Ill. £75.00. (E-book: \$99.99.)

After World War II, the countries that became part of the Soviet zone built a party-state system on the model of the Soviet Union. However, this was far from being a slavish copy of a master plan. On the one hand, no such master plan existed. On the other, national and local characteristics determined how the apparatus and citizens implemented the decisions taken at the centre of the party. The different turns and breaking points also show that – despite the common

³Verena Lehmbrock, *Der denkende Landwirt. Agrarwissen und Aufklärung in Deutschland 1750–1820* (Cologne, 2020).

ideology and institutional centralization – the system has generated a variety of social responses. Besides the Prague Spring of 1968 and the Polish Solidarity movement, the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 is a landmark event that had a major impact on Eastern European history and memory. Peter Kenez's book is a belated continuation of his previous work covering the history of Hungary from the end of World War II to the takeover by the communists. The author is well-versed in the twentieth-century history of the region, studying the Soviet Union, the communist mass mobilization, and the Holocaust. In this book, he presents the political processes and antecedents leading to the Hungarian Revolution of 1956.

The book under review here comprises twelve chapters. The first five thematic chapters provide an overview of the political, economic, and social system that developed during the years of High Stalinism in Hungary (1949–1953). The second half of the book, comprising Chapters Six to Eleven, covers the short but change-rich period between Stalin's death and the outbreak of the revolution. Kenez offers the “grand narrative” of the political processes, its most significant events, and turning points. In his approach, the history of the period is written from the top down, determined by political decision-making. The main protagonists are the high-ranking politicians who ran the system, which was built on the Soviet model, Hungary being one of the socialist countries of Eastern Europe. Kenez's narrative is usually supplemented by short biographies. Who won the leading positions, what were their social backgrounds, and what did they do before and during the war? By answering these questions, the political tableau of the pre-revolutionary period is laid out before us.

The first chapter describes the political system: the leading figures, the party structure, the central and local government, and the election system. Kenez stresses the role of propaganda; he presents the mass mobilization practices, the role of mass organizations, and the political campaigns. The second chapter deals with the transformation of the economy and society, collectivization, the planned economy, the development of heavy industry, and the effects of nationalization. The next part, entitled “Terror”, depicts the working of the political police and the network of state security authorities. The main character of the chapter is Gábor Peter, the leader of the State Protection Authority (Államvédelmi Hatóság). The central venue of terror is the courtroom where the show trials of the so-called enemy of the people's democracy were held. Additionally, Kenez argues that terror was an everyday experience for ordinary people, citing the high number of citizens arrested. In the next chapter, “Communists Killing One Another”, the death sentence passed on the former minister László Rajk shows the brutality of the regime, which was also practiced against the “internal enemy”, the high-ranking members of the party. The fifth chapter describes the Sovietization of education and culture, the transformation of the school system, and the curriculum following the communist ideology. Through the silenced or exiled scientists, artists, and creators, Kenez reports on the loss to academic and cultural life.

The author considers Stalin's death in 1953 as the chief turning point after the unprecedented events that began to unfold in Hungarian domestic politics. The second part of the book focuses on the ousting of Mátyás Rákosi and the appointment of Imre Nagy as prime minister, the measures of the “New Course”,

and the events of the rapid return to dogmatic ideology in the following years. After Imre Nagy was dismissed from the government, he was expelled from the party at the end of 1955 for refusing the communist ritual of self-criticism. In the economy, the focus returned to enforcing heavy industrial development instead of measures aimed at raising living standards. Meanwhile, the intellectuals became more active, and voices more critical were heard. The author points out that the reformist intelligentsia was quite heterogeneous and its members moved away from dogmatic leadership to varying degrees. Chapter Nine details how the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union directed the spotlight on Imre Nagy again as proof that there was an alternative to the hard-line Rákosi government in Hungary. The change of political direction led to the rehabilitation of László Rajk, who became a symbol of the regime's crimes against their own comrades. The next chapter deals with the summer of 1956: the debates of the Petöfi Circle and the reburial of László Rajk, followed by the events of the revolutionary days, end the volume. In his conclusion, Kenez summarizes the reasons that led to the uprising against the regime: the lack of legitimacy, the huge gap between propaganda and living standards, the insult to national pride by copying the Soviet Union, and the failure of Hungarian society to accept a leadership composed mostly of Jews.

The book offers a detailed review of the main events of High Stalinism in Hungary. However, Kenez does not contextualize his work in a theoretical and historiographical framework and does not explain the methodological considerations he follows. His findings show that he interprets the early years of the dictatorship within the framework of the totalitarian paradigm. Totalitarian theory, prevalent from the 1950s onwards, saw society in Sovietized countries as a passive mass of atomized individuals deprived of their will, as opposed to a party state that had achieved total power. According to Kenez, "Hungarians between 1949 and 1953 lived in a fully developed totalitarian political system" (p. 14). "Totalitarian form" means "repressing all opposition", the "civil society disappears", and "individual citizens have no way of knowing what others think" (p. 12). As a result, the volume presents the regime as the only actor, acting as an entity isolated from society, following Moscow's orders. The intentions may have been aimed at total domination, but their realization existed only in the minds of a few party leaders and ideologues. Even the apparatus of the dictatorship did not carry out its tasks in a disciplined way – as "smoothly rotating little wheels" – following the directives of the party centre. The citizens outside the apparatus also acted in their own interests, sometimes following the official line. Furthermore, party organizations and their apparatus did not operate in isolation from society but as part of it.

Kenez claims "terror impacted all aspects of life and touched the lives of every citizen" (p. 66). Although people lived in a dictatorship and were aware of all the dangers and violent repression, fear did not permeate all interactions in everyday life. By scrutinizing this from an everyday historical perspective, we can see that the social response to terror was complex and situational. Furthermore, Kenez does not consider that, in addition to violence, the regime used more sophisticated means to mobilize and force citizens to cooperate. Since this is not the aim of the book, Kenez does not take a closer look below the macro level; he does not take into account everyday practices. However, understanding the background of revolutionary

events only at the level of major political decisions provides an incomplete picture. In the revolution, it was not a homogeneous mass that rebelled against an oppressive system. A wide variety of people acted for a wide variety of motives, including the desire to correct the system.

In Kenez's book, the "substantial reduction of repression" is the prelude to revolution (p. 220). The author discusses this political situation but does not explain what happened to those who reacted to it, how patterns of behaviour altered, and what kinds of social responses ultimately led to the October 1956 demonstrations. Hence, he depicts Hungary's history as a one-way process that culminated in a revolution. The titles of the chapters reflect the process of the Communist Party's overthrow of the political, economic, social, and cultural systems. All the while, society suffered nationalization, class enemies and reactionaries were persecuted, and decadent and anti-establishment artists were silenced. They do not shape the process, they have no room for manoeuvring, and they do not assert their interests. In the final chapter, this silent, passive, and faceless mass unleashes the greatest revolution of the 1950s in Eastern Europe. As a result, the book shows the citizens only in two extreme situations: either they were passive enforcers or they made a revolution.

The book gives an insight into the milestones of the Hungarian version of High Stalinism. It provides a good overview for anyone interested in the history of the period between 1948 and 1956. However, to understand the complexity of the processes leading to the uprising, we need to consider not only high politics but also other scenes of social life and those individuals who not only suffered but also shaped these years.

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