

SÁNDOR SZILASSY, *Magyarország a szakadék szélén* [Hungary at the Brink of an Abyss]. Kaposvár: Magyar Nemzeti Történelmi Társaság, 1997, pp. 96; and its earlier English version: *Revolutionary Hungary, 1918-1921*. Astor Park, Florida: Danubian Press, Inc., 1971, pp. 143.

The Hungarian version of Szilassy's book under review is the first volume in the series «Trianon Studies» [Trianoni Tanulmányok] initiated in Hungary by the newly founded Hungarian National Historical Society [Magyar Nemzeti Történelmi Társaság] based in the city of Kaposvár, The purpose of this series - and of its sponsoring association - is to counteract the negative influences of communist rule in Hungary, when the Treaty of Trianon - the most destructive and defining event in Hungary's history since the Battle of Mohács in 1526 - could not even be mentioned, let alone examined from the vantage point of the nation that had suffered more from the punitive treaties following World War I than any other of the defeated states. The English version of this book was originally published nearly three decades ago in the so-called «Behind the Iron Curtain Series» put out by the noted Hungarian novelist, Count Albert Wass (1908-1998), for the purposes of presenting a non-Marxist view of Hungarian historical developments. In those days, historical writing in Hungary was still under the control of the Soviet-dominated Hungarian Socialist [Communist] Workers' Party. In consequence of this, it was still possible to publish major syntheses of Hungarian history with only a casual references to the Treaty of Trianon and its consequences. One of the best examples of this is *A History of Hungary* that appeared in several western languages under the editorship of Ervin Pamlényi in 1973, where Trianon is dismissed in twenty-eight lines amounting to less than a full page (pp. 461-462) in a work of 676 pages. Being published by a small press without the appropriate academic affiliation, the impact of Szilassy's English language work on American historiography concerning Hungary was naturally minimal. And this holds true notwithstanding the scholarly merit of this work, which - if put out by a major academic publisher - could have influenced many of the subsequent scholarly works touching upon the post-World War I years. Even so, Szilassy's book was recently republished in a slightly revised Hungarian edition, presumably with the hope of influencing the Hungarian reading public, which for many years had been cut off from the results of respectable Western historical scholarship. Like its earlier English language predecessor, the recently published Hungarian version

of this book covers the period between 1918 and 1921 in ten separate sections, including chapters on Hungary's involvement in World War I, the final months of the war, the country's collapse in November 1918, the establishment of a liberal republic under Count Mihály Károlyi, and that of a Soviet Republic under Béla Kun, the transition from communism to nationalism, the rise of Admiral Nicholas Horthy to power, the signing of the Peace Treaty of Trianon, King/Emperor Karl's two unsuccessful attempts to return to the Hungarian throne, the resulting dethronization of the Habsburg dynasty, and the beginnings of social and political consolidation under Admiral Horthy's leadership. Szilassy's work is based partially on the products of traditional historical scholarship of the post-Trianon period, and partially on archival materials found in several American archives, including those of Stanford University's Hoover Institutions, the National Archives in Washington, the Library of Congress, and the Archives of Columbia University Library. These collections contain many of the papers of the post-World War I Hungary's political leaders and political regimes. Szilassy's tone in this volume is that of a perceptive and detached scholar, who at the same time has an emotional link to his topic. It reflects considerable reading and much archival research. At the same time it also reflects the author's lack of effort or desire to incorporate the results of more recent historical research into his volume. Much has been done in this area during the past three decades both in Hungary in the United States, and the author should probably have taken cognizance of this fact. As it stands, based on his notes, the Hungarian version of his book appears like a reprint of the three decades old volume. Notwithstanding his failure to incorporate the results of more recent historical scholarship into his volume, Szilassy's book is a most useful volume. It gives a clear, concise, and at times captivating overview of Hungary's historical evolution at a moment of its history when it found itself «on the brink of an abyss.» Szilassy's narrative is preceded by an essay authored by Kálmán Magyar, the current President of the Hungarian National Historical Society, as well as by the author's own introduction, where he describes the scenes of his archival research. The latter does contain a slight misstatement concerning the Hoover Institution, which is located not in the «neighborhood of Stanford University,» but right in the very center of the Stanford campus. Szilassy's volume is supplemented by an Appendix that contains ten relevant documents (letters, speeches, proclamations), a review of the original English version of this book, several photographs and maps, a selective name and subject index, as well as a short biographical essay about the author. *Magyarország a szakadék szélén* [Hungary on the Brink of an Abyss] is a scholarly, yet popular work that deserves to be read by all who crave an objective analysis of Hungary's political evolution during one of the darkest periods of its history.

STEVEN BÉLA VÁRDY