Péter Csunderlik, 2019. A “vörös farsangtól” a “vörös tatárjárásig. A Tanácsköztársaság a korai Horthy-korszak pamphlet- és visszaemlékezés-irodalomban [From the “Red Carnival” to the “Red Mongol Invasion.” The Soviet Republic in the Pamphlet and Memoir Literature of the Early Horthy Era]. Budapest: Napvilág Kiadó. Pp. 365.

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The year 2019 in Hungary was marked by the commemoration of the 100th anniversary of the 133-day rule of the Hungarian Soviet Republic. The communist regime was established on March 21, 1919, and the news shook the victorious peacemakers at the Paris Peace Conference, as it signaled the spread of the dreaded “bacilli” of Bolshevism from Russia to the West. The short-lived communist dictatorship left a lasting impact on the Hungarian collective memory that was first shaped by the memory politics of the interwar right-wing Horthy regime, which identified itself with the counterrevolution and painted the Soviet Republic and its leaders with the darkest colors. Following World War II, under Soviet occupation, the communist regimes in Hungary reversed the trend and identified the Hungarian Soviet Republic as the glorious precursor to the postwar Hungarian status quo.

The collapse of communism, or state socialism, and the rise of western-type democratic governments in Hungary in 1989 indicated that an objective re-examination of 1919 by historians promised balanced interpretations and the shaping of memory history that did not reflect Manichean extremes. All these expectations changed with the rise of the authoritarian Orbán regime in 2010, which is identified with extreme right-wing policies. It shapes memory politics that aim to revive the cult of the authoritarian Regent Miklós Horthy and the denigration of the Hungarian Soviet Republic. The symbolic act of this policy during this anniversary year was the removal from Martyrs Square [Vértanúktere] the statue of the martyred prime minister, the communist Imre Nagy, of the ill-fated 1956 Hungarian revolution, and its replacement

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with a memorial to the victims of the Red Terror of the Soviet Republic. The memorial was originally erected on that locale in 1934 and was pulled down by “protesters” in September 1945.

Peter Csunderlik’s magisterial work undertakes source criticism and content analysis of some sixty memoirs and political pamphlets dealing with the Soviet Republic that were penned and published during the 10 years following its collapse on August 1, 1919. In light of recent developments, it is a welcome contribution to the understanding of the shaping of collective memory. Generally, these works were done to denigrate not only the revolutionary Soviet Republic led by the communist Béla Kun but also its predecessor, the People’s Republic, which was promulgated 2 weeks after the victory of the liberal democratic revolution on October 31, 1918, and whose leader was Count Mihály Károlyi. In many of the publications examined by Csunderlik, the two revolutions were telescoped into one. The People’s Republic was falsely accused of being responsible for not resisting the dismantling of historic Hungary by its neighbors. Their land grab was finalized in the onerous terms of the Peace Treaty of Trianon on June 4, 1920. Although the document was signed by the representatives of the Horthy regime, the memoirs blamed the revolutions of 1918–1919 for Trianon (p. 255) and Count Károlyi for making way for the rise of the Soviet Republic, which, in turn, was termed a Jewish dictatorship (p. 99). This latter claim, as Csunderlik notes, was canonized by extreme right-wing literature (p. 175).

In this work, Csunderlik first identifies and evaluates the types of sources he examined. These include memoirs of writers from the political left, center, and right. This is then followed by topics identified as chapters, each divided by thematic subheadings, under which the author describes the commonality he finds in the examined publications. This approach, at times, leads the author into repetition but it also permits him to demonstrate how assertions made in certain memoirs were divorced from reality and were factually wrong.

Memoirs and pamphlets that assailed the Hungarian Soviet Republic and its leaders had the greatest impact on collective memory. These publications served political goals as they legitimized the counterrevolutionary regime and the cult of Horthy by stressing that the Commune, as it was called, was not supported by those who embraced Magyar identity and was backed only by misled workers and the Jews. Csunderlik in his concluding summary notes “the emphasis that the Jews supported the Soviet Republic provided serious arguments for the anti-Semitic regulations of the Horthy era, especially the introduction and passing of the *numerus clausus* law [of 1920] which ‘aimed’ at the outing of ‘Jewish intellectuals’” (p. 323). This reviewer wishes to point

out that during the last year of the Horthy regime in July 1944, Prime Minister Döme Sztójay justified the deportations of Hungary's Jews to death camps by referring to the alleged role of the Jews in the communist revolution: "The racially pure Jews are generally the representatives of destruction, as in 1918 [*sic*] they were the most destructive and were the allies of the Bolsheviks" (Karsai 2017, p. 97).

The collective memory that holds that the Soviet Republic was a Jewish undertaking leads Csunderlik to examine the anti-Semitic literature in a separate category as well, under the subheading, "The Proletarian Dictatorship as 'Jewish Dictatorship'" (p. 175). This scapegoating of the Jews, the author notes, is related to "a very sensitive historical question" (p. 175) precisely because this extreme-right position was absorbed into collective memory (176). Its basis is the fact that in the Revolutionary Governing Council the majority of people's commissars were of Jewish background. According to some right-wing memoirs, 90 percent of the leadership was Jewish. Csunderlik refers to the recent article of the topmost authority on the history of the Soviet Republic, Tibor Hajdu, and corrects this statistic to 61 percent, explaining that these leaders were atheists and had no Jewish identity (p. 176). In a commemorative publication that appeared in March 2019, Pál Pritz identified the concept of Jewish dictatorship as the "most noxious view" about the Soviet Republic. Rejecting the charge of Jewish dictatorship, Pritz claims not only that the leaders of Jewish origin in the Governing Council had no Jewish identity but also the majority of the leaders in the provinces were non-Jews. In addition, most of the Hungarian Jews were against the communists as the Jews objected to the government's hostility to religion and its socialization of private property (Pritz 2019, pp. 65–66).

Csunderlik also notes that in none of the examined publications he did not find explanations based on historical sociology. He suggests that a large number of commissars of Jewish origin was due to their radicalization, which was caused by the fact that attaining legal equality did not end social discrimination against the Jews (p. 176).

The presence of Jews among the leaders was also connected to the "Red Terror" that, according to the right-wing memoirs, protected the "Jewish rule." Csunderlik covers the theme in the entire chapter and the subheadings cover not only the explanations for and descriptions of the terror in the memoirs but also the leaders who stood out in the memoirs. These include Tibor Szamuely, Otto Korvin, and József Cserny. The author points out that in the examined literature, only one writer tried to understand the real causes of the terror. The erstwhile Minister of Agriculture of the Károlyi regime, the

centrist Barna Buza, attributed the terror to popular resentment. He saw the Red Terror as a consequence of World War I and a cause of the White Terror that followed the collapse of the Soviet Republic. Other publications blamed the Jews as the cause of the terror. Csunderlik, to some extent, shares Buza's view as he declares that the wartime brutalization of soldiers had as much to do with the terror of the Soviet Republic, which was in the midst of fighting against Hungary's neighbors, as did Bolshevik ideology (p. 232).

On the number of victims of the terror, Csunderlik refers to the 1919 pamphlet *A zsidók rémuralma Magyarországon* [The Reign of Terror of Jews in Hungary], which claimed the number to be 4,000. Csunderlik contrasts this with the official figure of 590 provided by a prosecutor, Albert Váry, of the Horthy regime. Recent research by Tibor Hajdu and Gergely Bődök reduced the numbers to 380 and 365, respectively, and claimed that the rest died in armed conflict against the red troops or were shot while they were apprehended during criminal activity (p. 233). Bődök also mentions that historians now estimate that the White Terror had 1,000–2,000 victims, a great many of them were innocent Jews (Bődök 2015, pp. 101, 106). Hajdu, reflecting on the number of victims, found it ironic that in the official memory politics the death of few hundreds due to terror seem to override the death of hundreds of thousands of troops who were killed in needless conflicts ordered by the generals during World War I (Hajdu 2019, p. 26). It is also ironic that though at least three times as many were killed in the counterrevolutionary White Terror of 1919–1920, the restored memorial on Martyrs Square does not remember them.

The analysis of Csunderlik is not limited to the method of empiricist, or positivist history, but liberally uses a favorite methodology of social science history, the postmodern. Postmodernists, greatly influenced by Hayden White's structuralist approach in *Metahistory*, believe that historical sources, primary or secondary, are constructed the same way as is fiction and could be examined as such. Thus Csunderlik looks at the tropes, most importantly the metaphors, that were used by the memoirists and also the modes of emplotment in the form of tragedy, comedy, and satire.

In the textual analysis, Csunderlik also notes the prevalence of what he calls "strategic metaphors" in the narratives of the memoirs. Although the author does not specifically mention why metaphors are important, this reviewer can refer to the linguist and philosopher George Lakoff's observation that "Our conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature." Furthermore, "the essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another"

(Lakoff and Johnson 1980, pp. 3, 5). Csunderlik finds in the texts a common metanarrative based on medical metaphors in the emplotment that describes the Soviet Republic as a tragedy. For example, the trauma of Bolshevism is described as the plague, a frequent metaphor in memoir and pamphlet literature (p. 316). Another popular metaphor for the destructive nature of the Soviet Republic in the examined literature, which is also included in the monograph's title, is the Mongol invasion [Tatárjárás]. Csunderlik traces the origins of this metaphor in turn-of-the-century anti-Semitic literature (p. 315).

The "Vörös farsang" [Red Carnival] in the title refers to another frequently used metaphor in the memoirs as during the Soviet Republic rule the proletarians, for a short while, embraced the role of the formerly dominant social classes (p. 326). The carnival is emplotted as comedy and satire and Csunderlik frequently finds in the memoirs such descriptions about the actions of the partisans of the Soviet Republic.

The monograph is accompanied by extensive explanatory footnotes that are as fascinating and sophisticated readings as the text itself. The wide range of readings that Csunderlik refers to is most impressive, and so is his bibliography. The book goes far in making its readers understand the formation of memory history about the Soviet Republic, a history that is in the process of being resuscitated by the new authoritarians in Hungary.

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