

Patrice Higonnet

Berend Universalist

First, an anecdote, then an apology, and thirdly, a brief talk.

The anecdote has to do with the way Harvard's libraries used to keep track of its books before the computerization of everything in 2012. The librarians would paste a slip into the back of books and stamp them with a date to remember when the book was due. You could see at a glance how often it had been read. So it is that when I recently took out *The European Periphery and Industrialisation, 1780-1914* published in 1982, I found more notes and dates pasted and recorded than in any other book I have ever taken out in my 60 years in the university. Dozens, indeed, scores of students had used this book. I have never seen anything like it. This book clearly was one of Harvard's best investments.

The apology is to Zoltan, and it concerns my response to his question on what it was that I might write for Ivan Berend's 90th birthday: first, I answered, I would have some words on how Berend has understood western writing on economic history (which is definitely not my field); second, that I would summarize how his findings had then enabled Hungarian historians to understand the economic fate of their own country (a subject on which my knowledge was minimal); and thirdly, that I would consider also the manner that Hungarian historians had always imagined the trajectory of their discipline. My intention incidentally, was *not* to focus on Ivan Berend as a public intellectual, since, as we all know, his career has justly been exceptional.

"'Vaste programme" as general de Gaulle liked to say. It would be an exaggeration to suggest that this outline was obviously inadequate. What is however now left of these promised remarks on Berend's Pilgrim's progress in more than 30 books on political economy, follows a progression that is based on five texts: the first is a contribution which appeared in 1973 and which I curiously purchased at that date; the second is a book entitled *Peripheries*, published by the Cambridge University press in 1982, which I have already mentioned; the third is his *History Derailed*, of 2003 which is an overview of 19th century Europe; and the last is his survey in 2016 of the European Union, its history and its shadowed future.

I refer here also but very briefly to Berend's moving account published in 2009 of his life and his early years in 1944-1945. Horrendous years. Dachau. How could one forget or forgive such an ordeal? Of his early and very brief Stalinist years, nothing needs to be said, except perhaps that they very soon mattered for him as being precisely the reverse of what he wished to see for Hungary and for himself.

The first important text of Ivan Berend was in 1973, in a censored *History of Hungary* edited by Ervin Pamlenyi under the Kadar regime. And here is a reference to that text in Britain in 1975: "Dr. Peter Hanak, Dr. Giorgy Ranki, Dr. Ivan Berend and Doctor Candidate Miklos Lackó are thorough and competent researchers in political, social and economic history as one can tell from other works of them, and to some extent from these chapters; but (they) would be difficult to fit into an ideological scenario..." That quotation is from a TLS review in August 1975

of a book that was indeed, and of necessity, haphazardly presented, and not attributed by its editor to any one author, all of them, again, censored.

But this early text was followed in 1982 by an emphatically different book, namely Berend's and Ranki's *The European Periphery and Industrialization 1780-1914*. We find in these pages ten references to Marx and his *Grundrisse*, but there are also ten references to Alexander Gerschenkron. We also find there many pages on how to think about what was a GNP, but the COMECON is never mentioned. This book moreover was emphatically about a common periphery (Immanuel Wallerstein was duly acknowledge) and the book was emphatically *not* just about the specificities of the Hungarian situation under Soviet rule. It was about the economic life of the western capitalist core of Europe and of its periphery: Kossuth, a political figure, was not mentioned in these pages, but Eötvös was, and so was even Szechenyi. The book was not about colonialism or exploitation, but about population and economic growth, railways prices, costs, and so on. It was, in brief, a purposed and a successful book.

And at the other end of Ivan Berend's career (again, with its 30 books and 200 essays, was another and more spacious book. This was *History Derailed* published in 2008: this text was not only about economics, nor was it about political economy exclusively. It was instead about social history taken here as a seamless web, as a grand summation of a life dedicated to scholarship: "Mein Acker ist die Zeit; die Zeit ist mein Vermächtnis" (Goethe). In terms of time, the book was about Europe in the 19th century in industry and agriculture, about romanticism and nationalism, about gender, about structures. In terms of space, it concerned both eastern and western Europe. It was research that was also based on a unique familiarity with the relevant literature in many different languages.

But his last book on *The Contemporary Crisis of the European Union* (2017) was the one that spoke most forcefully to me. First, because I am a certified Euromaniac. But also because the purpose and spirit of this book seemed to me the most puzzling and original in Ivan Berend's career: his lifelong through he had been a meliorist, an economist, a dedicated westernizer, a social democrat. His lode star was then plain. But here, he seemed more puzzled. I now quote from this book: "(The oligarchs') fondness for money makes them unwilling to pay taxes... (In this society emerges) a criminal class... The existence of such persons is to be attributed to want of education, ill-training, and an evil constitution of the State" (cited p. 106). This is not a quotation from Paul Krugman in the *New York Times*. It is taken from Plato's *Republic* and it is also a quotation which Berend likes (he uses it elsewhere). But here, it has taken on a particular purpose since Berend applies it to Europe and to the potential "beginning of a devastating disintegration process" (p.165).

I would go further. This book is not about the blessing of incipient capitalism. It is not about "the West" as an ethical choice for eastern Europe. It is instead, to be brief, that capitalism, world-over, is sick. Capitalism in America today is not just about meritocracy over the common good. It is about the victory of shallow individualism over self-reliance and "true grit," it is about Donald Trump and his 75 million votes, about lies, racism, and political corruption.

This very sad situation enables us to conclude on the theme of Viktor Orban. Hungary is and has been for centuries sandwiched between East and West. "Why Hungary?" Because it has always been small country with powerful neighbors, and since the seventeenth century pulled between a dictatorial East and a liberal West. Hegel (and Tocqueville after him) thought that America had no past and was outside History. Hungary is par excellence a country that has had too much History. Saint-Stephen's crown as a tilted symbol really does speak to that nation's fate. It often mimics its neighbors close and far, at times for the better but also for the worse. We are back here to Dachau, to Eötvös, and to Orban.

And the interesting thing about him (whose stay at Oxford was funded by a liberal and generous Soros) is that this exposure enabled Orban, thanks to Thatcher and Ronald Reagan, to sense that the liberal West was indeed quite sick, and to see also that he could now anchor not just his career but the fate of his own country to that very sickness.

Berend a fourteen-year old victim of lunatic fascism, a young man dismayed by tyrannous Stalinism, and a writer dazzled by the social-democratic West in the 1980's and 1990's: but today a liberal minded internationalist.

This is a trajectory that is much to be admired.