

EAST CENTRAL EUROPEAN PERCEPTIONS OF EARLY AMERICA.

Edited by *Béla K. Király* and *George Barany*. Brooklyn College of the City University of New York, School of Social Science, Department of History. *Studies on Society in Change*, no. 5. Lisse: The Peter De Ridder Press, 1977. 144 pp. \$7.75, paper. Distributed by Humanities Press, Atlantic Highlands, N.J.

A persistent theme in American thought has been the belief that the American Revolution carried a universal and enduring message to mankind. The notion that America derived a special mission in world affairs from the idealism of its revolutionary beginnings has, in the past two hundred years, been challenged, criticized, and ridiculed, but still it survives. It survives in part because there has been just enough evidence of its impact on other parts of the world to give it credence. Never was this belief so widely held or deeply felt as in the mid-nineteenth century, when the nation was still young and fiercely proud of its achievement. Yet, in the aftermath of 1848, many Americans were swept by waves of doubt as they questioned the applicability of America's republican example to other peoples, especially those in Western and Central Europe. In the concluding essay of this brief volume, one of the editors seeks to restore that faith by pointing out that America *did* have an impact on East Central European thought, although not in the overt dramatic fashion that Americans had expected. "Indeed," writes George Barany, "the universal appeal of the American Declaration of Independence and Revolution can be illustrated by their echo in Central and East Europe."

The contributions of eight scholars to this collection—part of Brooklyn College's observance of the bicentennial—provide support to Barany's conclusion. Joseph Rothschild focuses on the perceptions of East Central European immigrants to the United States and suggests that to them America meant freedom in meaningful historical terms rather than abstract terms. Paula Fichtner describes the early efforts of the United States to establish diplomatic relations with the Habsburg Monarchy, no easy task. The impact of "America" on Czech literature from the sixteenth to the early nineteenth century, holding up a "critical mirror" to Europeans as well as emphasizing the values of human freedom and a new social order, is the subject of František Svejkský's study. The reflections of two Hungarian travelers to the United States, Sándor Bölöni Farkas, who toured the country at the time of Tocqueville, and Béla Széchenyi, who visited during the Civil War, are analyzed by Alfred Reisch and Béla Király. Polish attitudes toward American republican government and the American Revolution, down to the present day, provide themes for Irene Sokol and Eugene Kusielewicz.

It is clear from these essays that East Central European perceptions of America tell a great deal about how the people perceived themselves and their own problems. Barany ties all the various threads together, concedes the complexity of the American Revolution's "appeal and echo" in East Central Europe, but emphasizes its significance. The key to an understanding of America's impact, he writes, is "the appreciation of personal and national liberty," two virtues that seldom went hand in hand in East Central Europe. The region, he points out, traditionally has received "enlightened impulses" from outside at a distance of one or two generations; historians should not despair of "the retarded and occasionally elusive appearance, disappearance, and reappearance of American revolutionary and emancipatory ideas in Central and Eastern Europe." Instead, he calls for a greater effort to explore and understand the "multiple links" that tie the people of East Central Europe to the United States. This volume is certainly an important contribution to that effort.

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