Bloomington Hosts Conference on Political Transitions in Hungary

On April 2, 2000, a conference organized by Indiana University’s György Ránki Chair in Hungarian Studies and the Department of Central Eurasian Studies (CEUS), titled *Political Transitions in Hungary in Comparative Perspective*, commemorated two events of great magnitude in Hungary’s history: the thousandth anniversary of Hungarian statehood and the tenth anniversary of the collapse of communism. Hence, all speakers were asked to pose similar questions, such as the international and domestic contexts or the political, economic, and social impact of the particular transition they were asked to address.

In the panel, “From Statehood to Subjugation,” Denis Sinor (professor emeritus, CEUS) addressed the still much-debated origins of the Hungarian nation. Gustave Bayerle (CEUS) pondered the question of whether the disastrous Turkish conquest of the sixteenth century could have been avoided with more prudent diplomacy or a more common purpose among Hungary's political leaders. István György Tóth’s (Hungarian Academy of Sciences) presentation on Hungary's integration into the Hapsburg monarchy concluded that it was preferable to continue Turkish occupation, but he also conveyed the message that a weak state's choices are always limited.

The second panel, “Golden Age and Decline,” began with Mihály Szegedy-Maszák (Comparative Literature, IUB) speaking of how one great intellect, the novelist and political thinker Zsigmond Kemeny, sought to pave the way for an acceptable modus vivendi between Austria and Hungary after Vienna crushed the Hungarian Revolution of 1848–1849. Tibor Frank (Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest) illustrated how the compromise of 1867 helped usher in a “golden age” in Hungarian history, while Attila Pók (Hungarian Academy of Sciences) discussed the social and economic dislocations caused by the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy from a socio-psychological perspective.

For the “Nazism, Communism, and Democracy” panel, three speakers, Gunter Bischof (University of New Orleans), László Borhi (IUB), and Christian Ostermann (Woodrow Wilson International Center) compared the divergent experiences of three nations that emerged from Nazi rule in 1945—Austria, Germany, and Hungary—with the Soviet Union’s imperial onslaught.

Turning to the tenth anniversary of the liberation of Hungary and the rest of East-Central Europe from communism and Soviet rule, Toivo Raun (CEUS) addressed the Baltic experience, while Jack Bielasiak (Political Science, IUB) summarized the complicated Polish experience. Maria Bucur (History, IUB) discussed the impact of history and memory in Romania after 1989, while Paul Marer (Business, IUB) talked about the difficulties of dismantling a centrally planned economy.

In the final panel on “The Aftermath of the Fall of Communism,” Rudolf Tókes (University of Connecticut) addressed the difficult legacy of communism in the creation of a new and democratic institutional system. Finally, Ambassador and former Minister of Foreign Affairs Géza Jeszensky analyzed the foreign policy of Hungary’s first freely elected prime minister, the late József Antall, after the collapse of communism.

Conference speakers are Toivo Raun, Paul Marer, Mihály Szegedy-Maszák, Ambassador Géza Jeszensky, and László Borhi.

In order to place Hungarian history in an international context, we invited speakers to discuss similar experiences in the history of Austria, the Baltic States, Germany, Poland, and Romania. We hoped to create a common framework for the analysis of the long common histories of the Central and East European nations.

please see bottom of next page
IUUK Business Professor Retires

Although Sita Amba-Rao retired in December 1999 as emeritus professor of management in the Business and Economics Division after 21 years at Indiana University Kokomo, she continues to be professionally active in her fields—human resource management and organizational change and development. On a recent visit to India, she was invited to address a group of managers of Bharat Dynamics, Ltd. in Hyderabad. The speech and following discussion focused on “best practices” in human resource management in the context of the globalized economy in India. Amba-Rao, a founding member of the Industrial Relations Association of India, also participated in that organization’s strategy meeting during this visit.

Her recent paper, “Comparative Performance Appraisal Practices and Management Values among Foreign and Domestic Firms in India,” co-authored with Joseph Petrick (Wright State), Jatinder Gupta (Ball State), and Tom von der Embse (IU Kokomo) and published in the International Journal of Human Resource Management (vol.11, Feb. 2000), was described by William Frederick, a prominent scholar in values management, as “a splendid piece of work. I especially admire the fact that you brought forth the importance to practicing managers of grasping the differences found in various types of firms...an excellent example of how research can inform practice” [personal letter to the author, March 2000].

Another article, “Corporate Merger and Employee Commitment: An Assessment of a Teambuilding Intervention,” co-authored with former student Beth Hallock, is forthcoming in the Osmania Journal of Management, a publication of Osmania University in India. In the early 1990s, Amba-Rao spent a sabbatical year at Osmania University. Upon her retirement, she donated a large part of her journal and book collections to the business school of that university.

As an example of her long-standing commitment to IU Kokomo and to her field, Amba-Rao and her husband created a scholarship fund, the Sita C. and C. L. Amba-Rao Service Award, to be awarded annually to an outstanding undergraduate majoring in management administration in the Business and Economics Division. The recipient must have demonstrated outstanding academic achievement as well as contributed his/her professional skills in service to the community. The award is a $500 scholarship to qualified juniors or seniors and was first awarded in 1995–1996.

A MBA-RAO and her husband are retiring to Bellingham in the state of Washington.

—RMN

Impossible as it may seem, in the course of one and a half days, we covered the history of much of Europe over 1,000 years. Each panel was followed by lively and intellectually open debates on questions that have long divided scholars of several disciplines.

—László Borhi
György Ránki Chair in Hungarian Studies, IUB

The conference attracted an audience of more than 75 participants.