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Rákosi, Kádár, Kossuth and Széchenyi - How can they be mentioned on the same page?

Review of the book by Gabriella Csiffáry. Corvina. Budapest, 2021. 495 p.

Rákosi, Kádár, Kossuth and Széchenyi - How can you mention them all in the same page? If not on the same page, then in a single, hefty volume, we have managed to make them compatible. Gabriella Csiffáry, historian and chief archivist, published a nearly half a thousand-page book on them in 2021 entitled: *Hungarian politicians in the classroom*.

The academic researcher of the Budapest City Archives has undertaken the task of making available the school registers of exactly 86 famous or notorious Hungarian people. Based on short biographies and then on documents that have survived to the present day, his book summarises the original school registers, enclosed with the book, one by one.

It's an exciting read and a colourful roster in terms of content and ideology. You only have to select from the personalities on the list: In addition to those listed in the introduction and the title, there are, for example, Prince Ferenc Rákóczi, former Prime Minister Kálmán Tisza, Bishop and Member of Parliament Ottokár Prohászka, Governor Miklós Horthy, university professor and émigré politician Oszkár Jászi, and the anarcho-syndicalist director of the Knyderár, Ervin Szabó, Döme Sztójay, the head of the puppet government of the Emergency Era, György Lukács, the aesthete-philosopher, Gyula Gömbös, the former Prime Minister of the People's Nationalist Party, Gyula Gömbös, the communist People's Commissar, Béla Kun, the former right-wing politician and former President of the First

Republic after World War II, Zoltán Tildy, Tibor Szamuely, leader of the terrorist commune, Cardinal Archprimate József Mindszenty, Imre Nagy, sentenced to death, Ferenc Szálasi, leader of the nation, Ernő Gerő, "bridge-builder", József Révai, journalist and chief ideologist, Ferenc Nagy, small farmer prime minister and emigrant, Mihály Farkas, Rákosi's Minister of National Defence, the dreaded Gábor Péter, the executed László Rajk, Rákosi's former Minister of the Interior, István Bibó university professor and librarian, György Aczél of "3T", our first head of state after the regime change, Árpád Göncz, Gyula Horn, left-wing politician, Gyula Horn Jr. Prime Minister József Antall, and Imre Pozsgay, who was the first to dare to say that 1956 was a "people's uprising".

In content, the names fit together because they are all politicians. But their socialisation and their intellectual and spiritual preparation for their careers were very different.

During his university years, Kálmán Tisza's family was able to finance his travels to France, Belgium and England. In fact, he was able to lecture for a year at the University of Berlin between 1850 and 1851, where Leopold von Ranke had a chair for himself. Ottokar Prohászka was an excellent student throughout his studies and even obtained his doctorate with honours in Rome. Miklós Horthy was a poorly-qualified student, even at the Naval Academy, where he repeatedly passed with failing grades. In high school, Stójay received a satisfactory grade in religion, as did György Lukács in singing. But the later school-educational philosopher had already written an essay at the age of 15, which he presented to his teachers entitled *The influence of individual nations on the education of mankind*. Béla Kun (Kohn) was expelled from high school because of his behaviour, and later he could not even graduate from the University of Cluj, because he was arrested for his political involvement. Szamuely was a bad student all the time. According to the available sources, he was also at odds with his secondary school teachers in Nyíregyháza and was expelled from the institution. Rákosi (Rosenfeld) Mátyás Rákosi (Rosenfeld) Mátyás got a satisfactory grade in singing and gymnastics, but an A in Latin. This provided a good basis for him to master foreign languages easily, and he graduated from the Keleti Trade Academy with a degree in foreign trade. Imre Nagy, a martyr, was so poorly educated that he was unable to finish high school and became a locksmith's assistant. Despite this, he was elected a member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (MTA) in 1950. It is questionable to what extent his academic work was based on his work at the Agricultural Institute and the Statistical Office in Moscow until his return home in October 1944. What is certain is that he proved to be the

right preparation for the Stalinist models, the nationalisation of agriculture and the introduction of the planned economy, to even get a university teaching post in his home country. Ernő Gerő (Singer) attended medical school for two semesters after graduation and never finished. His biography as a young man did not predestine him to be elected an honorary member of the Department of Technical Sciences of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences in 1949, and to receive the Kossuth Prize in the same year. Mihály Farkas (Hermann Löwy) was Minister of Defence and Interior during the Rákosi era (1948-1953), having his first job as a printing apprentice with a bachelor's degree in his hand. The head of the ÁVH, Benjámín Eisenberger, aka Gábor Péter, had a particularly unsuccessful school career. His primary school education is unknown. He flunked his apprenticeship school and finally, with great difficulty, qualified as an apprentice tailor. János Kádár (Czermanik) studied to become a typewriter mechanic, and thus qualified as a journeyman. But after that he never touched a machine. He was a carpet maker and a carpet shop assistant, i.e. a storekeeper. By comparison, he ran our country between 1956 and 1989.

What links these biographies together? As already mentioned, politics and the fact that they have written themselves into Hungarian history. Gabriella Csiffáry's book is definitely a must-read. In addition to learning about the biographies of statesmen, it is useful to see and read about how their beginnings were decisive, where they came from, what kind of family they came from, what influences they were exposed to in their youth, which determined the quality of their later lives. It is impossible to draw up an equation or a definition based on life paths, because each person's school years were paired with their later career in different, individual ways. We cannot say, on the basis of 86 CVs and certificates, that those who did well in school had a high-flying star and those who did poorly had a failing life. And, of course, there is the question of how and in what we measure success. But it is clear from the book that, for many, the only way forward was through politics rather than through the acquisition of lexical and practical knowledge and education. Only... This reduction is not accidental, for the life paths of those who are still unsympathetic to the present day provide unanimous proof that the lack of education has led to a continuum towards political extremism.