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„NÓGRÁD A KÖZÜGYÉRT”

THE CIVIL SERVANTS OF NÓGRÁD(-HONT) COUNTY AND

THE POLITICAL TRANSITIONS

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Between 1938 and 1950, Hungary experienced three major political transformations: the rule of Ferenc Szálasi, the democratization attempt of 1945, and the communist takeover of 1948/1949. These transitions not only brought about radical changes to the existing political structures, but the newly established regimes also significantly impacted the everyday lives of the population. My doctoral dissertation focuses on a clearly defined segment of society: the careers of civil servants in Nógrád (-Hont) County, and the effects of the political transitions on their professional trajectories. The research centers on two main groups: those who formed the county-level administrative apparatus of the interwar political system, and those who, often lacking prior bureaucratic experience, were appointed after 1945 primarily based on political loyalty. The study primarily includes those officials whose positions enabled them to influence the functioning of the county, its districts, and its municipalities. Over the examined period, I identified 270 such civil servants. I collected relevant data on their careers and analyzed using methods derived from prosopographical and archontological research. Although both domestic and international scholarship commonly defines prosopography as the study of a group of historical actors sharing a common background, my dissertation – due to the absence of a proper control group – is better understood as a microhistorical study of the local administrative elite rather than a classical prosopographical analysis.

The central question of my research is how these political transitions influenced both collective and individual career paths, and what strategies civil servants

employed to adapt to externally imposed political changes. My analysis also explores the extent to which the newly established regimes relied on experienced officials and what proportion of the studied group managed to secure positions in the new administrative systems. The case of Nógrád(-Hont) provides a compelling illustration of how national-level political shifts were reflected in local elite restructuring efforts and how individuals and groups responded to the challenges these shifts presented.

The analysis reveals that most of the studied civil servants did not engage in overt resistance, nor did they openly ally themselves with the new regimes. Rather, they sought to adapt to the challenges they faced by making use of the limited options available to them. This adaptation typically took the form of statements and testimonies crafted in the expected ideological language, responding to the actions of the new regimes. Their primary goal was to secure their own and their families' livelihoods and preserve their social status. However, in doing so, they also contributed – albeit inadvertently – to legitimizing the newly established regimes and, consequently, to the bottom-up consolidation of totalitarianism. Therefore, these civil servants can be considered everyday collaborators. In their case, however, collaboration did not necessarily imply the uncritical service of consecutive regimes operating under different ideological frameworks, but rather represented a pragmatic strategy for day-to-day survival and continuity. The relative success of their strategies is reflected in the fact that, by the time the Soviet-style council system was introduced in 1950, 21.1% of the 270 civil servants – 57

individuals – had secured positions at various levels of the new administrative hierarchy. Among them, 19 had already served in the pre-war administration, meaning that 7% of the studied group successfully retained their administrative roles across all three political transitions between 1938 and 1950. This finding demonstrates that, despite the turbulence of mid-20th-century Hungarian politics, it was still possible to pursue a long, continuous career in public administration.