

The first parliamentary appearance of National Socialism in Hungary in 1932

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Abstract: *In this paper, I present the circumstances of the birth of the first more significant national socialist party represented in the Hungarian parliament too, and the life and work of its founder and leader, Zoltán Meskó (1883-1959). Although the almost-unknown National Socialist Party held meetings in Hungary as early as the spring of 1922, and fascist, national, national socialist micro-parties and small movements proliferated like mushrooms in the late 1920s and the early 1930s, Zoltán Meskó, MP was the first to “raise the flag” in the Hungarian parliament on 16 June 1932. This article outlines the life of this strange and unconventional politician, who had once seen better days, was a former military officer, a hero of the First World War, a member of parliament since 1917, and briefly held several posts as a state secretary. I pay special attention to his speeches in parliament in 1932, to the articles in the daily newspaper of the party, the “Nemzet Szava” (Word of Nation), and to the early period of this peculiar “pro-government” organisation loyal to Governor Miklós Horthy, the National Socialist Hungarian Agricultural Labourers’ and Workers’ Party. From the end of 1933, Meskó was in a downward spiral, losing his seat in parliament in 1935, but was re-elected as a deputy in 1939. From this period onwards, however, Meskó was almost insignificant in Hungarian domestic politics.*

Keywords: *Zoltán Meskó, National Socialism, Parliament, National Assembly, National Socialist Hungarian Agricultural Labourers’ and Workers’ Party, Nemzet Szava (Word of Nation)*

Introduction

Zoltán Meskó (1883-1959) was a unique figure in the history of Hungarian politics between the two world wars. He began his career as a military officer, which he continued as a politician from 1917 until 1944. For a short time he held a number of posts as State Secretary (Smallholder Affairs, Agriculture and Interior), and in 1920 he played a prominent role in the organisation of the Smallholders’ Party. In the 1920s, as a member of the Smallholders’ Party and then of the Unity Party (this was the ruling party in Kingdom of Hungary at the time), he was active in politics and public life, both within the walls of Parliament and in other forums. His witty remarks and anecdotes have been published in book form². The book is a portrait of a jovial figure, an active and influential politician who was also entertaining and joking.

He became increasingly anti-Semitic in the 1930s, radicalised in his rhetoric and interpellations and was one of the forerunners of the Hungarian Arrow Cross movement³. The

¹ Horthy, Miklós (1868-1957) admiral, politician, Governor (Regent) of the Kingdom of Hungary between 1920-1944.

² Vidor, Gyula (coll.), *Meskó Zoltán vidám történetei. Elmondja a T. Ház folyosóján* (The hilarious stories of Zoltán Meskó. He tells it in the corridor of the Hungarian Parliament), Budapest, Légrédy, 1925.

³ For a complete biography of Zoltán Meskó, see: Udvarvölgyi, Zsolt, *Meskó Zoltán: egy politikusi pályakép. PhD-értékezés* (Zoltán Meskó: A carrier in politics. PhD dissertation), Miskolc, Miskolci Egyetem Bölcsészettudományi Kar Irodalomtudományi Doktori Iskola, 2008, <https://doktori.hu/index.php?menuid=193&lang=HU&vid=1773>, accessed on 09.07.2015.

first significant national socialist parties were formed in Hungary in the early 1930s. Prior to that, only completely insignificant initiatives had appeared (fascist parties, national parties). The first to be „infected by the brown plague” in Parliament was Zoltán Meskó. On 16 June 1932, the National Socialist Hungarian Agricultural Labourers’ and Workers’ Party announced its formation within the walls of the Parliament building. Meskó was the first to present a national socialist programme in the Hungarian Parliament, but this study will briefly outline his entire career.

The life and work of Zoltán Meskó until 1932

Zoltán Meskó was born on 12 March 1883 in Baja, in a Roman Catholic family⁴. His grandfather, László Meskó Sr. - who was still a Calvinist - came to Baja from Abaúj County, and his father László became a town councillor in Baja. Meskó first graduated from the Imperial and Royal (k. und k. in German) Military School in Kőszeg, then from the Imperial and Royal Military High School in Hranice, Czechia (Morvaféhertemplom in Hungarian, Mährisch Weisskirchen in German) and finally from the Military Academy in Vienna⁵. Zoltán Meskó was commissioned a lieutenant on 1 September 1903 and was assigned to the 14th Imperial and Royal Infantry Battalion stationed in Szeged. He served there for a few years; in 1907, he was no longer an active officer, as he was paid a waiting allowance. In 1910, he left actual military service, placed himself in an off-duty status and became involved in the organisational work of agricultural interest groups. He became general secretary and head of department of the Farmers’ Insurance Cooperative⁶.

After the outbreak of the First World War, he was promoted to the rank of off-duty First Lieutenant with effect from 1 November 1914 and was assigned to the 23rd District Supplementary Headquarters of the Imperial and Royal (k. und k. in German) Army. During the war, he also temporarily served in the command of an Imperial and Royal Infantry Division. According to the Military Gazette (No. 119), on 28 June 1916 he was awarded the “Highest Commendation” for

⁴ Zoltán Meskó's several ancestors and few distant relatives of his family (Meskó of Felsőkubin) were involved in politics and writing. For instance:

László Meskó of Felsőkubin (1851-1922) lawyer, politician, member of the Parliament, State Secretary of the Ministry of Justice between 1907-1909, party leader, county government commissioner.

Pál Meskó of Felsőkubin (1857- 1930) farmer, agrarian politician, managing director of the “Hangya” (Ant) Consumption Cooperative, one of the organisers of the Hungarian farmers' groups.

Márton Meskó of Felsőkubin (1868 - 1898) assistant pharmacist.

⁵ Correctly: Technical Military Academy (Technische Militärakademie), Vienna, then Mödling. Founded in 1717. The so-called Militärakademie (military academy), the highest level of the Austro-Hungarian Empire’s military institutional system. The Military Academy was an imperial and royal (k. und k.), so-called “joint”, 3-year, prestigious institution. A significant part of the officers of the Monarchy's Imperial and Royal (k. und k.) Armed Forces graduated from it.

⁶ The Farmers’ Insurance Cooperative was founded in 1899 on the initiative and with the participation of large landowners. Initially it only provided fire and hail insurance, but in 1914 it extended its activities to include livestock insurance. Together with the “Hangya” (Ant) Cooperative, the Cooperative also developed a modern bank insurance scheme. At the beginning of the Second World War, it provided support for the families of its employees who had gone on military service and for the dependants of staff who had died a heroic death.

“distinguished service in front of the enemy”. Finally, on 27 December 1917 (with the rank to be calculated from 25 December), he was promoted to the rank of Captain out of service⁷. During World War I, he served on the Italian front in the Dolomites, receiving the Silver Military Medal for his services and was wounded. On 21 May 1917, the district of Kecel unanimously elected him as a deputy of the Party of Independence and '48 in a by-election. After the dissolution of the party, he stayed with Ákos Bizony, MP⁸. In 1918, he was for a time the county government commissioner (főispán in Hungarian) of his native Baja.

On 4 December 1918, “the Serbian National Directorate in Novi Sad passed a resolution to appoint a new county government commissioner for each county. (...) A new county government commissioner was appointed for Baranya and Baja. Stipan Vojnić-Tunić, former deputy mayor of Subotica (Szabadka in Hungarian), appeared in Pécs to take up his post. However, he was refused in Pécs. He was more successful in Baja, where he took the post of county government commissioner after the removal of Zoltán Meskó⁹. Baja fell under foreign occupation and Mesko was taken prisoner by the Serbs. After his release, he went to Szeged, where he took part in the organisation of the national army led by Admiral Miklós Horthy.

Meskó later served as State Secretary for Smallholder Affairs and then for Agriculture in the István Friedrich¹⁰ government. In 1920, he was appointed Political State Secretary in the Ministry of the Interior, a position he relinquished in 1921. In 1920, he was very active in the organisation of the National Smallholders' and Agricultural Workers' Party¹¹. He was one of the founders of the National Farmers' Association¹². In the first National Assembly, he represented the district of Kiskőrös with a smallholders' party programme. He was among the first to call for the surrender of war assets. He then took an active part in the party's organisational and agitation work. He was also the executive chairman of István Szabó Nagyatádi's small holders' party. In the

⁷ Ministry of Defence. Military History Institute and Museum. E-mail message. Reg. nr. LEV-1068-1/2015. Subject: The military career of Zoltán Meskó. 3 July 2015. (Materials relating to Meskó: AKVI 56114, and HM 1920.13. oszt. áll. 132872.)

⁸ Ákos Bizony (1846-1922) lawyer, politician, member of Parliament. After the dissolution of the Independence Party in 1917, he founded the Party of Independence and '48 (so-called “Bizony Party”), of which he became president. The party did not prove to be long-lived.

⁹ 1918, http://adattar.vmmi.org/fejezetek/1992/03_1918.pdf, accessed on 04.08.2015. p. 19.

¹⁰ Friedrich, István (1883-1951) politician, football player, businessman, MP, Prime Minister of Hungary in 1919, party leader.

¹¹ The party was formed by the merger of the National Smallholders' Party led by István Szabó Nagyatádi and the National Agricultural Labourers' Party founded by Pál Meskó on 2 January 1919. On 29 November 1919, the United Smallholders' and Agricultural Labourers' Party founded by István Szabó Sokorópátkai also merged with the party.

¹² The National Farmers' Association (known in full as the Village National Farmers' Association) was founded in 1920. Its founders, Gyula Rubinek, István Szabó Nagyatádi, István Szabó Sokorópátkai and Zoltán Meskó were ministers and state secretaries in the early 1920s, and they tried to win the organisation to fight against the “red disease”, the workers of the “sinful towns”. Its members were small landowners from Transdanubia and large farmers from the lowlands. In many places, the Association functioned as a reading group, but it also engaged in vociferous politicking.

second National Assembly he represented his old district with the programme of the Unity Party, but he left the party and went into opposition because of the increase in land tax.

He rejoined the governing party in support of Count István Bethlen¹³ in the wake of the so-called “Counterfeiting of Franc affair”¹⁴. In the first Parliament, he represented the district of Kiskőrös, and made significant contributions, mainly on agricultural issues. He was one of the initiators of the movement against job hoarding and mammoth incomes. He organised the National Farmer Front and set up the National Farmer Home, of which he became the executive chairman, bringing together the farmers’ associations and the agricultural workers’ groups. He was one of those who called for the introduction of compulsory sickness and disability insurance for agricultural workers. He was also responsible for the movement for the “Hungarianisation” of names. He spoke out several times on this issue. Together with Dr. Zoltán Lengyel, MP¹⁵, he founded the Hungarianisation of Names’ Society.

In 1931, he represented his old district in Parliament and became a member of the Committee on Agriculture and Immunity¹⁶. Meskó was active within the walls of the Parliament, but he became notorious for his unrelenting interjections and comments. In the 1920s, these interjections were even more humorous and acerbic, and were met with undivided amusement. From 1931 onwards, the interjections often turned into anti-Semitic, sharply anti-leftist outbursts, sometimes to the point of personal attacks and even assaults. He also became radicalised in his speeches and interpellations and acted as one of the forerunners of the Hungarian Arrow Cross movement. On 12 February 1932, he defined his political principles thus. “I am an agrarian, a representative of the popular, Christian, agrarian wing”¹⁷. He then called for an “economic dictatorship” and said that “a way must be found to give decent poor people a seat in this Parliament”¹⁸. He later quit the governing party, which he justified by saying, “I quit the party to regain my full freedom of action”, but he also immediately pointed out that “quitting the governing party and running off to the opposition left is not to my taste”¹⁹.

¹³ Count Bethlen, István (1874-1946) Hungarian aristocrat, politician, MP, party leader, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Hungary between 1921-1931.

¹⁴ The „Counterfeiting of Franc affair” was a plot by Hungarian high-ranking nationalists to forge French banknotes. The scandal broke in 1925 and the organisers were exposed.

¹⁵ Lengyel, Zoltán, Dr. (1873 – 1940) lawyer, journalist, MP.

¹⁶ Lengyel, László, Dr. - Vidor, Gyula, Dr. (eds.), *Magyar Országgyűlési Almanach* (Hungarian Parliamentary Almanac), Budapest, MTI RT., 1931, https://library.hungaricana.hu/hu/view/OGYK_Almanach_1931-1936_1/?pg=2&layout=s, accessed on 13.09.2022. p. 216.

¹⁷ Hansard of the 1931-1936 session of the National Assembly, proclaimed for 18 July 1931, Volume 4, at the session of 12 February 1932, p. 226.

¹⁸ Hansard of the 1931-1936 session of the National Assembly, proclaimed for 18 July 1931, Volume 5, at the session of 26 February 1932 and 13 April 1932, p. 50., 312.

¹⁹ Hansard of the 1931-1936 session of the National Assembly, proclaimed for 18 July 1931, Volume 6, at the session of 20 April 1932, p. 9-10.

He liked to contribute to the budget debates, as it allowed him to express national socialist propaganda without constraints. On May 9 1932, he accepted the budget - now as an independent MP - but at the same time he said that there was an “underground communist organisation” in the country, and that this “unbridled agitation was spreading, especially among the Hungarian peasant poor and agricultural workers”, and he also read out a communist leaflet²⁰. He ended his speech by saying: “I work more for the farmers and agricultural workers than my deputy fellow for the industrial workers. For seventeen years I have been sent here by the farmers without any support. As a young man of thirty-two, I was brought in on my own resources, and the Hungarian farmers were not cared for one-tenth as much as the industrial workers. This happened under a regime that called itself a smallholders’ party, an agrarian party.” He urged that the “poor peasant people”, the servants, should be paid a decent wage, and then demanded radical measures: “Workers deserve their wages. They say you are a socialist when you talk like that. I believe it if it means that I love the people, that I want to fight and work for the workers, that I want to lift them out of their present sad situation, which is shameful even for the Chinese kuli. If that is socialism, then I am proud to call myself a socialist...”²¹.

The debate on the budget continued, and Meskó came up with one demagogic and simple-minded proposal after another: “I am not a demagogue, but I do not think I am sinning against Hungarian honour if I say to the prosperous French and English capitalists, »wait, I cannot pay my debt any other way than by taking a bite out of my own child’s mouth«”²². The Parliamentary Assembly did not leave Meskó’s thoughts unchallenged, with many, mainly from the Social Democratic side, sharply attacking “Zoltán Hitler”²³. However, such taunts and the like did not deter Meskó from continuing his rampage within the walls of the parliament: “I am not anti-lawyer, but I do owe it to the truth to say here that there is a strong anti-lawyer, anti-fiscal mood in the whole country. They are bloodsuckers, brigands!” Meskó said of himself: “Yes, I am a movement man. This is the voice of Hungarians, the voice of the suffering Hungarians in this country”²⁴.

It is here that I should mention - looking back from the parliamentary battles of words - the formation of the Hungarian national socialist movement nationwide and the main stages of its initial development. The movement thus began to gain momentum after December 1931, and in

²⁰ Hansard of the 1931-1936 session of the National Assembly, proclaimed for 18 July 1931, Volume 8, at the session of 19 May 1932, p. 105.

²¹ Hansard of the 1931-1936 session of the National Assembly, proclaimed for 18 July 1931, Volume 8, at the session of 24 May 1932, p. 224-226.

²² Hansard of the 1931-1936 session of the National Assembly, proclaimed for 18 July 1931, Volume 9, at the session of 3 June 1932, p. 124.

²³ Hansard of the 1931-1936 session of the National Assembly, proclaimed for 18 July 1931, Volume 9, at the session of 6 June 1932, p. 235.

²⁴ Hansard of the 1931-1936 session of the National Assembly, proclaimed for 18 July 1931, Volume 9, at the session of 8 June 1932, p. 319-320.

the early days and summer of 1932. But their activities were then still insignificant. The leaders of the movement were preoccupied by internal conflicts and infighting. At this time Zoltán Böszörmény²⁵, journalist, poet, national socialist politician and Meskó were competing for leadership. Until the summer of 1932, Böszörmény was still organising the Nazi movement in Hungary together with Meskó. However, this alliance lasted only for a time. The two individuals, with leadership ambitions and an extraordinarily ardent desire for public involvement, could not be in the same party for a long time, as neither tolerated the shadow of the other, each wanting an exclusive leadership role. Meskó thought that, because of his better-known public profile, he would soon be the leader of the National Socialist Party led by Böszörmény. He joined the party because of this calculation²⁶.

In the spring of 1932, negotiations began in preparation for his entry. On 28 May 1932, the Ministry of the Interior reported that the negotiations between Meskó and Böszörmény had been successful. Meskó joined the National Socialist Hungarian Workers' Party (also called Scythe Cross Party), and it was planned that after the budget debate Meskó would present the party's manifesto in the parliament. However, the cooperation between the two leaders could only be a very short-term. Although Böszörmény was the less politically inclined of the two, he had the advantage in the party. He was the organiser of the National Socialist Party, so his position within the party was stronger, and at this time, he was the only one who had contacts with Adolf Hitler. However, the cooperation between the two Nazi leadership candidates could not have lasted in other respects, as there were significant differences in their perceptions. The Scythe Cross, following the German example, used the social phraseology they had learned from Hitler, while Meskó, unlike Böszörmény, represented the moderate wing of National Socialism²⁷. A split became inevitable, and Meskó formed a new party under the name National Socialist Hungarian Agricultural Labourers' and Workers' Party. Meskó, the leader, at the time of his party's formation, got an audience with the Governor Miklós Horthy whom he knew well from the “old days” of Szeged in 1919, before his speech in parliament, where he presented his speech and agreed with him that “he would present the programme the essence of which he had communicated to the governor, and at the beginning of his speech he would make a declaration of loyalty to the governor on behalf of the new formation”²⁸.

²⁵ Böszörmény, Zoltán (1893-?) journalist, poet, national socialist politician and party leader.

²⁶ Szakács, Kálmán, *Kaszáskeresztesek*, The Scythe Cross movement, Budapest, Kossuth, 1963, pp. 52-53.

²⁷ *Ibidem*. p. 53-56.

²⁸ National Archives of Hungary: MNL OL BM VII. Res. K 149 1933-7-6292.

Opening of the flag of the National Socialism in the Hungarian Parliament, 1932

On June 16 1932, Zoltán Meskó spoke before the agenda on the subject of international agitation in the country. His speech was delivered in a highly theatrical setting. He appeared at the sitting wearing a brown shirt, a Sam Browne belt and a swastika, and greeted the parliament with a Hitlerist salute. He read out the programme of his party, the National Socialist Hungarian Agricultural Labourers' and Workers' Party, and at the end of his speech he pinned the swastika badge on his chest. In the introduction to his speech, he stressed that "the Italian, Turkish and German peoples found themselves. However much the Hungarian national society has watched with anxious sympathy the difficult struggles of the courageous awakening of consciousness of its sister nations abroad, the founding of the new countries of Mussolini, Kemal and Hitler, however much we admire the new national statesmen of Europe, however much we are imbued with the historical necessity of following their example: we had to understand that only a pure Hungarian movement could triumph in our own land, among our own brothers and sisters, in the air of the peculiarly Hungarian climate. Our objectives, our goals, our ways, our means cannot be in any detail other than Hungarian. We call ourselves Hungarian nationalists." He asked his fellow MPs to "accompany with goodwill and understanding this new movement here in the Danube basin." Finally, he expressed his respect for the Governor Miklós Horthy, "whose exemplary love of race and concern for all of us is one with the soul of the Hungarian people"²⁹.

After that, he read out his party's programme³⁰. A perusal of the programme reveals that the party is founded on the "will to live nationally" and is based on "positive Christianity". It demands border revision, universal equal secret suffrage, that in the future only a "member of the nation" can be granted new Hungarian citizenship, and that only people of Turanian or Aryan origin can become members of the nation. The "Turanian" was intended to identify people of "ancient Hungarian" origin, the "Aryan" to identify "German immigrants". Contrary to the Böszörménys' conception, Meskó - bearing in mind the mixed origin of the middle classes - no longer spoke against foreigners in general. In other words, he only wanted to exclude the Jews from Hungarian society. The programme called for the expulsion of "undesirable elements", the expropriation of war assets, action against profiteers, price gougers and usurers, the general obligation to work, the abolition of incomes without work and effort, and the rationalisation of all mining and large-scale factories, nationalisation of credit, rationalisation of exports, reduction of agricultural interest rates, reform of taxes, especially social taxes, fair adjustment of the ecclesiastical

²⁹ Hansard of the 1931-1936 session of the National Assembly, proclaimed for 18 July 1931, Volume 10, at the session of 16 June 1932, p. 32.

³⁰ *A Nemzeti Szocialista Magyar Földműves és Munkáspárt programja* (Programme of the National Socialist Hungarian Agricultural Labourers' and Workers' Party), in Gergely, Jenő-Glatz, Ferenc-Pölöskei, Ferenc (eds), *Magyarországi pártprogramok 1919-1944* (Party programmes in Hungary 1919-1944), Budapest, Kossuth, 1991, p. 314-318.

burdens of workers and the lower middle classes, abolition of entail (*fidei-commissum*). The following statement might be familiar, albeit from a different era and ideology: “The land belongs first and foremost to those who love and cultivate it.” Meskó demanded the organic integration of the middle class into the working national society, the protection of a viable small industry and retail trade, the reintroduction of the general obligation to protect, the reform of legislation, a wide range of social measures, and finally strict laws against all artistic and literary tendencies which were against the universal interests and ancient traditions of the nation. An analysis of the speech reveals at once its demagogy, its anti-communist, anti-Semitic, anti-capitalist ideology, its pro-revisionism and racism, and finally its excessive emphasis on social and economic problems. These principles played a leading role in Zoltán Meskó’s activities throughout, and he frequently referred to the objectives of the programme in his subsequent speeches.

The next day, Meskó’s weekly, the “*Pesti Újság*” (Pest’s Newspaper)³¹, gave ample coverage to the news of the party’s foundation. On the front page, the first report was entitled “The Hungarian swastika has set off on its triumphal journey”, which, in view of the significance of the event, is quoted below: “The sufferings of decades are thunderously revealing the souls of peoples around the world. From the depths of those struggles, a powerful energy of new national consciousness is bursting forth. To reshape first their countries and then the world in their image. The names of Mussolini, Kemal, Hitler are now the triumphant banners of great countries. Everywhere, our victories have brought a moral revival of new human truths instead of pseudo-morals. In the markets of international countries, the humiliators and the humiliated have exchanged peoples, borders, drawn. The sweat of millions of working people was squandered without consulting the suffering nations. They did not count on the fact that the post of their green council tables would be blotted out by the vibrant colour of new life unfurling on millions and millions of hectares of farmland and that the new crops being greened on them would not bring new crop sacrifices to the paragraphs of the insouciance. The awakening consciousness of millions of working people is demanding life. The Hungarian national socialist movement has been stretched into a great national programme by the unshakeable force of historical coming. The purposeful, disciplined march of our ranks of self-consciousness is moving with hard steps past the hesitant gazes of belittlement and uncertainty. We know what we want! Our goal: the prosperity of our nation. Our strength: our indomitable patriotism, our sense of integrity and the faith of millions of our Hungarian brothers and sisters in us”.

³¹ *Pesti Újság*. (Pest’s Newspaper), political and economic weekly, editor-in-chief: Zoltán Meskó, 17 June 1932, p. 1.

The newspaper then recalled the events in the chamber: “At the session of the Hungarian Parliament on Thursday, 16 June, in the morning, during general interest, Zoltán Meskó, MP, first wearing a brown shirt under his black ceremonial dress, rose to speak. Meskó, former State Secretary, leader of the National Socialist Hungarian Agricultural Labourers’ and Workers’ Party asked to speak to officially announce the formation and objectives of the new party in the first forum of Hungarian public life, speaking before the agenda with the permission of the President of the National Assembly. (...) In the Chamber of the Parliament, the deputies fell silent, in the journalists’ boxes heads bowed forward, pencils started to write down the first self-conscious words of the programme of National Socialism. In the gallery, the marching brown-shirted army of the National Socialist Party darkened in compact, disciplined ranks. Farmers, workers, doctors, engineers, bright-eyed Hungarians came to the disciplined demonstration to witness the parliamentary announcement of the party movement”³².

On 1 October 1932, the government of Gyula Gömbös³³ was formed. The prime minister’s speech emphasised that the new head of government would renounce the implementation of the former race protection programme, and then presented his 95-point government programme, the so-called “National Work Plan”. The programme was commented on by party spokespersons, including Meskó, who said that the government programme “in many respects - and not one cardinal issue - it is identical to our own programme. The »great social cohesion« is fully in line with our programme, and the greatest obstacle to this cohesion is the current economic world order. A new world is what we national socialists are looking for, not only in this country, but worldwide.” In his speech, Meskó proposed abolishing unemployment benefits, instead “we must provide work for everyone”, he said.

He said of Gömbös: “One liberal newspaper says it wants to know which Gyula Gömbös is sitting in the prime minister’s chair, the »old one« or the »new one«. They say the »old one« is enthusiastic, immature, inexperienced, or the »new one«, the settled, wise, tactful, forward-looking, revising and forgiving. On behalf of myself and the thousands of enthusiasts in the national socialist movement under my leadership, I can say that we know only the »old« Gyula Gömbös. Since life is the dictator, let life be his prime minister.” Finally, he expressed his anti-social-democratic and anti-Semitic views: “For indeed internationalism is the greatest humbug, the greatest fraud in the world”, and “where money is easy to come by, where a year’s income can be earned in a day in a café, it is not my kind, not my denomination, who do business, those must take the horns of the plough. This does not mean that I do not respect one or another decent Jewish gentleman or decent

³² *Ibidem*.

³³ Gömbös, Gyula (1886-1936) military officer, politician, party leader, MP, Minister of Defence between 1929-32, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Hungary between 1932-1936.

Jewish fellow citizen, but it means that we are not doing anti-Semitism, but we are speaking out in defence of the Hungarian race”³⁴. From 1931 onwards, Meskó’s anti-Semitism led him into constant verbal battles, mainly with his Social Democratic fellow MPs. The conversations were conducted in a rather abusive, alpine style.

The Nemzet Szava (Word of Nation) daily in 1932

On 31 July 1932, Meskó founded a newspaper called “*Magyar Horogkereszt*” (Hungarian Swastika), which he transformed into a daily newspaper called “*Nemzet Szava*” (Word of Nation) on 22 October 1932, which became the first truly significant National Socialist press product in Hungary.³⁵ On 20 November 1932, the editorial entitled “Hungary claims its territories” stated that “the time has come for the most forceful intervention. Only by recapturing villages and towns in the shortest possible time can the economic crisis be resolved (...) In view of the events in Greater Germany, with the support of Mussolini and Hitler, we must strike a stronger note against the successor states. Hungary has only one realistic way forward: to make the most energetic territorial claims. (...) The Hungarian Prime Minister has openly advocated a policy of revisionism. We believe that this is a turning point in the life of the country”³⁶. On the other hand, the newspaper carried a wide variety of news about the party too, including the fact that the National Socialist Hungarian Agricultural Labourers’ and Workers’ Party had set up winter shelters in Szeged where the town’s penniless could shelter from the cold weather³⁷.

On November 22 1932, the newspaper headlined that “Hitler has taken the fate of Germany into his own hands”. The editorial already referred to him as the “new German torch” who had “bored his way like a meteor into the firmament of European politics - Adolf Hitler is now not only the name of a leader but also the sign of a new direction, he has awakened the world. But the rumblings of the German giant’s rise have awakened the neighbouring outcast nations and seem to be awakening the millennial country.” Later, the article also looks at the domestic situation: “I can still vividly see Dr. Iván Szúts³⁸, Géza Mándi³⁹, Árpád Dobos⁴⁰, András Tari⁴¹ and the others, the Hungarian socialists of the new era on the peripheries of Budapest, as they began to preach the

³⁴ Hansard of the 1931-1936 session of the National Assembly, proclaimed for 18 July 1931, Volume 11, at the session of 12 October 1932, p. 98-100.

³⁵ The importance of the newspaper is demonstrated by the fact that, although several national socialist newspapers were launched, the first to gain a wide readership was the *Nemzet Szava*. It should be noted that *Nemzet Szava* is also mentioned in various press history summaries.

³⁶ *Nemzet Szava* (Word of Nation), 20 November 1932, p. 1.

³⁷ *Nemzet Szava* (Word of Nation), 20 November 1932, p. 3.

³⁸ Szúts, Iván (1900-1973) lawyer, politician, MP, party leader.

³⁹ Mándi, Géza (?-?) worker, national socialist politician, party activist.

⁴⁰ Dobos, Árpád (?-?) national socialist politician, party activist.

⁴¹ Tari, András (?-?) national socialist politician, party activist.

socialist truths of life in the evenings last year among the Hungarians in misery. As they urged the Hungarian workers to find decent livelihoods and to drain the infected public life(...) And I see the small groups of believers slowly turning into a camp. The first local group is being formed in Újpest. Then the others. Then comes the opening of the party's flag in the Parliament, which attracts national attention and attracts the attention of foreign countries. With Zoltán Meskó in the lead, the National Socialists' organisation spread to the countryside. The camp has been growing ever since. It is increasing the yearning for the new Hungary in the souls of honest working Hungarians." Finally, we can also read the "bible of the Hungarian national socialists": "When there will be no greedy accumulation of income and no unemployed prosperity on one side, and no breadlessness, misery and a sea of suffering on the other. But there will be liberty, bread, a more dignified life, justice, respect for work and uncompromising unselfish patriotism. This is the »bible« of the Hungarian National Socialists"⁴².

The paper also reported on party meetings. On 28 November 1932, the party held an "impressive meeting" in Kispest. The party president also appeared and said: "We, national socialists, call each other brothers. (...) I am convinced that the Hungarian worker is Hungarian in his soul. I can see from the interjections here that the Social Democrats are hurt that there is an other socialist party. They believe that it is a crime that we are unbreakably Hungarian as well as being socialist, and that we are fighting against the mask of »internationalism«. A new world must come in which work is valued. A certain minimum standard of living must be given to all. Either the state can give the worker a job, or if it cannot give him a job, it has a duty to provide bread!" The irresponsible promises of Meskó and his fellow leaders fell on fertile ground in some workers' districts of cities, but the party's rival all along was the Social Democratic Party of Hungary. They regularly disrupted each other's meetings. At this meeting, too, "about 20 social-democratic workers took their seats and began to disturb the speaker with angry shouts, and finally began to shout their slogan: »Friendship«"⁴³. In some places, however, in anticipation of later Arrow Cross-social-democratic battles, the disturbances ended in more serious atrocities.

On December 3 1932, a national party dinner was held, attended by a thousand people (!?). Most of the prominent members of the party spoke at the event. Meskó declared that "the movement is based on the religious-ethical world view, Puritan Christianity. He then lashed out in harsh words against the accumulation of jobs, and lashed out strongly against the »skippers«, price-cutters and loan sharks. He called for a new disability law and then protested against further immigration of foreign Jews." A worker, Géza Mándi addressed the patriotic socialist working

⁴² *Nemzet Szava* (Word of Nation), 22 November 1932, p. 1.

⁴³ *Nemzet Szava* (Word of Nation), 29 November 1932, p. 2.

class. Count Fidél Pálffy⁴⁴, the leader of the national socialist movement in Dunántúl (Transdanubia), wrote a letter to the audience: “Today Hungarian Christian society, robbed of its material resources, has lost its freedom of movement, and is committing an unheard-of audacity when it dares to organise in the bondage of international capital and reawakens against speculation. It will wake up, and it will not be lulled to sleep again by international big business, because it has had enough of having already succeeded in lulling the Christian course to sleep in this way”⁴⁵. On behalf of the party’s women members, Dr. Erzsébet Madarász⁴⁶ presented the objectives of the party’s women’s camp. Dr. Sándor Csapó⁴⁷, the party’s prosecutor, conveyed the “enthusiasm” of the national socialist lawyers: “The Hungarian legal profession has long been waiting for a new system, one in which each member of the nation will find his or her secure place in society. The task of the lawyer should not be to twist and turn paragraphs and words, but to bring law into contact with progressive life.” Even more impossible opinions were expressed. András Tari, Central Electoral Board member, dealt with economic issues. According to him, “export-import should be a state monopoly. The state should also have the sovereign right to issue money. The distribution of wealth should be based not on individual dexterity or »Al Capone style« genius, but on talent, industry, and honour. This can only be achieved through a dictatorial national state power built on equality, security, and freedom.” And Géza Pisztrai, the party’s national organisational chief, noted in his speech that the slogan “Courage”, with which party members greeted each other, was the supreme Hungarian virtue and duty”⁴⁸. In December 1932, Adolf Hitler sent a message to the *Nemzet Szava* (Word of Nation): “The future belongs to those who have the heart to fight!” was the succinct message⁴⁹.

The party’s activity picked up at the turn of 1932-33. Meskó launched a nationwide campaign to save the indebted smallholders and farmers. “He took steps with the government to supplement the decree suspending the auctions. If the decree already specifies the cases in which the suspension of the auction is justified, it should also state that the land registry authority should suspend the auction on the request of the interested party”⁵⁰. The movement has also spread to the countryside. When Prime Minister Gyula Gömbös visited Győr, “the delegation, led by Count Fidél Pálffy, the county chief of organisation, Béla Vida, István Fias and László Stuchlich, the

⁴⁴ Count Pálffy, Fidél (1895-1946) aristocrat, politician, MP, national socialist party leader, Minister of Agriculture between 1944-1945.

⁴⁵ *Nemzet Szava* (Word of Nation), 4 December 1932, p. 5.

⁴⁶ Madarász, Erzsébet, Dr (1899-1985) physician, chief physician, author of medical books, national socialist politician, party activist.

⁴⁷ Csapó, Sándor, Dr. (?-1958) lawyer, national socialist politician, party activist

⁴⁸ *Nemzet Szava* (Word of Nation), 4 December 1932, p. 5.

⁴⁹ *Nemzet Szava* (Word of Nation), 13 December 1932, p. 1.

⁵⁰ *Nemzet Szava* (Word of Nation), 14 December 1932, p. 1-2.

district organisers, marching in closed ranks under swastika badges and national flags, with military discipline, attracted great attention”. Meskó was also present at the station. The party leaders presented a memorandum to the Prime Minister, who received them and promised help. In the memorandum, they supported the government: “Our party does not declare itself to be in opposition in order to be a wheel tying in the Prime Minister’s promised work for the great cause of the nation, but a pledge in the hands of the nation that the attacks and intrigues of international tendencies will find such a counterweight in our party, which is determined to fight the hardest, that it will ensure the practical implementation of the national programme at all costs”⁵¹.

The year 1932 ended with optimistic news in *Nemzet Szava*: “Békéscsaba, Nagykőrös, Magyaróvár and Szentendre will be the new stations of Zoltán Meskó’s propaganda, where huge crowds will gather under the banner of the national socialist movement. The National Socialist Party will also use the new year to continue its organizing work with great force”⁵².

On landing phase from 1933

Although the year 1933 was still marked by Meskó’s activity in parliament and the strengthening of the party, at the end of the year the Meskó’s movement started to go downhill. At the end of 1933, the Hungarian National Socialist Party was founded under the leadership of Count Sándor Festetics⁵³. Festetics, who as the brother-in-law of Count Mihály Károlyi⁵⁴ had been Minister of Defence in his government between December 1918 and January 1919, wanted to organise fascist storm troops in late 1933 and early 1934, and consistently criticised the Gömbös government for its policy against agrarian poverty. After his flag was torn down, many people joined the “Count Sándor”, mainly because they hoped to share in the income from the 40,000-acre estate in Dég, Tolna county. Count Festetics initially approached Meskó as an MP of the governing Unity Party. On 17 December 1933, he left the governing party. However, Meskó tried to take advantage of one of the country’s richest aristocrats, and their break-up became inevitable. In January 1934, the Count published the party’s programme in Dég under the title „Detailed Programme of the National Socialist Party”. Later, for a scant six months, Count Festetics’

⁵¹ *Nemzet Szava* (Word of Nation), 18 December 1932, p. 1.

⁵² *Nemzet Szava* (Word of Nation), 30 December 1932, p. 2.

⁵³ Count Festetics, Sándor (1882–1956) aristocrat, politician, MP, Minister of Defence between 1918-1919, national socialist party leader.

⁵⁴ Count Károlyi, Mihály (1875-1955) aristocrat, politician, MP, Prime Minister of Hungary (1918-1919) and President Of Hungary (1918-1919).

organisation merged with the Meskó-Pálffy party, but on 1 July 1934, Festetics left the merged national socialist party and began to engage in politics again independently⁵⁵.

By the end of 1934, Meskó had become one of many Hungarian Nazi rival party leaders. The central problem of the Hungarian national socialist movements was the lack of unity and of a suitable leader (“Führer”). The unification of the parties, groups and factions, which “went their separate ways according to the Turanian spirit”, could not be solved, and their rival leaders competed for Hitler’s favour, although they had already recognised in 1932 that an “apostolic leader” was needed for the success of their movements. For example, the German ambassador Hans Georg von Mackensen⁵⁶ did not offer Goebbels to receive the politically unknown Lajos Bozony⁵⁷, a member of Meskó’s entourage who was trying to contact him⁵⁸. This also shows that by the end of 1933 Zoltán Meskó and his party had lost almost all recognition in the Hungarian political arena and diplomatic circles as well.

For the 1935 elections, the far-right parties tried to unite their forces. In 1934, Festetics allied with Meskó’s and Count Pálffy’s party, but Festetics later broke away and merged with the Debrecen-based national socialist group. This merged party received seventy thousand votes and got two members of parliament. The Meskó-Pálffy party failed to win a seat. A few weeks before the elections, on 4 March 1935, the Party of the Will of the Nation of Ferenc Szálasi⁵⁹ was founded, but it was still insignificant and did not run in the elections. From 1935, after many decades as an MP, Meskó continued to be active in politics outside Parliament. He travelled the country, (re)organising his party.

By 1939, the Hungarian National Socialist Agricultural Labourers’ and Workers’ Party (the official name of the party at the time) was the longest-established national socialist party, but the more radical actions of the Arrow Cross Party had won many sympathisers away from the Meskó’s party. The party only put up a list in Jász-Nagykun-Szolnok county, and its recommendations in Debrecen were not accepted. Only three candidates were nominated in individual districts⁶⁰. In

⁵⁵ Paksy, Zoltán, „A nemzetiszocialista mozgalmak megszerveződése, párt- és regionális struktúrája Magyarországon az 1930-as években” (The organization, party and regional structure of national socialist movements in Hungary in the 1930s), in *Múltunk* (2009) nr. 3. <http://epa.oszk.hu/00900/00995/00019/pdf/paksyz09-3.pdf>, accessed on 12.09.2022. p. 216-219.

⁵⁶ von Mackensen, Hans Georg (1883-1947) German diplomat, ambassador, State Secretary at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs.

⁵⁷ Bozony, Lajos (?-?) national socialist politician.

⁵⁸ Németh, István, „A magyarországi fasiszta szervezetek működésének visszhangja a német és magyar kormánykörökben” (The repercussions of fascist organisations in Hungary in German and Hungarian government circles), in *A Politikai Főiskola Közleményei* (1984) nr. 1-2. p. 140-149.

⁵⁹ Szálasi, Ferenc (1897-1946) military officer, politician, arrow-cross party leader, MP, „Leader of the Nation” between 1944-1945.

⁶⁰ *Választástörténet-1939* (History of elections – 1939), <http://www.polhist.hu/voks2002/vtort39.htm>, accessed on 21.01.2009.

the 1939 elections, the Meskó party won three seats among the Arrow Cross parties running separately. The party chairman Meskó and István Magyary-Kossa⁶¹, a landowner and cousin of Miklós Horthy, an old comrade-in-arms of Meskó, became deputies of Jász-Nagykun-Szolnok county⁶², while Dr. Lajos Jandl⁶³ won a seat in Tamási, Tolna county. The successive failures led to sharpening tensions between the Arrow Cross Party and the other national socialist factions. A good example of this was the failed boycott of parliament by the Arrow Cross Party. Later, Meskó accused Kálmán Hubay⁶⁴, Faction Leader of Arrow Cross Party and his group in parliament of unlawful appropriation of the Arrow Cross symbol. From that point on, relations between Meskó and the Arrow Cross activists deteriorated completely. In January 1940, the Arrow Cross fighters physically assaulted him. Perhaps as a result of this, he gradually distanced himself from the Szálasi's MPs and fellows, who were partly disparaging and partly jealous of the Meskó party's politicking⁶⁵. Although the Arrow Cross movement, which was gaining strength in the late 1930s, sucked the air away from Meskó, who represented the “older school”, they still also saw competition in his party. New “players” entered the political arena (Gömbös died in 1936, others retreated), and political discourse took on a different language. Meskó, too, became disillusioned with politics. His discontent was compounded by family tragedies: his son, Tibor Meskó died a heroic death at the age of 25 from machine-gun fire on 5 October 1938 in Rimaszombat⁶⁶ as a lieutenant in the Hungarian army⁶⁷, and his other son, Imre Meskó died tragically in hospital as a prisoner of war in Soviet captivity on 28 March 1945⁶⁸. After the war, Meskó was sentenced by the People's Court to five years imprisonment in the first instance and life imprisonment in the second instance for war crimes. Meskó with the assistance of his beloved family fought against this sentence throughout his life but was finally released only in the days of the 1956 revolution. Later, the Kádár regime did not tolerate the former national socialist party leader's release, and he was arrested again in 1957. In 1959, Meskó, who was 76 years old and by then very ill, appealed to the Kádár secretariat to have him released. Kádár pardoned his former prison companion, allowing “the long-suffering and

⁶¹ Magyary-Kossa, István (1856-1950) landowner, politician, MP, Ranking Speaker of the National Assembly.

⁶² István Magyary-Kossa became the Ranking Speaker of the National Assembly. He resigned after the formation of the House of Representatives and was replaced by Dr. Béla Szemere.

⁶³ Jandl, Lajos, Dr (1894-1974) physician, politician, MP.

⁶⁴ Hubay, Kálmán (1902-1946) journalist, Arrow Cross politician. Until the release of Ferenc Szálasi in 1940, he was the leader of the Arrow Cross Party and leader of its parliamentary group.

⁶⁵ On the relationship between the Meskó party and the Arrow Cross party, see: Lackó, Miklós, *Nyilasok, nemzetiszocialisták 1935–1944*, Arrow Cross, *National Socialists 1935-1944*, Budapest, Kossuth, 1966, p. 118., 185., 207., 212., 233.

⁶⁶ Correctly: in Kacagópuszta

⁶⁷ <http://www.hadisir.hu/hadisir/?bejegyzesek=adatlap&id=950735664926469352>, accessed on 05.08.2015. Letöltés ideje: 2015. augusztus 5.

⁶⁸ Udvarvölgyi, Zsolt, *Meskó Zoltán: egy politikusi pályakép. PhD-értékezés* (Zoltán Meskó: A carrier in politics. PhD dissertation), Miskolc, Miskolci Egyetem Bölcsészettudományi Kar Irodalomtudományi Doktori Iskola, 2008, <https://doktori.hu/index.php?menuid=193&lang=HU&vid=1773>, accessed on 09.07.2015. p. 108.

„The first parliamentary appearance of National Socialism in Hungary in 1932”, *Astra Salvensis*, XII (2024), No. 23, p. 61-76.

tormented veteran politician” to return home to his family ten days before his death. Meskó died on 10 June 1959 in Nagybaracska, and was buried in Baja, accompanied by a crowd of 100 people.

Conclusion

I believe that by researching and processing the sources available to me, I have succeeded in presenting the career of an unusual Hungarian politician. Zoltán Meskó (1883-1959) was a military officer, politician, state secretary, Member of Parliament and founder-president of the first significant Hungarian national socialist party. He once looked forward to a distinguished career as an army officer or an agricultural lobbyist or a politician, but later he divided from his former self and shifted to the extreme right, while at the same time becoming marginalised. His ideology was terrible, his anti-Semitic and hate-speech-based statements unacceptable. Later on, he and his family at the risk of their lives, were involved in the rescue, hiding and feeding of Jewish families during the Holocaust in Budapest in 1944-1945.⁶⁹ I consider Meskó had a complex life, but he was nevertheless an insignificant figure in the Horthy era rather than a major player.

⁶⁹ Udvarvölgyi, Zsolt, *Meskó Zoltán a népbíróság előtt: Egy nyilas képviselő, aki zsidókat mentett a vészidőszakban – forrásközlés* (Zoltán Meskó in front of the People's Court: an Arrow Cross MP who saved Jews during the Holocaust – sources), *Keresztény-Zsidó Teológiai Évkönyv*, 2018, p. 229-246.