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## Zoltán Tildy and 1919

### *Abstract.*

After the Second World War, Zoltán Tildy held the offices of Prime Minister of Hungary and later President of the Republic. As a figure of historical significance, his career is the subject of considerable controversy. The central question is why Zoltán Tildy did not take a more robust stance against the nascent communist dictatorship. A number of questions about his life's journey can be answered by attempting to comprehend his thought process through an earlier historical moment. For the first time since Lenin, a proletarian dictatorship was proclaimed in Hungary. Under Béla Kun's regime, many people enthusiastically embraced the Soviet Republic, only to be disappointed by it due to several misunderstandings. One of the figures associated with this enthusiasm and early survival technique was Tildy, who is associated with the communist leadership. He established a Reformed organization in Somogy County, called the Pastors' Trade Union. Furthermore, his life was also marked by the death of his father-in-law from the same period, an episode that is therefore also covered in this paper.

**Keywords:** Hungarian Reformed Church, Hungarian Soviet Republic, First World War, trade union, communism, Somogy County, Zoltán Tildy, Antal Gyenis, cooperation

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He was one of those politicians whose past was a stain that needed to be covered up. In his memoirs, Dezső Sulyok commences his account of Tildy.<sup>2</sup> This study aims to present a hitherto under-researched aspect of Zoltán Tildy's life.

Between the two world wars, Zoltán Tildy was a prominent figure in Hungarian politics, representing *Független Kisgazdapárt* (FKGP) [Smallholders' Independent Party]. He was a vocal opponent of the Nazi regime in Germany.<sup>3</sup> He became a prominent political figure in the post-1945 period and briefly during the 1956 revolution.<sup>4</sup> He was Prime Minister of Hungary from 1945 and President of the Republic from 1946, a period during which the communist dictatorship was established. He was a politician who was committed to democratic principles but also demonstrated an ability to compromise, a quality that was effectively exploited by anti-democratic forces.<sup>5</sup>

However, prior to this, in 1919, Zoltán Tildy played a pivotal role in a particularly intriguing and unconventional period in Hungary's history. Between 21 March and 1 August 1919, the Hungarian Soviet Republic attempted to establish a Bolshevik dictatorship. The existence of the communist state for 133 days had a significant impact on the life of the churches, as the state constantly sought to restrict church activity within the walls of the churches. In this context, some church members opted for collaboration while others resorted to overt or passive resistance. A third group engaged in various forms of action to survive the totalitarian but unstable communist dictatorship.<sup>6</sup>

Zoltán Tildy was among those who fell into the latter category in 1919 and founded the Somogy Pastors' Union with several of his own members. The activities and fate of Zoltán Tildy's father-in-law during the same narrow six-month period are of crucial importance for understanding his subsequent career trajectory. My research has been somewhat influenced by the fact that all the press material about the Somogyi Pastors' Union is missing from all the archives I could find. This is likely due to a conceptual procedure.

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<sup>2</sup> Sulyok, Dezső (1996): *A magyar tragédia*. New York, Hungarian October 23 Movement. 434.

<sup>3</sup> Romsics, Ignác (2005): *Magyarország története a XX. században*. Budapest, Osiris. 227, 260.

<sup>4</sup> Op. cit. 393.

<sup>5</sup> Op. cit. 286–291.

<sup>6</sup> Csűrös, András (2019): Adalékok az egyházi ingatlanok tanácsköztársasági államosításához, különös tekintettel a Református Egyházra. In: *Múltunk. Politikátörténeti folyóirat*. 2019/1. 96–118.

## Introduction

Zoltán Tildy was born on 18 November 1889 in Losonc, which would make him 30 years of age in 1919.<sup>7</sup> Between the years 1910 and 1913, he attended the Reformed Theological Academy in Pápa, where he was awarded a scholarship to study in Belfast.<sup>8</sup> He entered into matrimony in 1914. Between 1916 and 1919, he served as an assistant pastor in Szenna (Somogy County). In March 1919, he was transferred from Szenna to Orci as pastor, remaining in the same county.<sup>9</sup> By his own account, he taught religion during the Soviet Republic although the subject was abolished in Somogy on 18 April.<sup>10</sup> While there was no central decree banning the teaching of religion, the banning order was issued county by county, or the capital city decree was used as a basis. Tildy was still permitted to continue teaching religious studies, which was not an isolated occurrence. One such example is that of a teacher in Somogyviszló, who stated that he would continue to teach religious lessons until he was reported.<sup>11</sup> The Soviet Republic of 21 March to 1 August 1919 was not a dictatorship in the making but rather an experiment in state building at the conclusion of the First World War. There were instances of anarchy, and in numerous municipalities and counties, the central laws and decrees were implemented in a manner that differed from their intended purpose. In some instances, the implementation of these measures was excessive, while in others no provisions were implemented at all. The Soviet Republic adopted a hostile stance towards the churches. All church institutions were nationalized, all property and contributions were confiscated from the churches, and even cash was taken from the safes.

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<sup>7</sup> HAAS, György (2000): *Diktatúrák árnyékában. Tildy Zoltán élete*. Budapest, private edition. 13.

<sup>8</sup> SZERENCSE, Károly (1991): *Tizenhárom életrajz*. Budapest, Tankönyvkiadó Vállalat.

<sup>9</sup> HAAS 2000, 22. According to other sources in 1920: VÍGH, Károly (1991): *Tildy Zoltán életútja*. Békéscsaba, Tevan. 17. But based on his private letter, the first is more certain, since he says, “Én olyan gyülekezetbe jöttem egy hónappal előbb, amely nem akart papot választani.” [“I came to a congregation a month before that did not want to elect a priest.”]. In: *Archives of the Transdanubian Reformed Church District I*. Church District Records 1. b. Administrative records, 1919. box 404. 1360/1919.

<sup>10</sup> ILLÉS, Dezső (ed.) (1969): *Tanácsköztársaság Somogyban*. Kaposvár (Hungary), Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party Committee of Somogy County. 212.

<sup>11</sup> *Archives of the Transdanubian Reformed Church District I*. Diocesan records 1. b. Administrative records, 1919. box 404. 1441/1919.

## **Pastors' Union**

During the Hungarian Soviet Republic, on 21 April 1919,<sup>12</sup> Zoltán Tildy, together with several Reformed pastors, organized a pastors' union in Somogy County, of which he became the secretary.<sup>13</sup> The association was most commonly referred to as the Somogy Protestant Pastors' Union, the Somogy Pastors Union, or in several sources as the Union of Reformed Pastors in Nagyatád County.<sup>14</sup> It is unclear whether, among historical figures, John Calvin or Lenin would have reacted more negatively to the news that such an organization could be formed. One of our most important sources on the union is a letter from Zoltán Tildy to a friend in Budapest, which is preserved in the bequest of László Deme to the Synod Archives. In his letter, Tildy wrote, "We are preparing a pastors' meeting in Somogy (formation of a pastors' union, future organization and management of our diocese and parishes), and on Friday 11 April 1919 we will have important things to do in Kaposvár."<sup>15</sup> It transpires that at the time the letter was written the decision to form a trade union had not yet been taken. It is likely that the idea originated at the meeting. The letter reveals that the participants were expected to come from the area divided by the structure of the Reformed Church of Hungary into the diocese of Outer and Inner Somogy.<sup>16</sup> In a subsequent section of the letter, the author proposed that a representative from Budapest should attend the inaugural meeting, which was tentatively scheduled for Tuesday, the 15<sup>th</sup>, in Kaposvár.<sup>17</sup> It is possible that the organizations in question may have already been formed on 15 April, rather than

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<sup>12</sup> BALOGH, Margit – GERGELY, Jenő (1993): *Egyházak az újkori Magyarországon. 1790–1992*. Budapest, Hungarian Academy of Sciences: Institute of History. 168.

<sup>13</sup> BOLYKI, János – LADÁNYI, Sándor (1987): Református Egyház. In: Lendvai, L. Ferenc (ed.): *A magyar protestantizmus, 1918–1948. Tanulmányok*. Budapest, Kossuth Kiadó. 37.

<sup>14</sup> *Archives of the Transdanubian Reformed Church District I*. Diocesan records 1. b. Administrative records, 1919. box 404. Certificate of pastors of the Inner-Somogy. 52/1919.

<sup>15</sup> Without date. [All translations of originally non-English texts/quotations are mine throughout the article unless otherwise stated.]. At the bottom of the letter is written "mid-April 1919?" DEME, László (1985): Visszatekintés a Magyar Evangéliumi Keresztyén Diákszövetség útjára. Budapest. 49–52. In: *Archives of the Hungarian Reformed Church's Synod* 23. fonds. Box 6. MEKDSZ history.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

waiting until the 21<sup>st</sup>. It is important to consider the context of the Soviet Republic's decree on religious freedom, which was issued on 17 April. This decree dispelled naive ideas about religious freedom, and it had to be read out in church, with an explanation, and checked by careful comrades. Consequently, if the organization had been established prior to this date, it would have been reasonable to assume that they would have a greater degree of flexibility than they currently had.

With regard to the pastors' union, Lajos Máté, pastor of Somogyvisonta, was appointed president of the pastors' union and was also appointed local representative of the Credit Union based in the capital.<sup>18</sup> It is known that there is one other officer of the organization. József Kovács, a pastor from Kaposszentbenedek, was member of the electoral committee. A relative list of members can be compiled, which included 22 pastors,<sup>19</sup> representing approximately one third to one quarter of those serving in the dioceses of Inner and Outer Somogy.

It would be of interest to ascertain how the Soviet Republic managed to cope with this somewhat anomalous trade union. Zoltán Tildy wrote in his letter<sup>20</sup> about the movement within the church. Elek Vincze, a priest from Felsőmocsolád, was the first to initiate action. Since then, negotiations have been conducted with the leaders of the Socialist Party in Kaposvár and the members of the county executive committee. There was a great deal of understanding and goodwill throughout.<sup>21</sup> *Új Reformáció*, an internal

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<sup>18</sup> *Archives of the Transdanubian Reformed Church District I*. Diocesan records 1. b. Administrative records, 1919. box 404. Certificate of pastors of the Inner-Somogy. 52/1919.

<sup>19</sup> Zoltán Tildy, Lajos Máté, József Kovács, Ödön Farkas, János Fekete; besides them, István Császár (Gige), Márton Csertán (Kaposvár), Pál Mezey (Kutas), the pastor of Somogyjád, name unknown, Aladár Izsák (Somogyszob), Zsigmond Németh (Alsók) also joined the meeting at the invitation of the pastor of Mocsolád, Elek Vincze. Nemeskisfaludi was also member of the union. Sándor Tóth (Vásárosbéc), Sándor Tóth (Zselickisfalud), Árpád Vikár (Nagypostad?), József Györek (Alsósegesd Tábor / Dábor?) pastor, and one more unnamed member. Kristóf Barakonyi from Homokszentgyörgy, Sándor Bujtár from Hencsés, and one more unidentified pastor.

<sup>20</sup> The letter is addressed to "Laci". He also mentions Imre Szabó and Gombos [Ferenc], so he must be writing to one of the people who mobilized in the capital, László Deme. *Archives of the Transdanubian Reformed Church District I*. Records of the Transdanubian Reformed Church District 1. b. Administrative records, 1919. box 404. 1360/1919.

<sup>21</sup> DEME 1985, 49–52.

church reformer newspaper, also wrote about the cooperation with the party (Hungarian Socialist Party): "With the friendly cooperation of the socialist party there, they want to create a trade union of Reformed pastors."<sup>22</sup> Two sources provide evidence that Zoltán Tildy had agreed in advance with the Hungarian Socialist Party to form a trade union. This was a rare occurrence in 1919. There were few priests and pastors who cooperated with the communist regime. Even according to socialist historiography, the regime's church policy "provoked open or covert opposition from the majority of church leaders and pastors".<sup>23</sup>

The party was indeed aware of the Pastors' Union and maintained an awareness of its activities. László Bohár, a Lutheran pastor from Sárszentlőrinc, expressed a desire to join both the party and a trade union. On 24 April, the Tolna County Administrative Committee replied that he had been accepted into the party but should not join the trade union because "the pastors' trade union is being formed, so when it is formed, he should join it".<sup>24</sup>

A secondary source indicates that the Catholic lower clergy of Győr and the county also sought to establish a trade union. The existence of a trade union is also of interest to us because membership of a trade union was contingent upon membership of a political party.<sup>25</sup> It is evident that members of the Pastors' Union did not automatically become party members. The peculiarity of the situation is further compounded by the fact that pastors were not electors and could not be elected in accordance with the constitution of the Council system.<sup>26</sup>

The society in question was not particularly ideologically committed. The Pastors' Union was not structured according to ideological principles but rather on the

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<sup>22</sup> *Új Reformáció*. II, 16[20 April 1919]. 8.

<sup>23</sup> SZALVA, János (1978): *A Magyar Tanácsköztársaság egyházpolitikájának néhány kérdése*. National Archives of Hungary. XIX-A-21-C. State Office for Church Affairs. 4. box 41. 14–15.

<sup>24</sup> K. BALOG, János (ed.) (1970): *A két forradalom Tolna megyében (1918–1919)*. The Committee of Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party of Tolna County's Department of Propaganda and Culture. 441.

<sup>25</sup> BELLÉR, Béla (1969): A Tanácsköztársaság és a vallás. In: *Világosság*. X, 4. 216.

<sup>26</sup> Constitution of the Soviet Republic, § 21. In: PONGRÁCZ, Jenő (ed.) (1919): *Tanácsköztársasági Törvénytár I*. Budapest, Hungarian Socialist Party. 46. This was not voted by Parliament or the legislature replacing it but by a council of People's Commissars with executive powers, then called the Revolutionary Governing Council in Hungary.

basis of advocacy. In any case, the aforementioned József Kovács reported that he was engaged in the teaching of religion in the village and in the resistance to the liquidation of church property.<sup>27</sup> Ödön Farkas, the pastor of Nagybajom, was member of the trade union but was subsequently blacklisted as a counter-revolutionary, and his sermons were subjected to repeated scrutiny.<sup>28</sup> A similar situation occurred to János Fekete, a Reformed pastor from Galambok. He stated, "I joined the Somogy Protestant priests' organization, but only out of collegiality and because I believed that by being so unified, we would not be so easily handled."<sup>29</sup> The pastor from Galambok declined to accept the state aid that was offered, citing a lack of alignment between his principles and the conditions attached to the aid.<sup>30</sup> Therefore, it can be concluded that this union was not a peace movement in the making despite the name suggesting otherwise. The majority of pastors were not motivated to collaborate but rather to ensure their own survival. It is unclear whether the participants were aware that Zoltán Tildy was engaged in discussions with the Communist Party regarding the union.

Following its establishment, a significant development occurred. On behalf of the Nagyatád Rural Trade Union, President Lajos Máté petitioned the Revolutionary Governing Council to exempt union member pastors from the confiscation of church property. This appeal was drafted on 11 June and extended an invitation to the pastors to attend a meeting.<sup>31</sup> It is not possible to ascertain the source of the exemption, and it is considered unlikely that it was granted. However, a similar incident occurred in Kaposvár, where the liquidating commissioner informed the Reformed pastor in advance of his impending arrival, effectively preventing the liquidation. After the liquidation, the commissioner returned to the pastors on several occasions to express his apologies.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> *Archives of the Transdanubian Reformed Church District I*. Diocesan records 1. b. Administrative records, 1919. box 404. Certificate of the pastors of the Inner Somogy. 50/1919.

<sup>28</sup> Op. cit. 59/1919.

<sup>29</sup> Op. cit. 36/1919.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> *Archives of the Transdanubian Reformed Church District* 138. documents of the Somogyi Reformed Diocese. b. Administrative documents, 1919. box 134. 1149/1919.

<sup>32</sup> FAZEKAS, Csaba (1997): A „Vallásügyi Likvidáló Hivatal” 1919-ben. In: Pölöskei, Ferenc – Stemler, Gyula (eds.): *Múltból a jövőbe. Tanulmányok*. Budapest, Eötvös Loránd University: Faculty of Humanities, Department of Modern and Contemporary Hungarian History. 79.

The Dean of the Outer Somogy Reformed Diocese in Ságyvár retained possession of all the land, agricultural implements, and livestock belonging to the diocese for the current year.<sup>33</sup> In contrast, the Reformed parish in Somogyudvarhely was expropriated and subsequently inhabited by a small number of proletarian soldiers and even a member of the “Cheeky” (*Ripők*), together with his almost cousin.<sup>34</sup> His case was not an isolated one; during the Soviet Republic, parishes were also socialized, although in most cases the seizure was not carried out. It can be seen that the liquidation did indeed occur in Somogy County, and that there was no positive response to the request.

After the collapse of the Soviet Republic, Tildy also wrote about the trade union as an interest group: “Naturally, I did not take part in any communist movements or in spreading communist ideas. I did not agitate. I was neither member of a workers’ council nor of a board of directors nor of a trade union. (The Lutheran pastors of the outer and inner dioceses of Somogy formed a so-called ‘trade union’ for the purposes of a united defence. I was a member, but it was not a socialist union, it did not ask for recognition, it did not belong to a political party, it did not pay party fees.”<sup>35</sup>

The future prime minister was prepared not only to defend himself but also to draw up a concrete programme for the Reformed pastors of the capital. “It is of the utmost importance that the reorganization of our congregations be carried out with unanimity. In conclusion, the Association of Evangelical Workers should 1. take over the dioceses, 2. take over the leadership of the dioceses, 3. send a man to each congregation for the reorganization of the congregations.”<sup>36</sup> In addition, he proposed the retirement of elderly pastors to be replaced by young people ready to take up their posts.

So, Tildy tried to help events in the capital with concrete ideas. His activity was much needed, for we must give credit to his statement in early March 1919 in the left-wing New Reformation that “in its present state [...] our church is incapable of meeting the crying needs of the present time...”<sup>37</sup> Our sources are incomplete, but we tend to see

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<sup>33</sup> *Ráday Archives of the Dunamelléki Reformed Church District* A/1 b. Bishop’s Papers, 1919 Papers 201. box. 831/1919.

<sup>34</sup> *Archives of the Transdanubian Reformed Church District* 138. documents of the Somogyi Reformed Diocese. b. Administrative documents, 1919. box 134. 1377/1919.

<sup>35</sup> Op. cit. 1149/1919.

<sup>36</sup> DEME 1985, 49–52.

<sup>37</sup> TILDY, Zoltán (1919): Munkát! In: *Dunántúli Protestáns Lap*. XXX, 10. 75–76.



the Somogyi Pastors' Union as a grotesque attempt at defence. In this context, however, the party's positive attitude seems strange. In this light, we consider Károly Vigh's remark, "Tildy was one of those Reformed pastors in 1919 who did not oppose the power of the Council but cooperated with it in solving the contemporary problems of our church", to be exaggerated.<sup>38</sup>

In addition to the defensive tactics, we must mention Gyula Keresztes, who was almost Tildy's neighbour. In Kaposmérő and Újlak, he prevented the implementation of the "proletarian dictatorship" in cooperation with the peasants (not Tildy!). During the 133 days, he was in contact with counter-revolutionary circles. For this, he was threatened in the 2 April issue of *Somogyi Munkás* with "the strike of the 'hard fist' of the workers".<sup>39</sup> Pál Bolla, the Reformed pastor of Inke, a remote village in Somogy, denounced the communists from the pulpit, spoke his mind so loudly that the commander of the Red Guard wanted to arrest him on the first day of Pentecost. When asked if he had taken a job during the Commune, he told the deacon, "Under these circumstances, only in the prison of Kaposvár was a job offered, possibly a hanging, which, thanks to God's omniscient grace and providence, was thwarted and made impossible at the twelfth hour. [I kept my faithful together, urging them to persevere and to trust in God]."<sup>40</sup>

To sum up, Zoltán Tildy and his friends and colleagues in Somogy founded the Pastors' Union for protection. According to our sources, they were not able to carry out any real activity, and there was no advantage or later disadvantage for the members to join. The organization was not formed on ideological grounds, but at the time of its foundation Zoltán Tildy had clearly agreed and cooperated with the Socialist Party. The tragedy of Zoltán Tildy's later life was that he sought an agreement with a power that strove after exclusivity. The first overture was the possible creation of a trade union.

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<sup>38</sup> VIGH 1991, 15.

<sup>39</sup> *Archives of the Transdanubian Reformed Church District I*. Diocesan records 1. b. Administrative records, 1919. box 404. 114/1919.

<sup>40</sup> Op. cit. 65/1919.

## **Antal Gyenis**

The future president of the republic was also involved in other aspects of the Soviet Republic, namely in relation to his father-in-law.

Antal Gyenis was born in Üszögpusztá (Baranya County) in 1871. He completed his primary schooling in Pécs and then attended the Cistercian Gymnasium in Pécs. He was asked not to enrol for the 1887 school year. He was expelled from the third class of the Episcopal Teacher Training College for disciplinary reasons. He received his teacher's diploma in Baja in 1889. He was sent to Pécsvárad and then to Szekszárd (Tolna County), where he got married.<sup>41</sup> In 1901, he moved with his family to the nearby Dombóvár. He led an active social and civic life. He was the editor-in-chief of the newspaper *Dombóvár és Vidéke* in 1911–1912.<sup>42</sup> In 1916, he was drafted for military service. In 1918, at the time of the Aster Revolution, he formed the local National Council as member of the Hungarian Social Democratic Party. In February, shortly before the proclamation of the Soviet Republic, he founded the local Soldiers' and Workers' Council and was elected its president.<sup>43</sup> On the orders of Antal Gyenis, religious instruction was banned in the schools of Dombóvár on 24 March, before the decree of the capital was issued.<sup>44</sup> The next day, the Dombóvár "Directorate" – as school director – entrusted him with the supervision of the socialized schools.<sup>45</sup> (We do not know if he was related to Vilmos Gyenis, who was also elected to the Dombóvár Directorate.)<sup>46</sup>

In addition to the Dombóvár Directorate, he held other positions:<sup>47</sup> he was the chairman of the district council,<sup>48</sup> was member of the county council of public culture,

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<sup>41</sup> SIMON, Károly (1984): *Két évtized Dombóváron (1901–1919). Emlékezés Gyenis Antal igazgatótanítóra*. Vol. II. Dombóvár (Hungary), Cultural Centre and Library of Dombóvár City. 3–4.

<sup>42</sup> Op. cit. 5–14.

<sup>43</sup> Op. cit. 15–16.

<sup>44</sup> Op. cit. 17.

<sup>45</sup> K. BALOG 1970, 84.

<sup>46</sup> Op. cit. 106. Or comrade Ferenc Gyenis from Szigetvár. *National Archives of Hungary*, K 46 - PTI - 605. f. box 9. II/15./d. ő. e. 329.

<sup>47</sup> SÜLYÖK 1996, 434–438.

<sup>48</sup> SIMON 1984, 15–16.

and was also on the Editorial Board of the journal *Dombóvári Proletár*.<sup>49</sup>

The latter is interesting because there was a counter-revolutionary movement there, and Antal Gyenis took part in its bloody suppression. Four people died in the fighting, and three were hanged by the communists as reprisals. The Catholic priest was also severely beaten. Antal Gyenis took part in the fighting as a platoon leader.

On 25 June 1919, he sent a telegram to the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs, requesting that a detachment of the armed forces be sent to Dombóvár and the surrounding area because "movement" had been observed. The Red soldiers did not arrive, but two months later Pál Prónay and his troops did. "The most murderous and at the same time the most influential of all the paramilitary units, the Pronay company (later Battalion)." <sup>50</sup>

Antal Gyenis was executed along with ten others on 18 August 1919. He was buried in Tamási, and after 1945 his ashes were transferred to Dombóvár.<sup>51</sup> Dezső Sulyok, a major figure in the democratization of Hungary after 1945, wrote the following about the impact of the relationship between Zoltán Tildy and Antal Gyenis:

Zoltán Tildy was a Protestant pastor who had been haunted all his life by the fate of his father-in-law. [...] The most natural thing for Tildy to have done would have been to lead the agrarian proletariat and, with this revolutionary impetus, to lead Hungarian democracy to victory, thus overtaking Rákosi. But the looming shadow of his hanged father-in-law prevented him from taking such a bold step. Meanwhile, his wife, bent on revenge against his father, pushed him to the left to satisfy her vengeance.<sup>52</sup>

The shadow of his father-in-law was cast over the career of the politician<sup>53</sup> later

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<sup>49</sup> K. BALOGH 1970, 108–109, 132–134, 200–201, 318.

<sup>50</sup> BODÓ, Béla (2010): Hungarian Aristocracy and the White Terror. In: *Journal of Contemporary History*. 45, 4[October]. 704.

<sup>51</sup> SIMON 1984, 16–17.

<sup>52</sup> SULYOK 1996, 434–435.

<sup>53</sup> "Politikai indulását, későbbi magatartását is befolyásolta apósának sorsa, akit az 1919-es Tanácsköztársaság viselt jegyzői tisztsége miatt (neve ott szerepelt a parasztakasztások dokumentumain) felakasztottak." [His political start and his later behaviour were also influenced by the fate of his father-in-law, who was hanged for his position as a notary in the

dubbed the “hangman in robe”,<sup>54</sup> as he rejected all applications for clemency as President of the Republic. Among others, he rejected the pardon requests of people who were leading politicians and military officers in Hungary between 1920 and 1945. After 1945, he insisted to the very end on a coalition with the left-wing parties, as he had been afraid of a showdown since 1919. He did not want to see a left-wing dictatorship. Zoltán Tildy hesitated to oppose the communists’ attempt to seize power. The historian Károly Szerencsés called it a “policy of retreat”.<sup>55</sup> Zoltán Tildy’s attitude and role after 1945 are significantly overshadowed by the facts we have learned about his and his father-in-law’s activities and history.

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Soviet Republic in 1919 (his name was on the documents of the hangings of peasants).]. SZERENCSE 1991, 55–56.

<sup>54</sup> The vestments of the Hungarian Reformed pastors.

<sup>55</sup> SZERENCSE 1991, 58.

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