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Polish Electoral Law in the 1920s in the Light of the Hungarian Period Literature and Electoral Law. A Comparative Historical Study

Keywords: Polish electoral law, Hungarian electoral law, Hungarian electoral law period literature, 1920s.

Słowa kluczowe: polskie prawo wyborcze, węgierskie prawo wyborcze, węgierska literatura prawnicza okresu wyborczego, 1920 rok

Summary

Based on Hungarian period literature, the study presents the main features of 1920s Polish electoral law, while comparing it to the Hungarian electoral law of the same period. Those elements of Polish electoral law are highlighted that the interwar Hungarian literature covers. Likewise, the study outlines the two differing directions which – already apparent in the first decades following the world war – the development of Polish and Hungarian electoral law had taken, despite starting out on a similar footing in the wake of independent statehood. Before drawing conclusions – with a consideration of their impact on political life – the study touches upon, in both states, the structure of the legislature, the electoral system and the distribution of seats, the conditions of active and passive suffrage law and the questions surrounding the nomination process. While in Poland “politics was shaped by electoral law’s chronic state of crisis”, in Hungary the admittedly manipulated electoral law ensured governability.

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Streszczenie**Polskie prawo wyborcze z 1920 roku w świetle węgierskiej literatury i prawa wyborczego. Studium porównawcze**

Tekst stanowi analizę mającą na celu zestawienie głównych zasad polskiego prawa wyborczego z 1920 r. oraz węgierskiego prawa wyborczego, przeprowadzoną na podstawie literatury węgierskiej tego okresu. Artykuł przedstawia, widoczne już w pierwszych latach po I wojnie światowej, dwa odmienne kierunki ewolucji węgierskiego i polskiego prawa wyborczego, różne, pomimo rozwoju dokonującego się w oparciu o podobne zasady, a także w rezultacie powstania suwerennego państwa. Analiza obejmuje strukturę władzy, system wyborczy i zasady podziału miejsc w parlamencie, warunki czynnego i biernego prawa wyborczego, praw wyborczych kobiet, a także kwestii dotyczących procedury wyborczej. Podczas gdy w Polsce „polityka została ukształtowana przez prawo wyborcze w przewlekłym stanie kryzysu”, na Węgrzech starano się kształtować prawo wyborcze, w celu zagwarantowania praworządności.

[In Poland] politics was shaped by electoral law's chronic state of crisis.
(Sándor Berecz, 1932)²

I.

The year 1918 proved to be a decisive turn in the histories of both the Polish and Hungarian nations. For the Poles, November 11th meant independence after 125 years³, while only two days later, on November 13th, Charles IV, Emperor of Austria and King of Hungary, relinquished the Hungarian throne as a result of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy's military collapse

² S. Berecz, *A tökéletes választójog (The Perfect Electoral Law, Hungarian language)*, Budapest 1932, p. 232.

³ Independent Poland ceased to exist in 1793, when its territory was divided up among Russia, Prussia and Austria. N. Davies, *Lengyelország története (The History of Poland, Hungarian language)*, Budapest 2006.

on the Italian Front. With the Peace of Riga (March 18th, 1921) ending the Polish-Russian (“Polish-Bolshevik”) War, the signing of the Treaty of Trianon (June 4th, 1920) ending the Hungarian-Romanian War in 1919 and the WWI for Hungary – the result of which was the loss of two-thirds of her territory – both the Poles and Hungarians faced the task of organizing an independent state. The creation of an electoral system was part of that task.

References to Polish electoral law in the Hungarian literature, however, were made only after the consolidation, by which time the criticism of the era’s definitive Hungarian law of 1925⁴ had been brought to the fore. Sándor Berecz’s book was published in 1932, and was unique in that it foremost analyzed foreign electoral laws – Poland’s, among others – in order to hasten suffrage reform in Hungary. Tihamér Acsay’s 1934-published book also made reference to foreign suffrage, with somewhat less emphasis. He also made note of the two most instructive characteristics of Polish electoral law from the Hungarian perspective, which we shall review in greater detail below. We therefore shall present Polish electoral law of the period as the Hungarian sources from the period considered it.

We must emphasize, however, that the mentioned works should not be considered as comparative studies in the modern sense since they only describe the foreign examples (Berecz), or simply reference them (Acsay). Nor did the authors need this perspective, since the experts and politicians – for whom the books had been produced – were all well-versed and familiar with the Hungarian electoral law (and its peculiarities) that was in effect. From a distance of ninety years, however, even 1920s Hungarian electoral law is shrouded in the fog of time; therefore, with the historian’s perspective, we have completed the comparison *post factum* – with Polish considerations, in the present work. The basis of the comparison from the Hungarian side is formed by the Electoral Act of 1925, whose most important aspects had become law via decree in 1922⁵, and would define the Hungarian electoral system until 1938.

⁴ 1925. évi XXVI. törvénycikk az országgyűlési képviselők választásáról (Act XXVI of 1925, *Concerning the Election of the Representatives of the Parliament*, Hungarian language), <http://www.1000ev.hu/index.php?a=3¶m=7637> (25.03.2015).

⁵ A m. kir. minisztérium 1922. évi 2.200. M.E. számú rendelete, az 1922. évben összeülő nemzetgyűlés tagjainak választásáról (Decree 2.200 of 1922 of the Royal Hungarian Ministry,

II.

Interwar Poland's parliament was bicameral, consisting of an upper house, the "Senate", and a house of representatives named the "Sejm". The 444 members of the latter were elected for a 5-year term⁶. In Hungary, a temporary legislative body, the unicameral "National Assembly" functioned from the time of the 1918–1919 revolutions until 1926, from which time a "Parliament" was elected, and whose upper house was thusly reorganized⁷. The number of representatives was finalized in act only from 1938⁸, because of a delay in electoral district reform, from which time 260 representatives were seated in the Hungarian parliament. As in Poland, a term lasted for five years⁹, which was not so usual for Europe in that era, where the shorter 4- or 3-year term was more commonplace.

III.

In 1919 the Polish National Assembly (convening the constitutional convention) was elected via a proportional (list) electoral system, and from 1921 onwards this system was implemented for both houses¹⁰. Both of the Hungarian authors cited earlier paid attention to this fact, as the extension of the list electoral system was an important consideration in Hungarian electoral reform. The Hungarian Electoral Act of 1925 applied the list electoral system

Concerning the Election of the Members of the National Assembly Convening in 1922, Hungarian language), [in:] *Magyarországi Rendeletek Tára LVI. 1922. (Compilation of Hungarian Decrees LVI 1922*, Hungarian language), Budapest 1923, pp. 14–70.

⁶ S. Berecz, op.cit., p. 89. and p. 321.

⁷ 1926. évi XXII. törvénycikk az országgyűlés felsőházáról (*Act XXII of 1926, Concerning the Upper House of the Parliament* (Hungarian language), <http://www.1000ev.hu/index.php?a=3¶m=7682> (26.03.2015).

⁸ 1938. évi XIX. törvénycikk az országgyűlési képviselők választásáról (*Act XIX of 1938, Concerning the Election of the Representatives of Parliament*, Hungarian language), <http://www.1000ev.hu/index.php?a=3¶m=8074> (25.03.2015).

⁹ 1925. évi XXVI. törvénycikk (*Act XXVI of 1925*), par. 177.

¹⁰ S. Berecz, op.cit., p. 146. T. Acsay, *Lajstromos szavazás egyéni választással. A választójog kérdései (List Voting with Individual Elections. Questions about Electoral Law*, Hungarian language), Budapest 1934, p. 37.

only to Budapest and its surrounding areas, and those cities having more than one seat (seven larger cities in total). Everywhere else – where only one representative would be elected – individual candidates ran¹¹.

In Poland out of 444 representatives, 372 were elected via district elections, while 72 gained entry through countrywide lists. There were a total of 64 districts, with each district having from 4 to 14 representatives¹². In Hungary the simple majority system was used in 199 electoral districts (only one representative was elected from these districts), while in 11 list districts a total of 46 representatives were elected via the proportional electoral system¹³. The Electoral Act of 1925 implemented the countrywide list in Hungary, too, although – in contrast to the Polish solution – it could not be considered as an integral part of the system. For the law allowed the Ministry of the Interior to reduce the number of electoral districts by ten percent until a special act would finalize the number of districts; until then, however, no change to the number of representatives was forthcoming. The remaining “surplus” representative seats were to be filled by the parties’ countrywide lists¹⁴, which were closed in both Poland and Hungary.

While in Poland the seats were divided up according to the D’Hondt method¹⁵, in Hungary, the list seats were handed out – using proportional number – according to the largest-remainders principle¹⁶. A common feature of both the Polish and Hungarian system was that the share of the countrywide list seats meant a premium to the major parties, which is to say,

¹¹ 1925. évi XXVI. törvénycikk (Act XXVI of 1925), par. 13. (1). We note that in 1919 the electoral law of the People’s Republic of Hungary (People’s Act XXV) implemented a list system exclusively. The National Assembly that had convened the constitutional convention did not get elected. With Act I of 1920, Hungary returned to monarchy. The interwar “temporary” regent handled all responsibilities of the head of state.

¹² S. Berecz, op.cit., p. 90 and p. 263.

¹³ S. Berecz, op.cit., p. 25. We note that according to the electoral law of 1938, 135 representatives were to be elected as individual candidates and 125 from list districts. From that point, every jurisdiction (county) became a list district, and the law required that within each list district there be individual electoral districts. The number of the latter was established by the minister of the interior via decree.

¹⁴ 1925. évi XXVI. törvénycikk (Act XXVI of 1925), par. 12. (2) and (3).

¹⁵ S. Berecz, op.cit., p. 90 and p. 263.

¹⁶ 1925. évi XXVI. törvénycikk (Act XXVI of 1925), par. 98. The Electoral Act of The People’s Republic of Hungary (People’s Act XXV) likewise used the D’Hondt method in 1919.

that the countrywide list at that time did not play a compensatory role in either country. In Poland only those parties received countrywide list seats (as well as the seats remaining vacant after the first allocation), which were able to win in at least six districts seats, in proportion to the votes received for district lists¹⁷. In Hungary the seats that could be filled from countrywide list were also divided up among the parties based on the proportion of the vote received, but countrywide list seats belonged exclusively to those parties which capable of organizing nationally, and from which at least ten candidates had been validly nominated¹⁸.

In Hungary list voting was secret and mandatory. On the other hand, the voting for individual candidates was public and optional¹⁹. Poland only experimented with optional, public voting, when in November 1930, Marshal Piłsudski's government bloc took up the fight against the opposition bloc that had been formed from the various other parties. The high state committee charged with electoral affairs – whose chairman was chosen by the President of the Republic from among candidates nominated by the government – instructed the heads of the electoral districts to allow voice votes for lists to count²⁰.

The Polish electoral geography hit the minorities who lived in concentrated territories – mainly the Ukrainians and the Belorussians, – hard, since it was stated that, for a given electoral district, the smaller the percentage of Poles living there, the greater the number of votes needed to win a seat. In theory the ratio could be as great as 1:2. For example, in the Pole-dominated city of Krakow, one seat represented 46,000 inhabitants, while in Kremenets, in the Ukrainian electoral districts, one seat represented 98,000 inhabitants²¹. In Hungary, the minority population became negligible in the wake of the Treaty of Trianon, while the large electoral districts which had been created in the days of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy remained, so that the fewest independence representatives could be elected²².

¹⁷ S. Berecz, op.cit., p. 90 and p. 263.

¹⁸ 1925. évi XXVI. törvénycikk (Act XXVI of 1925), par. 12. (5).

¹⁹ 1925. évi XXVI. törvénycikk (Act XXVI of 1925), par. 13. (2) and 14.

²⁰ S. Berecz, op.cit., p. 70.

²¹ S. Berecz, op.cit., p. 232.

²² In one of his parliamentary speeches, future prime minister Gyula Gömbös (October 1st, 1932 – October 6th, 1936) hinted at this: "This district gerrymandering originates from a time when the national resistance had to be broken". *The Hungarian National Assembly's*

IV.

In Poland the representatives of the Sejm were elected on the tenets of universality, equality, directness and secrecy by men and women at least twenty-one years of age who were living in the given electoral district at the time the election was called²³.

In Hungary, the first condition for active suffrage was Hungarian citizenship, but the fact of citizenship was not strictly sufficient for the fulfillment of this condition. The Law of 1925 limited the franchise to only those individuals who had been citizens for at least ten years before the election.

The second condition for suffrage was that the citizen had been living in the same settlement for at least two years before the election. It is interesting to note, however, how many exceptions there were to this rule. The 1925 law did allow for everyone a one-time change of residence during the period of exclusive residence. When such a situation arose, the calculation of the duration of time for the required exclusive residence was done such that the time before the change of residency was taken into account. Moreover, any length of time of residence was sufficient for public officials, teachers and clergy; for those who had graduated from middle school and were permanently employed; as well as the members of the National Association of Actors and for the wives of the above listed categories.

Men had to be at least twenty-four years of age, while for women the minimum age requirement was thirty years, for active suffrage. This was the 1925 Law's third age-related requirement. At the same time, irrespective of age, all individuals who had finished university or college qualified for suffrage.

415th session, Monday, May 25th, 1925, [in:] *Nemzetgyűlési napló XXXII (The Chronicle of the National Assembly, which convened from June 16th, 1922, vol. XXXII, May 14th, 1925 – June 3rd, 1925, Hungarian language)*, Budapest 1925, p. 153.

²³ S. Berecz, op.cit., p. 46 and p. 89. On the basis of the 1919 Hungarian suffrage decree, the members of the National Assembly were elected by men and women at least 24 years of age, in a universal, equal, direct and secret-balloted vote. *A magyar kormány 1919. évi 5.985. M.E. számú rendelete, a nemzetgyűlési, törvényhatósági és községi választójogról (Decree 5.985 of 1919 of the Hungarian Government, Concerning National Assembly, Municipal and Local Suffrage Law, Hungarian language)*, [in:] *Magyarországi Rendeletek Tára LIII 1919. (Compilation of Hungarian Decrees LIII 1919, Hungarian language)*, Budapest 1919. pp. 879–881. However in 1922, the below interpreted regulations came into force via decree.

Education assessment was the right of suffrage's fourth element. Accordingly only those men who had finished fourth grade in elementary school were eligible to vote. For women the requirement was having finished sixth grade. An exception to this rule was the woman who either had at least three legitimate children; which also included those children who had laid down their lives in WWI, or could support herself financially. For her, the education requirement also was having finished fourth grade.

In Polish elections, active-duty soldiers could not participate; however, they were not precluded from being elected as representatives in the Sejm²⁴. By contrast, in Hungarian elections, serving members of the armed forces and Gendarmerie, police, coast guard and customs officials had neither active nor passive electoral rights²⁵.

In Poland a candidate had to be at least twenty-five years of age in order to be elected²⁶. In Hungary the age requirement was thirty years, in addition to all of the prerequisites listed above²⁷. Polish state officials could not be elected from the electoral district where their office was located, with the exception of those officials who worked at a central bureau (ministry)²⁸. There was a similar regulation in effect in Hungary, but only the officials in the leadership capacity (lord lieutenants and chair judges), judges, prosecutors and the election committee heads were impacted²⁹. It was a unique Hungarian element that the ex-commissars of the Republic of Councils³⁰, the ex-members and ex-prosecution commissioners of the revolutionary court of justice could not be elected³¹. Otherwise, civil service in Hungary was no barrier to being elected to the National Assembly; upon his election, however, the representative-elect was required to leave his civil service occupation³². An in-

²⁴ S. Berecz, op.cit., p. 89.

²⁵ 1925. évi XXVI. törvénycikk (Act XXVI of 1925), par. 6.

²⁶ S. Berecz, op.cit., p. 46.

²⁷ 1925. évi XXVI. törvénycikk (Act XXVI of 1925), par. 9. According to Act XIX of 1938 par. 55. (1), additionally a lifetime career occupation was required, after which the individual had to pay a direct tax, except if he had been a representative earlier.

²⁸ S. Berecz, op.cit., pp. 89–90.

²⁹ 1925. évi XXVI. törvénycikk (Act XXVI of 1925), par. 11.

³⁰ Period name: Hungarian Soviet Republic, March 21st, 1919 – August 1st, 1919.

³¹ 1925. évi XXVI. törvénycikk (Act XXVI of 1925), par. 10. (1) 6.

³² 1925. évi XXVI. törvénycikk (Act XXVI of 1925), par. 182.

teresting aspect of the Polish regulation was that a representative could not be a managing editor. In Hungary Minister of Justice Tibor Zsitvay's³³ conflict of interest proposal was the only similar circumstance³⁴.

V.

In Poland the nomination for the electoral district's list had to be submitted thirty days before the election, and the maximum number of candidates that could be on it was twice the number of representatives to be voted for in the district³⁵. In Hungary the nomination had to be submitted to the election commissioner eight days prior to the election; in the case of a list election, the number of candidates of a list had to match the number of representatives and alternate representatives that could be elected from the district³⁶. The Polish and Hungarian systems worked similarly in that a law-school-trained judge would review the nominations, who, in Poland, was also the head of the district's electoral committee, while in Hungary, he was the election commissioner of the committee which consisted of a committee head, himself and four additional members and alternate members³⁷. Also similar was that in Poland a trustee had to be named simultaneously with the nomination (if a trustee of another list objected the party's name, then the consent of the head of the impacted party had to be obtained)³⁸, in Hungary in turn, the voters submitting the nomination had, on behalf of the party and up to the start of the election, the right to name two confidantes for each voting area to monitor the lawfulness of the election, while in list districts, the right to name a trustee and an alternate trustee for representation of the signatories and candidates against the electoral committee³⁹.

³³ Minister of Justice: February 4th, 1929 – October 1st, 1932.

³⁴ S. Berecz, op.cit., p. 90.

³⁵ S. Berecz, op.cit., p. 126.

³⁶ 1925. évi XXVI. törvénycikk (*Act XXVI of 1925*), par. 62. (3) and 93. (4).

³⁷ S. Berecz, op.cit., p. 126 and 1925. évi XXVI. törvénycikk (*Act XXVI of 1925*), par. 53. (4) and 62. (20). In locations where a list election was held, the decision to accept the nomination was for the election committee to make. Par. 93. (6).

³⁸ S. Berecz, op.cit., p. 126.

³⁹ 1925. évi XXVI. törvénycikk (*Act XXVI of 1925*), § 64. (1) and 93. (5).

In the Polish system, a nomination list needed at least 650 signatures⁴⁰. In Hungary, in those individual districts numbering at most ten thousand voters, the signature of at least 10% of the voters was necessary, while in those districts with a voter population above ten thousand, a minimum of one thousand voter signatures was needed to run the candidate. However, if the candidate had been a member of the National Assembly already, that is, if the candidate was running for reelection, then all he needed was 5% (individual district number maximum ten thousand voter) or the signature of 500 voters (districts with a voter population above ten thousand). 10% of the voters could nominate a local list, but at most 5,000 voters who had the right to vote in the respective list electoral district⁴¹.

Although the period literature emphasizes that the respective countries' nomination systems had the most in common, it was nonetheless the countrywide list nomination – due to the inherently different roles the countrywide list played – to which very different rules applied. In Poland, the nominations for the countrywide list had to be submitted to the high election commissioner forty days before the election – the election commissioner was picked on the basis of the Supreme Court's triple nomination process, with the head of state making the appointment while taking the prime minister's suggestion into consideration⁴². In Hungary, however, the parties had to submit the lists to the president of the House of Representatives in the six days following the election⁴³. In the Polish system, to qualify a countrywide list, it was necessary to get the nomination of at least five members of the previous Sejm, or a total of 1,000 nominations from two different electoral districts, which is to say, at least 500 from each district. The countrywide list was composed of no more than 100 candidates, and the candidates of the electoral districts had to state whether they wanted to contribute to tying their list to the countrywide one⁴⁴. In Hungary, for a countrywide list, the number of representatives and half that number of alternate representatives were nominated on the basis of how many representative seats the

⁴⁰ S. Bercz, op.cit., p. 126. and p. 263.

⁴¹ 1925. évi XXVI. törvénycikk (Act XXVI of 1925), § 62. (4), (5) and 93. (2).

⁴² S. Bercz, op.cit., p. 126.

⁴³ 1925. évi XXVI. törvénycikk (Act XXVI of 1925), § 12. (7).

⁴⁴ S. Bercz, op.cit., p. 126.

countrywide list allowed for⁴⁵. In the Polish system the electoral fee was unknown (the deposit of an agreed-to amount of money during the nomination)⁴⁶, while it was introduced in Hungary only in 1937⁴⁷.

VI.

The Hungarian period literature – since the representatives' honorarium was already then a sensitive subject – hints that in Poland the honorarium of a representative was a monthly 1,310 zlotys. The marshals of the diet received four times this amount, while the vice president one and a half times⁴⁸. It is also worth noting the Hungarian precept that any public service employee who was elected as a member of parliament received that amount in honorarium which he would have been entitled to had he retired from that public service position. At the end of his term as a member of parliament – since he had to be moved back into his former position – he had to be provided with a salary commensurate with his earlier job⁴⁹.

VII.

The Polish electoral system proved instructional for Hungary primarily for two reasons: both of the authors of the period highlight the system's list-like nature as a positive, while at the same time emphasizing that universal and secret ballot suffrage did not guarantee governability⁵⁰. All we can add to this is that while the formation of Hungary's interwar governments seemed admittedly stable – the Bethlen administration's time in office was precisely

⁴⁵ 1925. évi XXVI. törvénycikk (Act XXVI of 1925), § 12. (7).

⁴⁶ S. Berecz, op.cit., p. 263.

⁴⁷ 1937. évi VIII. törvénycikk az országgyűlési képviselőjelölés újabb szabályozásáról (Act VIII of 1937, Concerning the Further Regulation of the Nomination Process for the Representatives of the Parliament, Hungarian language), par. 4, <http://www.1000ev.hu/index.php?a=3¶m=8035> (6.04.2015).

⁴⁸ S. Berecz, op.cit., p. 328.

⁴⁹ 1925. évi XXVI. törvénycikk (Act XXVI of 1925), § 182. (5), (9) and (10).

⁵⁰ Acsay also mentions this, in connection to the danger posed by the “micro-parties” (T. Acsay, op.cit., p. 63) including the Berecz's opening quote.

ten years, four months and ten days – a parliamentary majority could only be provided via manipulated, which is to say, neither universal nor, in large part, secret-ballot suffrage law. In other words, the role that suffrage law plays today could not be completely fulfilled in either country at that time. Moreover, that the electoral system better reinforced the governability in Hungary can be considered more a result of its history during the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, while Poland could not have had a similar experience.

The new Polish state's Sejm (convening the constitutional convention) consisted of fourteen Polish and two minority (Jewish and German) political parties following the elections held in November 1918; there was total dissention, as not even the largest party could muster 30% of the seats. The number of parties did not fall later, as ten Polish and six minority parties received seats in the Sejm at the beginning of 1922, while fourteen Polish and eight minority parties picked up seats in 1928. Although the new electoral law – which was passed on July 28th, 1922, but already modified on September 21st – introduced a closed list arrangement, the simultaneously implemented countrywide list worked to the benefit of the larger parties, as the smaller parties could not receive any seats through it. In an effort to take advantage of this setup, large blocs developed before the election, these blocs subsequently broke up into its component pieces following the election. In the Sejm, distinct clubs developed around the individual party leaders; moreover, later the number of representatives belonging to no party significantly increased⁵¹.

The result of this was that from November 18th, 1918, to May 14th, 1926 – for a duration of seven years, five months and twenty-six days – Poland had no less than twenty-six different governments, staying in power for an average period of only five months and twenty days, since the coalition governments could lean on neither a united ruling party nor a parliamentary majority for support. During the transition (handover) period between governments – which summed to three years, five months and twelve days, so almost half the time – so-called “technocratic ministries” governed in the vacuum⁵².

⁵¹ S. Berecz, *op.cit.*, pp. 232–233.

⁵² S. Berecz, *op.cit.*, p. 233.

In order to remedy this political uneasiness, the rightist parties recommended electoral reform in 1926; these steps would have included reducing the number of representatives, creating a voter quorum whereby to win a seat a candidate had to receive a minimum of 100,000 votes and, to the detriment of the national minorities, the implementation of a number of exceptional measures. While the committees of the Sejm were debating the topic of electoral reform, however, on May 14th, 1926, Marshal Piłsudski initiated a coup d'état. The Sejm allowed it to stand, and from that point, the president was within his right to dissolve the Sejm and Senate. During the parliament's lapse, the president governed the nation via decree. The government was able to withstand parliamentary attacks because it was prohibited to hand in a motion of no confidence at the same committee meeting as the motion was decided⁵³.

Marshal Piłsudski, fretting about the prospect of an open dictatorship, chose instead to work together with a shadow parliament. As Piłsudski's organized "nonparty-affiliated" bloc could only manage to receive a quarter of the seats in the March 1928 elections, the marshal's support in the new Sejm was even less than what he had had. Piłsudski wanted to solve the political crisis via electoral reform, the point of which was to raise the minimum voting age to vote in Sejm elections to 24 years, the age of Sejm candidacy to 30; to vote in Senate elections to 30, the age of Senate candidacy to 40. Also, among the Senate's 150 members, only 100 candidates would be up for election; the remaining 50 would be named by the president⁵⁴.

Piłsudski also considered constitutional reform, but the government could rely on the support of only 122 members in the 444-seat Sejm. So instead of a compromise solution, the parliament was dissolved. In the 1930 election, held on November 23rd and 30th, the Piłsudski camp aimed for a 2/3 supermajority, in order to initiate constitutional reform. However, with only 247

⁵³ S. Berez, *op.cit.*, p. 233. We note that when the ballot became totally secret by the Electoral Act of 1938 in Hungary, at the same time the powers of both the upper house and the regent were expanded.

⁵⁴ S. Berez, *op.cit.*, pp. 233–234. We should note here that the members of the Hungarian upper house were not elected via universal suffrage. Rather it was based on their rank (dignity), office, election by county and municipal general assemblies or business and cultural institutions, or via placement.

seats won out of 444, a simple majority was all it could convene, despite arresting one hundred opposition representatives, voiding the candidate lists of the opposition in numerous electoral districts, and the issuing of an order by the electoral main committee according to which everyone would make known with a voice vote, publicly, which list he wished to support⁵⁵.

Suffrage law in Trianon Hungary developed from a similar starting point as Polish suffrage law: the members of the National Assembly were elected in 1920 on the basis of universal, equal, direct and secret-ballot voting, and neither prime minister, Pál Teleki nor István Bethlen, could assemble a stable parliamentary majority for his first government. In 1922 the two-year term of the National Assembly ended such that the intentionally late submitted suffrage bill could not be voted on, allowing Bethlen to pass it via decree upon the dissolution of the National Assembly⁵⁶. The bill – with some modifications – was then passed by the new National Assembly.

The point of Bethlen's reforms was to bring about a government that could not be toppled, yet maintained the nature of multiparty pluralism⁵⁷. On several occasions Bethlen said that the mechanical use of the principle of majority rule would lead to "raw" mob rule, which was incapable of governing the country, as a lack of higher education and diminished social conditions worked to the detriment of its long-term decision making in favor of the present. According to his view, if this did happen – taking into consideration the 1918 and 1919 revolutions – anarchic conditions, a dysfunctional state or a dictatorship would develop. Therefore the control of the country had to remain in the hands of "the intelligent leadership class"⁵⁸. Bethlen's conception embodied manipulated suffrage law, which originated from the fact that the ruling party's main voting base was public-balloted – which is to say, the relatively easily manipulable – countryside districts. So the principle of simple majority rule was approved in these places. In the secret-ballot cities, however, a list system

⁵⁵ S. Berecz, op.cit., p. 234.

⁵⁶ J. Bölöny, *Alkotmányjogi értekezéslet és oktrojált választójog (Constitutional Law Session and Imposed electoral Law*, Hungarian language), Budapest 1935.

⁵⁷ L. Püski, *A Horthy-rendszer (The Horthy System*, Hungarian language), Budapest 2006, p. 102, 112.

⁵⁸ I. Romsics, *Bethlen István konzervativizmusa (The Conservatism of István Bethlen*, Hungarian language). In: *Móra Ferenc Múzeum Évkönyve, 1988 (The Yearbook of the Ferenc Móra Museum, 1988)*, vol. I. Szeged 1989, p. 324.

was implemented in an effort to save the votes of the also-rans; moreover the law exclusively mandated voting participation for all who were eligible there; also through the use of secret balloting, the ruling party's voters would not be negatively influenced, and finally, by its very nature, the list system closed off any possibility for independent (nonparty-affiliated) candidates⁵⁹.

Government statistical polls from the period show that the class of civil servants and the agricultural land owners among those eligible to vote was overrepresented nationally, while the servant and farm labor class was severely underrepresented. This was in accordance with the government's intentions⁶⁰. Nevertheless, during the Bethlen era the percentage of the total population who was eligible to vote was between 27–30%, which cannot be considered as a drastically poor indicator: with this percentage Hungary was in the middle of the European field, together with Belgium, France and Switzerland⁶¹. Women's suffrage was a progressive element of the Hungarian system (for example, in France women received the right to vote only following WWII), while public-ballot voting – which was considered outmoded even for illiterates – went against the European current.

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⁵⁹ L. Püski, op.cit., p. 107, 112.

⁶⁰ Ibidem, p. 104.

⁶¹ Ibidem, p. 103.