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ÁGOSTON TREFORT

(1817–88)

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Ágoston Trefort was one of the outstanding figures of Hungarian cultural policy in the nineteenth century. He was in charge of public education for more than fifteen years.[2] An important milestone of his work was the creation of the first Act on Secondary Education, a subject of intense parliamentary debate. This act—No. 30 of 1883—shaped the organization and management of secondary schools, as well as the system of teacher training, which was to remain more or less unchanged until 1945. Half a century later, Gyula Kornis commented on the act as follows: '…this was not one of those rashly drafted acts that soon require modifications. It was a model of serious legislation—it met public needs and stood the test of time.'[3]

Trefort believed that the reform of secondary education could not be separated from the issue of teacher training; in this assumption he was following József Eötvös.[4] In his ministerial capacity, Trefort strove to make the teacher training institutions more effective. In this venture he was supported by the foremost experts of the age, such as Mór Kármán, one of Trefort's chief advisors in issues related to teacher-training and qualification. Kármán's impact on the relevant sections of the act is quite evident.

Trefort took office in September 1872, not long before the first (and, for a long time, the only) practical teacher-training school was opened. The school was part of the pedagogical department of the Teacher Training Institute at the University in Budapest; it was to be the chief setting for Mór Kármán's educational work for decades to come. In 1873, Trefort appointed Kármán notarial secretary of the National Committee for Public Education. Kármán also became the editor of the journal *Magyar Tanügy* [Hungarian Education] and from then on the journal played a significant part in the reform of public education. With respect to secondary education reform and teacher training, the most fruitful period in their long collaboration was the decade after 1872.

Early measures

In his first year as minister, Trefort took two important measures related to teacher training. In the autumn of 1872 the Parliament passed an act, on Trefort's initiative, to found a university in Kolozsvár (Cluj), and Trefort also oversaw the establishment of a teacher training institute there. At the same time, he united the two separate training schools for secondary school teachers. The two, originally founded by József Eötvös, and which were training teachers for grammar schools (*gymnasia*) and modern schools (*reáltanoda*), were merged into a single institution belonging to the Faculty of Arts. The explanation given for this measure was the following:

because the task of the grammar school and the modern school is one and the same, in spite of their different means and methods. One prepares our youth for university studies and initiates them into high culture through study of ancient languages, mathematics and the natural sciences, the other prepares them for university studies,

and for the Technical University in particular, with the help of modern languages, mathematics and the natural sciences. Therefore, it is not necessary to train their teachers in separate institutions.[5]

Trefort issued a temporary regulation for the new unified institute for the academic year 1873–74.[6] In spite of his intentions, however, the temporary regulation remained in effect for twenty-five years. József Sztoczek, a respected professor at the Technical University, was appointed principal of the unified institute. The different departments hired the best professors from the university and the Technical University,[7] such as the young but already established scientist Loránd Eötvös. As laid down in the new regulations, the practical training school was allowed to have its own independent administration, although it was to retain close connections with the teacher-training institute.

Another achievement of the first year of Trefort's ministerial work was to raise the salaries of secondary school teachers. This came into effect in 1873 and undoubtedly had a major, although indirect, effect on teacher training.

Boarding schools

The administrative reform of the training institute, as described above, did not resolve the problematic relations between the faculty of Arts and the institute, although more often than not, the instructors were the same. The finest experts in training, such as Gusztáv Heinrich, Mór Kármán and later Loránd Eötvös, accused the Faculty of Arts of providing inadequate professional training in comparison with the Faculties of Medicine or Law. They thought this inadequacy was the result of lax curricular and examination regulations. One of the most frequent accusations was that the faculty paid no attention to the earlier studies of its students, and the existence or otherwise of previously acquired knowledge.

Critics maintained that certain introductory courses in specific subjects, and also courses providing students with a broader perspective and sound scientific thinking, were sadly lacking. Due to unsatisfactory practical results, and inspired by the preliminary work on the new regulations, Trefort sent an ordinance to the National Committee for Public Education on 18 July 1875 asking for their views concerning a further reorganization of the institute:

> Many a time have I emphasized, and I am confident that the whole country is with me in this matter, that the key to the improvement of secondary education, and indeed of public education in general, is the training of teachers. The issue is all the more important with respect to secondary schools, since these are preparatory institutions for higher education, as well as a source of staff for primary education, and, therefore, must become the focus of all our efforts at improvement in both of these directions.[8]

Evaluating the achievements of the teacher training institutions in Budapest and Kolozsvár, he asserted that their work was not effective enough:

> The main reason for that, as I see it, is that their current organization is lacking in sufficient control and in the intellectual guidance and discipline which is necessary if trainees are to satisfy all their tasks, and if the prescribed lectures and practices are to meet their specific purpose and be held without fail and, finally, if the training is to accommodate each trainee's talent and abilities, as well as the needs of education at any one time.

Trefort proposed something new, keeping in mind that most of the teacher trainees were needy students from small towns, who, in their effort to make ends meet, could not devote all their energy to their studies. Following the model of the Ecole normale supérieure in Paris, the teacher training institutes would be turned into boarding schools 'in order that the future teachers can meet the requirement of general learnedness and professional rigour, in addition

to acquiring a complete training in their chosen subject'. (The subsequent founding of the Eötvös College was based on this idea of Trefort's, originally suggested by Loránd Eötvös.)

Kármán immediately responded to the minister's suggestion in the columns of 'Hungarian Education', even before the official response of the Committee for Public Education was given.[9] He welcomed the proposal and agreed with the importance of the planned boarding school, but he also voiced certain doubts. He did not think it was realistic to grant everyone a place in the boarding school and he did not think this was a real solution. He suggested that the training institute needed a much stronger, full-time faculty, 'which in terms of qualifications, would meet the standards of a university and in which jobs would require a certain scholarly degree (that of 'docens'), but which would nevertheless maintain close connections with teaching practice and thus serve as a mediator between the scholarship of the university and the practice of the schools'.

The proposal of the National Committee for Public Education,[10] which was written soon after, reflected a similar view. This was no coincidence, since Kármán was extremely respected by the members of the committee and the drafting of the official response to the minister was among his duties as a notarial secretary. Some shifts in emphasis can be observed in the two texts, however. Since Trefort referred to the French model of teacher training, completely separated from the university, the committee saw fit to assert that 'the institute should be organized as a university institute and part of the Faculty of Arts', maintaining that the separation of teacher training from the tasks of the university would endanger the professional standards of training for secondary schools, and ignore the unmet demand for professionals in higher education. The committee also supported Kármán's intentions of stabilizing the faculty of the institute; they proposed the appointment of a full-time 'senior teacher' for each subject, who could directly manage and control the studies of all trainees in a given subject. So that these teachers may still have enough time for research, the committee proposed hiring teaching assistants for them, 'who could help with supervising the practices and the independent work of the trainees according to the instructions of the senior teachers'.

It followed logically from the committee's view of teacher training as a task incumbent upon the university that they would want the Faculty of Arts to elaborate a systematic university curriculum capable of ensuring the successful preparation of the students for the State teaching examination in a three-year 8 programme. According to this plan, the primary tasks of the full-time teachers of the institute would be to supervise the lectures offered by the different departments, supervise the professional development of their students and ultimately influence work in the Faculty of Arts which represented the interests of teacher training. This was the most problematic point in the whole proposal, because the faculty saw this as an attack on its autonomy and the general principle of academic freedom, which was protected by law. Therefore, it could not have been a surprise to Trefort that the proposal was rejected by the Faculty of Arts, a response which he received in March 1876, several months after his original inquiry.

The proposal of the Committee for Public Education contained another important initiative: to increase the length of the training programme to four years. According to this proposal, the students would spend the first three years on studies of their chosen subject, whereas the fourth year would be devoted to the acquisition of educational qualifications and teaching skills. They considered the work of the institute's Department of Pedagogy as satisfactory, so they did not call for any change there, but they did urge the expansion of the faculty in the training practice school.

A new qualification system

In the course of 1875, besides the reform of teacher training, Trefort was working on another issue: the renewal of the system of qualifications. This was no coincidence, since the two issues were closely linked to each other in spite of their administrative separation: degrees were issued by the National Committee for Teacher Qualification, the members of which were experts in teacher training appointed by the minister. This new regulation of teacher training issued by Trefort was the first since the 1867 Compromise to refer to the qualification of Hungarian secondary school teachers.[11] As a consequence of the previous unification of the teacher training institute in 1873, it merged the qualifying committees for grammar and modern schools and introduced new examination procedures.

The new examination, introduced by Trefort, consisted of two stages. The first stage (basic examination) tested the candidate's abilities in subjects of general knowledge 'Hungarian language and literature, philosophy and pedagogy' without reference to the candidate's areas of specialization. The second stage (special examination) came after completion of university studies and tested the candidates' knowledge in their respective fields. It was another novelty that passing this examination qualified the candidate for teaching in any class of the secondary school, thus abolishing the earlier distinction between senior and junior secondary school teachers. The new examination procedures raised the standards of required knowledge. Gusztáv Heinrich wrote in praise of Trefort's measures:

> The development of our secondary schools is based on a dangerous circularity: our grammar and modern schools will be better if their teachers are better, but the colleges will only be able to educate better teachers if they get better students from the secondary schools. At long last this regulation took a brave step and broke this complacent circle in two.[12]

The second half of the 1870s saw an increase in the number of students in the Faculty of Arts who also wished to obtain teaching qualifications. The new examination procedures gave an incentive to the university to improve training conditions. The relation between the Faculty of Arts and the training institute was discussed once again. Loránd Eötvös was one of those concerned and, on his suggestion, the Faculty of Arts established an ad hoc committee to study the question.

In March 1878 Dean Arpad Keregyarto sent Trefort a major proposal on behalf of the Faculty of Arts. The document said that the faculty considered it one of its main tasks 'to supply secondary schools with teachers of the highest quality in terms of general learning and professional expertise'.[13] The Faculty of Arts criticized the complicated organization of the training institute, which allegedly became a time-consuming burden on the students. They maintained that the regulations of the institute endangered the interests of scholarly development. They ultimately asserted that 'teacher training is the exclusive right and duty of the university'. If the Faculty of Arts is to perform this acknowledged duty, an increase in the length of university studies to four years seemed inevitable. The faculty would be expanded and the structural and material conditions of education improved as well. The latter is the most crucial and forward-looking aspect of the proposal: it involved organizing seminars, new university locations, professorial salaries and student fellowships. Aware of the budgetary problems of the Ministry of Public Education, the Faculty of Arts suggested the temporary suspension of teacher training in the institute in Kolozsvar as a means of concentrating resources, since that institute trained only a few students and had no substantial impact on local university affairs. Strangely enough, the proposal happened to leave the subsidies of the Budapest institute intact—perhaps due to the fact that most of the professors hired by that institute were full-time professors of the Faculty of Arts.

Trefort sent this proposal by the Faculty of Arts to the Committee for Public Education for comment.[14] The committee's reply betrayed once again Mór Kármán's influence and refuted the university's arguments against the training institute one by one. They were still attributing the operational problems to the dysfunctional aspects pointed out by Trefort as early as 18 July 1875. They mentioned 'giving voice to Kármán's grievance' that the earlier proposal submitted by the committee never received serious attention from the ministry. The committee's view was that 'the right organization of university lectures is always a prerequisite of the secondary purpose of successful teacher training'. They were more skeptical about the university seminars which were to be organized; they were undoubtedly useful for professional training but could only be a partial solution with respect to teacher training, since they were no substitute for the educational functions of lectures and practices at the training institute. There were two issues in the proposal of the Faculty of Arts that were unconditionally supported by the committee: the increase in the length of training and the improvement of material conditions. They asserted, however, that the latter should not disadvantage the teacher-training institute in Kolozsvar. By way of explanation, they raised the question of whether 'there is a danger that the suspension of teacher training in Kolozsvar may harm university education much more than the proposal suggests, since the student body of the Faculty of Arts in Kolozsvar consists exclusively of aspiring teachers'.

Finally Trefort came to the conclusion that the increased length of training was supported by all educational institutions. It was also in agreement with progress taking place in the sciences.

The new university regulation took effect in the academic year 1888–81. After preliminary consultations with all those concerned, Trefort introduced modifications in the procedures of the qualifying examination for teachers once again in 1882.[15] The examination now consisted of three stages, instead of the earlier two: all those wishing to obtain teaching qualifications had to pass a basic examination at the end of the fourth semester, a special examination at the end of the eighth semester and a final examination after one year of practice (the trial period). This system, the essentials of which were confirmed by the 1883 Act, became the starting point for all further measures concerning teachers' qualifications in Trefort's lifetime and subsequently; in fact, as long as the training institute and the Committee for Teacher Qualification existed (until 1949).

The 1883 Act on Secondary Education ordered secondary schools to hire qualified teachers only. On the other hand, studies at the teacher-training institute were not a prerequisite for taking the qualifying examination, which was to become a major problem in the future. The act was not quite consistent with respect to the yearlong trial period either and, if anything, it was a step back from the 1882 regulations (which were to be modified again in 1888). The great virtue of the act on the matter of teacher training was that it stated the legal requirement of teaching qualifications and specified the conditions for obtaining such qualifications in the first instance. The introduction of the year of practice, in spite of all inconsistencies, ultimately meant that the time required for obtaining teaching qualifications was raised to five years, while a degree in arts and sciences required four years. This fact heightened the prestige of a degree with teaching qualifications as opposed to one without them from the 1880s on, a trend that only increased with the establishment of the Eötvös's College. These measures were a great motivation for denominational schools as well, since, from this time on, the Catholic orders and Protestant ecclesiastical institutions involved in education started to pay more attention to the issue of teacher training. Detailed legislation concerning teaching qualifications could have been more naturally part of a University Act, but, for lack of such, it was included in the Act on Secondary Education.

One legal detail of the qualifying examination which some thought harmful to minority interests was that it required a knowledge of Hungarian language and literature, and

the official language of the examination itself was Hungarian. This was, of course, the result of political designs in the Hungary of the post-Compromise era.

Practical training and seminars

After 1883, attention was once more focused on the young teacher's year of practice and thus on the practical training school. (In Kolozsvar there was no practice school, so the whole issue was seen from quite a different perspective.) It has often been said of Trefort (by his contemporaries as well as by modern-day scholars) that the practice school (originally initiated by his predecessors Eötvös and Pauler) was his 'favourite child'.[16] He was a frequent visitor, attracted not only by Mór Kármán's presence, or the fact that the new secondary school curriculum issued in 1879 was first tested there, or that the school was the scene of the practical training of the most talented trainees, but also by the fact that many in its faculty could easily become replacements for aging professors in the Faculty of Arts. In spite of all the ministerial support, the circumstances under which the practical training school functioned were inadequate for a long time; more equipment and faculty were constantly needed, but in vain,[17] since, as Janos Klamarik wrote, the Ministry of Public Education never had any money to spare.[18] Finally, when new buildings were built for the department of natural sciences in the mid-1880s, the practical training school acquired new premises as well, thanks to Trefort's support. When the building was officially opened, the street on which it was located was renamed Trefort Street. Trefort was present at the opening ceremony, and Kármánn made a speech.[19] From then on, the Committee for Public Education and the Committee for Teacher Qualification was also housed in the new building.

The year 1887 was a year of building in a broader sense as well. After years of preparation, the first seminars were created at the Faculty of Arts; others followed the ones in History, Classics and Modern Philology over the next few years. Thanks to these seminars, professors could maintain closer contacts with students, and the preparation of individual students for academic work became more thorough. All this had a positive effect on teacher training as well.

The establishment of these seminars gave Trefort a new chance to raise the standards of teacher training. The new regulations of the qualifying examination issued in 1888 [20] retained equal requirements for different majors, thereby abolishing the system of majors and minors permitted in 1882. Undoubtedly, this was a further motivation for the educational work at the Faculty of Arts. It is quite possible that Trefort was influenced in this decision by an open letter addressed to him by Loránd Eötvös.[21]

The students of the teacher-training institute had official priority for admission to the seminars and for relevant fellowships. Administrative links between the two institutions remained loose, however. In his directive to the Faculty of Arts in 1886, Trefort stated that he wished to maintain the structure of the existing teacher-training institute until the establishment of a boarding school became feasible. It is known from indirect sources [22] that the reform of teacher training was very much on his mind before his death, but the actual implementation of his ideas was left to later generations.

Notes

1. Istvánné Kiss (Hungary) Graduated from Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest, in 1954 as a secondary school teacher of history, and Italian language and literature. Ph.D. in 1990 in the fieldof modern and contemporary history. Worked for more than three decades as a teacher trainer at the Trefort Pilot School attatched to Eötvös Loránd University. At present, she is a history teacher.
2. See: J. Antall and A. Ladányi, 'A magyarországi felsöoktatás az abszolutizmus es adualizmus korában [Higher Education in Hungary in the Age of Absolutism and Dualism], in *Felsöoktatasi Szemle* (Budapest),

1968, p. 536–46; L. Felkai, ‘Az. 1883. évi középiskolai törvény létrejötte [The Accomplishments of the 1883 Secondary School Act], *Pedagógiai Szemle* (Budapest), 1959, p. 660–75; L. Felkai, ‘A tanárképzées történeti áttekintése aszázadfordulóig’ [Historical Review of Teacher Training up to the Turn of the Century], *Pedagógiai Szemle* (Budapest), 1961, p. 431–44; L. Felkai, ‘Trefort Ágoston miniszteri évei’ [Ágoston Trefort’s Years as Minister], *Pedagógiai Szemle* (Budapest), 1988, p. 674–86; Miklós Mann, *Trefort Ágoston élete és müködése* [The Life and Works of Ágoston Trefort], Budapest, Akadémiai Kiadó, 1982; Imre Szentpétery, *A Bölcsészettudományi kar Története* [History of the Faculty of Arts], Vol. IV.2, ‘A Trefort-korszak’, p. 497–552 Budapest, 1935; István Diószegi, *Az ELTE Bölcsészettudományi Karának Története V, ‘A dualizmus kora’* [The Age of Dualism in the History of the Faculty of Arts of ELTE V],, Budapest, 1989. p. 55–73.

3. Gyula Kornis, *A kultura válsága* [The Crisis of Culture], Franklin, 1934, p. 157
4. A profile of József Eötvös also appears in this series.
5. Ágoston Trefort, *Emlékbeszédek és tanulmányok* [Memorial Addresses and Studies], 1881, p. 336–37.
6. ELTE Lt. 15/b – 168/1873.
7. Kiss Istvanné, *Eötvös Józseftöl Eötvös Lorándig* [From Jozsef Eötvös to Loránd Eötvös], ELTE, 1988, p. 52–53.
8. *Magyar Tanügy* [Hungarian Education] (Budapest), 1875, p. 622–23.
9. Ibid., p. 624–27.
10. *Magyar Tanügy*, 1878, p. 414–25.
11. János Klamarik, *magyar iskolák szervezete és eljárása* [Organization and Regulation of Schools in Hungary], Budapest, 1881. (From p. 109 includes the complete text of the regulations issued as Decree No. 26,077 of the Ministry of Religion and Public Education on 28 October 1875.)
12. Gusztáv Heinrich, Az uj tanarviszgalati szabályzat [New Rules for the Teachers’ Examination], *Magyar Tanágy* (Budapest), 1876, p. 28.
13. *Magyar Tanágy* (Budapest), 1879, p. 105–11.
14. Ibid., p. 111–26.
15. Szabályzat a középiskolai (gymnasiumi és reáliskolai) tanárvizsgálatra [Rules for the Examination of Teachers for Grammar Schools and for Secondary Schools of Modern Languages, Sciences and Latin]. Decree No. 4567 of the Ministry of Religion and Public Education issued on 30 January 1882. Budapest, 1882, 16 p.
16. Péter Gunszt, ‘Marczali Henrik történetirói pályakezdése’ [The Start of Henrik Marczali’s Career as a Historiographer], *Századok* (Budapest), 1987, p. 911.
17. Kiss Istvánné, op. cit., p. 80–82, 86–87, 92–96.
18. György Wolf and János Waldapfel, eds., *Emlékkönyv Kármán Mór 25 éves tanári munkásságának emlékére* [Publication in Honour of Mor Kármán on the Occasion of His Twenty-five Years’ Service to Teaching], Budapest, 1897, p. 20.
19. A.M. Kir, Tanárképzöintézet Gyakorló Fögymnasiumának Értesitöje az 1887/88. tanévröl [Report on the 1887/88 School Year of the Principal Grammar School Attached to the Teacher Training College], Budapest, 1887, p. 4.
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21. Loránd Eötvös, *Eötvös Loránd a tudós ös müvelödéspolitikus irásaiból* [The Writings of Loránd Eötvös, the Educational Scholar and Politician], Budapest, Gondolat, 1964, p. 179–97.
22. Szentpétery, op. cit., p. 513–14.

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