

than before and the United States became a battleground where Budapest sought to neutralise their potential influence through subsidising, for example, Slovak newspapers and working through bidable priests. Meanwhile, despite non-Magyars' greater relative poverty, ironically the transfer of land at home was often in their favour. Nearly 5% of Magyar gentry or magnate land in Transylvania passed to Romanians or Saxons in the last pre-war decade.

This helps explain why, though the nationalities continued to decline on all the indices under control of the state, their political role revived in the twentieth century. More crucial here perhaps was the influence of the Romanian kingdom, of the Czechs (particularly Masaryk) and of Serbia and Croatia on their respective kinsmen. The periodical *Hlas* among Slovaks, the pressure in the Romanian National Party to prioritise universal suffrage over Transylvanian autonomy, the Radical victory in the Serb Church Congress elections of 1902 all bespoke the end of sterile passivity. The minorities participated in the 1905 Hungarian election, winning nine seats, and again in 1906, winning 25. But how many more seats would they win under universal suffrage? This sub-text of the drama Kristóffy's franchise proposals unleashed indicated how the nationality problem had, after all, not been solved.

### The Social Problem and the Anti-Climax of April 1906

Whereas the nationality problem was an old issue which the less discerning thought belonged to the past, the social problem had for some time been touted as the issue of an uncertain future. The leading liberal daily, the *Budapesti napló*, editorialised on 31 December 1899 as follows:

The nineteenth century brought the rule of democracy, the triumph of rights and affirmation of the individual ... [B]ut enquiring knowledge bold beyond limits is passing from this into a new period ... The social revolution is besieging democracy, and the concept of collectivism assaults the sanctity of individual right ...<sup>14</sup>

A sense of unease at the social condition runs through turn-of-the-century Hungarian writing, often linked to concern at rising emigration. (In fact, most emigrants overseas intended to return and recent

research suggests that more than the official figure of 30% did so.) What is also noteworthy is that 'the social problem' in a still peasant-majority country was so often cast in the imagery of urban socialism.

There were at least two grounds for complacency as far as the rural masses were concerned. Any unity among peasants had gone with serfdom. Non-noble rural Hungary by 1900 was divided into three great blocks which lived quite separate lives: the landed peasantry, the landless labourers and the farm-servants. Second, the fear and deference inculcated into the lower orders over the centuries retained its hold. 'The sword does not cut off the head which is bowed', ran a Transylvanian Romanian saying, while Hungarian farm-servants used their employer's full title ('His Excellency the Count') even as they cursed him privately!<sup>15</sup> Hence the phenomenon of Hungarian politicians like Wekerle and István Tisza, both landlords, who took urban social issues seriously, but considered the peasantry to be no cause for concern.

The landed peasants were generally descendants of the urbanial serfs of feudal times. Divisible into rich, middle, poor and dwarf categories in the rough ratio 1:4:10:9 they showed in the upper two levels (above approximately 30 acres) limited signs of a *rapprochement* to both bourgeois and noble lifestyles which produced, however, a distinctively peasant culture. It was at its most self-conscious in the *Alföld* which retained the three-field system and where rich peasants invested in buying more land rather than intensive farming. Peasant dress took on simplified forms of pre-1848 noble costume, older dance and tune types yielded to what is now thought of as typically Hungarian (like the *csárdás*), better-off peasants acquired the means to make or purchase high quality folk crafts. West of the Danube more intensive and mixed farming patterns developed but the same willingness to adopt their own niche in a stratified society applied.

Landless peasants in 1910 numbered some 4,350,000, a quarter of the total population. Largely descended from the old servile cottar class, they and dwarf peasants often found themselves providing neo-feudal services to their old masters; a modern anthropologist discovered that the dues an old Transylvanian Romanian woman recalled the landlord receiving in her youth were the same as her ancestors were supplying in the 1820s.<sup>16</sup> Because of the prevalence of great estates in the Danube basin Magyar peasants were disproportionately landless, just under a third of them being farm-servants living largely in overcrowded wooden barracks near the big house.