

Tisza's successors were soon embroiled on another issue of ruling-class fissure. A *Kulturkampf* broke out over Catholic priests' violation of an 1868 legal provision that children of mixed marriages should be baptised in the religion of the parent of their sex. Traditionally ascribed to a moribund liberalism's search for an issue on which to revive itself, this episode has been seen by the left-leaning Péter Hanák as the first shoots of a political Catholicism deliberately aiming to embarrass the government. The outcome was the pious monarch's reluctant sanction of bills transferring registration of births from Church to state, and introducing civil marriage. But noting Franz Joseph's distance from his government the Upper House voted them down in spring 1893. Wekerle, who had become prime minister the previous year, resigned only to return basking in liberal-national favour when Franz Joseph's preferred successor failed to form a government. The confessional laws went through. However, the whole crisis threw the political realities of Dualist Hungary into lurid relief. The king retreated from confrontation with a genuine majority opinion, but a prime minister who had crossed him could not survive either, and a delay in royal approval of the civil marriage law was the signal for Wekerle to go.

With his successor, the Transylvanian Calvinist, Count Dezső Bánffy, Hungarian liberalism finally ran out of steam. Bánffy applied to the wider stage, making an increasingly intolerant nationalism the regime's most distinctive feature. Too much fantasising about the *Rechtsstaat* (read: civil liberties) could be dangerous, he declared, and his subsequent political testament of 1903 blamed Hungarian politicians for wasting time over Vienna before they had sorted out the non-Magyars. Bánffy set up a special prime ministerial department to deal with social movements and the nationalities, and prohibited place-name designations not in Magyar throughout the country (1898). Yet his nemesis was to come over Vienna and reflect the mounting 'agrarian' backlash in the ruling elite against capitalist 'mercantilism'. The terms won in 1898 for the continuation of the economic compromise included some long-standing Hungarian demands, but also (at Franz Joseph's behest) the 'Ischl formula', by which if further negotiations on the common tariff did not succeed the existing tariff should simply be extended. The nationalist opposition held that this deprived Hungary of its right to paralyse common institutions by withholding assent. To mounting street fury and parliamentary obstruction, Bánffy's majority of over 160 from the brutal

elections of 1896 suffered melt-down in a backbench revolt which swept him from power (February 1899). However, with his departure his former ministers dominated the new government which now had a majority of 227. All the brouhaha of a claustrophobic political system had brought forth a mouse.

The new prime minister Széll, a one-time finance minister become banker and committee member of the agrarian interest pressure group, the OMGE, was well placed to defuse mercantilist-agrarian tensions. His 'Széll formula', swiftly agreed with Austria, won nationalist consent to temporary prolongation of the economic compromise by ingeniously declaring that *legally speaking* an independent Hungarian tariff now existed, though it happened to be the same as Austria's. Though in the Monarchy's perfervid climate this clause incensed Austrian Hungarophobes, it was essentially tokenism and the existing common tariff arrangements were subsequently extended to 1907. Széll went on in longer-term negotiations with Austria to win the higher grain tariffs the agrarians wanted, in the so-called Sylvester night agreement of 31 December 1902, haggled up to the deadline in a way which will be familiar to students of modern European institutions. But deceiving himself that he could build on this success to get through a bill increasing the size of the common army, Széll united against him the 'gentlemanly middle class', resentful that only 5-6% of the army's top command were Magyars, and the broad masses, who could be roused on an anti-Austrian ticket. Obstruction brought about his fall, and an intransigent defence of the common army by Franz Joseph in his Chlopy manifesto of September 1903. The manifesto rejected proposals of military concessions to Hungary with a - for Hungarians - demeaning reference to 'that spirit of unity and concord which directs the special characteristics of every ethnic group towards the good of the whole'.⁸ The result of the crisis was the summons to power of the last strong man of Dualist Hungary, Count István Tisza, Kálmán Tisza's son, in November 1903.

A convinced Calvinist of puritanical temperament and iron will, István Tisza is one of the personalities of early twentieth-century Europe. His credo was uncompromising: 'only such a nation deserves national life as, when attacked in its rights and freedoms, neither asks if it faces superior force nor weighs the prospects of the fight but unhesitatingly sheds its blood in the life and death struggle'.⁹ Like his father deeply convinced of the necessity of the union with Austria for Hungarian interests, he dreaded a twist of international politics