

which might make Hungary another Poland – but find the Hungarian political class locked in battle over dead-end obstruction and unable to respond. Tisza was a Hungarian Guizot, whose ultra-conservative liberalism linked the democratisation of Hungary to an educational process which would at some future time overcome present social divisions. Meanwhile, he advocated industrialisation as a means of modernising Hungary and absorbing the non-Magyars. Now he saw his chance, having suppressed a major railway strike in 1904, to seize the opportunity to rid Hungary's constitutional life from the scourge of obstruction. The uproar he caused by forcing through parliamentary proposals to ban technical obstruction and introduce a guillotine left him no choice but to go to the polls in January 1905. It is evidence that Tisza's idiosyncratic 'liberalism' had an idealistic streak that he did not try to fix them. As a result, he lost. Though most voters (410,000 to 268,000) still supported pro-Dualist parties, the governing Liberals won only 159 seats, against the 166 seats of the Independence Party (now including Apponyi) and 254 of all opposition groupings. Incidentally, 108 seats were not contested. Having failed to reach agreement with a dissident Liberal, Andrassy junior, son of the foreign minister of the 1870s, Franz Joseph responded by appointing a general, Baron Géza Fejérváry, head of a temporary government which the parliamentary majority – and indeed Tisza – refused cooperation as unconstitutional. Thereupon, on 27 July 1905, Fejérváry's minister of the interior, the career bureaucrat József Kristóffy, told a socialist delegation of his intention to introduce a bill for universal suffrage. It seemed the dynasty was willing to play the populist card against the whole political caste of gentry Hungary.

The Kossuthite tendency grew from an 'extreme left' rump of some twenty seats in the late 1860s to the relative independentist majority of 1905 because of the 1867ers' cumulative failure to harness gentry libertarianism and burgeoning national confidence to their cause. But there were also shifts in the Kossuthite ranks, aptly symbolised in the humdrum personality of Kossuth's son Ferenc, who returned to Hungary after his father's death in 1894 to lead a movement safely ensconced in the politics of gesture. A Hungarian historian has recently written of the 'preposterousness' of Dualist politics because of the gap between liberal self-image and reality, which swelled political duels over honour as real principle declined.¹⁰ The verdict is severe but not unjust. Those who have been noted here as superior politicians all perceived the need to compromise on the

independentist position towards Austria. With the partial exception of Deák, however, they did not depart from long-standing gentry attitudes to non-Magyars and the lower classes. This left them open to the populist gambit in 1905, because these groups had most to gain from universal suffrage. But was the Hungarian political elite simply less imaginative than Franz Joseph and his advisers or did it have more to lose? How culpable was the failure to do more on the social and nationality questions?

The Nationality Problem

One of the most dubious achievements of the Hungarian Dualist elite was to push the question of the 'nationalities' almost out of view in conventional political discourse. This had been far from the case at the time of the Compromise, when in addition to Croats some 35 non-Magyar nationalist MPs (there were also about 25 non-Magyar members of the governing party) upheld an alternative vision of a pluralist Hungary, where each national unit had its own official language. But this seemed even to the most liberal Magyar tantamount to partition, and in view of contemporary evidence of non-Magyar high-handedness (chiefly on the part of the Serb-dominated town council in Novi Sad), which anticipated what would happen in territories ceded by Hungary after 1918, it is hard to deny Magyar fears that what was at stake was not the extent of language rights but a struggle for power, potentially recreating the anti-Hungarian scenario of 1848-49. Dualist Hungary came into being in an atmosphere of unrest, in which the Hungarian Serbs' leader Svetozar Miletić and the *Omladina* movement of the nascent Serbian intelligentsia seemed to be preparing for a Balkan crisis they could use to jockey Serbia and the whole south Slav world into a bid for unification. As with Afrikaners, what became Magyars' systematic repression of ethnic rivals stemmed from an initial fear of being swamped. The Hungarian interior minister's 1869 comment that a Serb-Romanian pre-electoral conference to reiterate their stance on the nationality question amounted to 'the spreading of ideas hostile to the existing laws and aiming at deliberate disturbance of domestic calm, whipping up men's minds, indeed, even formal revolt' shows Budapest's intolerance of opposition.¹¹ Mayor Miletić and the elected council had already been deposed in Novi Sad.