

## **Electoral Law in Hungary under the Dual Monarchy**

**Eszter Mária KÖPF**

### **Introduction**

In Hungary we have been living in the era of the cult of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy established by the Compromise law of 1867. In addition to the scientific concern which dates back to the 1970s, the dualist state arose the interest of the general public at the turn of the 1980s and 1990s, when the democratic changes took place. Looking for the roots of bourgeois Hungary after 40 years of socialism, the recourse to the period between 1867 and 1918, the "happy peacetime" as it is called, was not faraway to seek. The fifty years' period before the First World War was the last "scene" of Hungarian history what we Hungarians remember nostalgically and with pride.

Austria-Hungary was one of the great powers of the age, and the Hungarians played a leading role in the multinational empire. Internal politics, excepting the hardly five-year long government of the opposition, was dominated by one uniform and pro-Compromise political force throughout the period. The Dual Monarchy, its territory of 677,443 square kilometre and its 51.4 million inhabitants (1910),<sup>1</sup> provided a huge market for Hungarian products, economy was thriving, the national income quadrupled from 1867 to 1913.<sup>2</sup> Favourable economic indexes attracted foreign investments. Thanks to this, in the traditionally agricultural country industry was also booming. We are still proud of amongst others the contemporary Hungarian engine production, lightning industry, the rapidly developing and European level railway network.

Economic growth served as a base for the development of human surroundings. Several magnificent photo albums have been published on Budapest at the turn of the century in recent years. When we have a look at these impressive

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<sup>1</sup> Akadémiai Kislexikon, Akadémia Kiadó, Budapest 1990, 2nd Volume, headword "Osztrák–Magyar Monarchia", p. 359.

<sup>2</sup> Hanák, p. 215.

photos, we should be ashamed of ourselves for the present ruinous condition of the beautiful *Ring-Strasse*-style blocks of flats of the inner city built at the time. To take another example, the results of one of the dominant artistic trends of the period, the secessionism, are still present in our every day lives and inspire for example machinery design, interior decoration, ornamental arts. And last but not least, the flourishing cultural life of the period can be pictured by the names inter alia of Mór Jókai, Zsigmond Móricz, Kálmán Mikszáth, Mihály Babits, Árpád Tóth, Endre Ady, József Rippl-Rónai, Tivadar Csontváry-Kosztka and Béla Bartók.

Nevertheless, in order to make a realistic evaluation of Hungary as part of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy we also have to take into consideration the field of social problems, in which the regime completely lost out. Governments of the period missed to develop Hungary's semi-feudal institutions towards the contemporary Western-European level. Due to the nature of the political decision-making mechanism, only the interests of the ruling classes were properly protected. At the same time the lower social classes of Hungarian origin, and the national minorities in general, were deprived even of their fundamental political liberties. Social tensions originating from this state of affairs became more and more serious in the course of the decades, and finally they broke down the Compromise-based political system and the whole empire as such.

Since restricted basic civil rights were one of the main characteristics of the period, no wonder that, inter alia, electoral law was a political hot potato.

### **The Upper House**

Dualist Hungary inherited bicameral parliament from the feudal age. As an epoch-making development, the Lower House was reorganized and based on representation by elected deputies during the Revolution and War of Independence of 1848–49. Laws IV and V of 1848 entitled approximately 10% of the population to vote, what was appropriate to the contemporary Western-European standard.

In 1848–49 the radical wing of the revolutionists wanted to make a clear sweep of the Upper House, while the liberal wing suggested to reform it. Missing the time however, none of these plans materialized. After the suppression of the War of Independence only one prominent political figure argued for the abolishment of the Upper House, Lajos Kossuth in 1851. Kossuth, who uphold his revolutionist views and ideas of independence until the end of his life, lived in exile at this time and published his draft of a new Hungarian constitution, according to which the Upper House would have been substituted by a

Senate elected by the people.<sup>3</sup> Thus, after the Compromise the old Upper House was convoked with the membership of all the prelates, barons and noblemen. Although almost nobody queried the reason for the existence of the Upper House any more, its reform was almost continuously on the agenda. The founding father of the Compromise, Ferenc Deák, in one of his last great speeches in Parliament for example proposed the removal of church's representatives from the Upper House in the framework of the reform of church politics in hand, by saying that they were "inappropriate" there.<sup>4</sup>

The reform of the Upper House finally took place in 1885, in accordance with Law VII of 1885. In spite of the suggestion of Ferenc Deák, the new law did not deprive pontiffs of their seats. Nevertheless, representation of the different denominations became more fair by the removal of the Catholic nominal bishops, i.e. bishops without church districts. Life-time membership of those noblemen whose annual land tax did not amount to the required minimum level ceased. Despite this rule however, landowners continued to occupy three-quarters of the seats. High *ispáns*, i.e. the heads of the county administration who were almost completely dependent on the government, were also dismissed, which measure decreased the cabinet's influence on the Upper House. At the same time, the most distinguished office holders of the jurisdiction, the president and vice-president of the Supreme Court and the president of the Budapest High Court of Justice became members. The moderate character of the reforms in question is shown by the monarch's right to appoint as life peers to the Upper House fifty persons of merit nominated by the Hungarian government.

Even after its 1885 reform the Upper House, which played an important role in the process of legislation, remained an antidemocratic body. Nevertheless, the antidemocratic character of the Upper House was not a considerable obstacle to the establishment of a modern parliamentary system. There are examples, like Great Britain, where, in addition to the House of Commons elected according to universal suffrage, the traditional aristocratic House of Lords functions up to now, and the constitutional system meets even the strictest present requirements of parliamentary democracy. Thus, keeping also in mind what has been written about the Upper House, in the following chapters we will concentrate on the Lower House of the Hungarian Parliament. By examining the election and the composition of this institution, we will illustrate how Hungary as part of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy failed to accept the democratic challenge of the age.

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<sup>3</sup> Csizmadia, p. 356.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*

### **Law XXXIII of 1874, the electoral law of the period**

The liberal republican electoral law of 1848 was an undesirable piece of legislation for the governing Deák Párt (Deák Party), and it was feared to cause difficulties for the first time in the 1872 elections. This fear was the real motive of prime minister Count Menyhért Lónyay for introducing a new electoral bill to the Parliament in February 1872, and not the intention "to clear the uncertain points" of the law in force, what served as official reasoning. The main points of the proposal were the exclusion of the poorer social classes from the elections by raising the property qualifications for voters, and the extension of parliamentary term from three to five years.

After Count Gyula Andrásy's nomination as common foreign minister of the Dual Monarchy in 1871, missing a brisk leader, the Deák Party slowed down. This loss of drive contributed on a large scale to the failure of Lónyay's electoral bill in Parliament. The opposition, more precisely the *szélsőbal* (extreme leftists), started to apply obstructionist tactics for the first time against this proposal. In order to block legislation, they held several hours long speeches which had nothing to do with the issue, and continuously asked for voting by names. As an answer, Lónyay introduced afternoon parliamentary sessions, by which he however added fuel to the flames, because the most influential opposition group, the *Bal Közép* (Left Centre Party) joined the obstructionists. In these circumstances the government was unable to make the Parliament to pass the new bill before it was dissolved, and thus the 1872 elections were called according to the law of 1848.

Although the Deák Party won the elections in question, it lost several seats. The new and weakened Lónyay government had to face serious problems, first of all considerable budget deficit. A reasonable solution to the crisis promised to be the fusion of the governing party and the above mentioned Left Centre Party led by Kálmán Tisza. For the sake of this cause, from the beginning of 1874 on, Kálmán Tisza met and negotiated several times with not only Ferenc Deák but also the ruler. The test of successful harmonization of the two parties' programmes were the passing of the incompatibility and the electoral bills of 1874.

The new electoral law (Law XXXIII of 1874) upheld the main principles of the previous one. As a general rule, those men above the age of twenty who – due to their intellectual and financial capability – were able to form and express their independent political wills, were entitled to vote. Financial independence of the voters was "guaranteed" by high tax qualifications. Nevertheless, those noblemen who already had had the right to vote, could participate in the elections in the future too, irrespective of their financial status. The measure which deprived tax debtors of their voting rights affected plenty of people.

The demagogic character of the requirement of "intellectual independence" of the electors can be easily shown by the example that teachers and priests were entitled to vote only if they were civil servants, i.e. dependent on the state.

Since the legislator intended to grant voting rights only for the ruling social classes, and at same time huge regional differences existed in the country, it was impossible to fix the same qualifications in towns and in the countryside. To put it practically, in cities one had to own at least a big house or a small business to vote. In villages peasants paying taxes after the minimum of a one-quarter plot (*egynegyed telek*)<sup>5</sup> in the sense of the Urbarial Patent of 1767 became electors according to the new law. In spite of the original intent of the legislator to introduce a more or less equal quota all around the country, great differences existed in practice. For example, while in Pusztaháza, Zemplén county in 1904, the land tax qualification was 68 *fillérs*<sup>6</sup>, it amounted to no less than 87 *koronas* and 17 *fillérs* in Zádorlak, Temes county.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, since the Urbarial Patent of 1767 was not in force in Transylvania,<sup>8</sup> it could not serve as a base for qualifications there. The quota of 8 forints of direct tax set by the law for this region was approximately 150% of the one applied to Hungary proper.<sup>9</sup>

The system of election districts did not change. This practically meant that in this respect the 1848 law with all its defects and inconsistencies – for example the rule that all the villages with the so called nominal town status formed a single election district regardless of their size and number of inhabitants – remained in force. The disproportionate character of electoral geography became even more evident after the introduction of Laws X and XI of 1877. These laws made possible for instance the establishment of election districts in such a way that in regions where the pro-Compromise political attitudes prevailed 100–200 people elected one representative, while in the Great Plain, where the ideas of independence were more popular, sometimes 7–8000 people sent one to the Parliament. For example, in the 1870s approximately 4100 inhabitants and 100

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<sup>5</sup> Area of the plots differed according to the quality of the soil. An average one-quarter plot consisted of 3–3.5 hectare of arable land and 1.5 hectare of pasture.

<sup>6</sup> From 1857 on the Hungarian currency had been the silver-based *forint* and its change, the *krajcár*. The modern, gold-based currency, the *korona* and its change, the *fillér* was introduced in 1892.

<sup>7</sup> Glatz, "A magyarok krónikája", p. 472.

<sup>8</sup> The sovereign Principality of Transylvania became part of the Habsburg Empire in 1687. The Habsburgs ruled Transylvania as a separate administrative unit from Hungary, via a governor ordered from the Vienna court. Although in 1867 Transylvania and Hungary were united, the different legal systems were not harmonised.

<sup>9</sup> Glatz, "Magyarok a Kárpát-medencében", p. 117.

voters of Abrudbánya elected one MP, while the same was true for the 32.000 inhabitants of Arad, the 22.000 of Cegléd, the 20.000 of Nagykőrös, and the 17.000 of Csongrád.<sup>10</sup>

Common voting for the new incompatibility and electoral laws showed the intentions of both the Deák Party and the Left Centre Party to merge. The fusion of the two main political forces and the establishment of the *Szabadelvű Párt* (Liberal Party) took place on the 1st of March, 1875. The new party represented the political interests of the big landowners and the leading industrial capitalists, and as such it was a devoted adherent of the Compromise-based constitutional system. Due to its consistent policy, this "typical nineteenth-century club" without permanent membership and central organisation<sup>11</sup> remained the ruling party of Hungary for the next thirty years. The "head of the club", was Count Kálmán Tisza, the prime minister, an excellent parliamentary tactician who served in this post for a record time in Hungarian history between 1875 and 1890. The prime minister of the "happy peacetime" and his party had, amongst other things, the 1874 electoral law as a stable pillar of the regime.

#### Practice of Law XXXIII of 1874 and functioning of the Lower House

Law XXXIII of 1874, according to which all the subsequent elections of the period were held, reduced the number of electors from 10% to approximately 6%:

**Number of people entitled to vote (on the basis of Law XXXIII of 1874)<sup>12</sup>**

	1881	1892	1901	1910	1914
number of registered electors	821 241	870 555	1 025 259	1 162 241	1 272 755
rate of registered electors (%)	6.0	5.7	6.1	6.4	6.8

number of electors  
on the basis of

– land tax	538 792	583 693	666 010	718 708	750 346
– house tax	22 239	26 760	41 900	46 918	55 170
– income tax	104 758	129 679	193 480	270 110	34 237
– schooling qualifications	53 975	65 461	71 821	86 749	92 612
– former laws	92 259	55 609	41 287	22 908	16 774

<sup>10</sup> Szekfű, p. 484.

<sup>11</sup> Sugar, p. 261.

<sup>12</sup> Glatz, "A magyarok krónikája", p. 472.

Electoral law served the interests of the ruling social classes. This was clearly reflected in the composition of the Lower House. Up to the late 1870s, 80 % of Hungary's parliamentary deputies were drawn from the landed aristocracy and "the Hungarian gentry"<sup>13</sup>. In 1910, the figure still stood at 50%. The number of deputies of middle-class origin – civil servants, lawyers, intellectuals – never exceeded a third of the total. Parliamentary deputies of peasant origin were rare. The workers, on the other hand, had no representation at all.<sup>14</sup>

The antidemocratic electoral law afflicted the national minorities more: in regions inhabited mainly by Hungarians the rate of voters was usually higher. Due on the one hand to the above mentioned positive discrimination of towns, and on the other hand to the more favourable economic status of those living there, more people were entitled to vote in the towns than in the countryside. This latter circumstance had its national aspect too, since the inhabitants of towns were mostly of Hungarian and German origin.<sup>15</sup>

Since no regulation on the fairness of the elections existed and the ballot was open, corruption, gerrymandering and the falsification of votes were normal practice. The series of election abuses started with the annual drawing up of the register of voters by the authorities. The pro-government bureaucrats tried their best to leave those who voted against the cabinet at the previous elections, or simply had a reputation of being a supporter of the opposition, out of the list. For example, in Nyitra county in 1895 22.812 people were registered as voters, while one year later 19.057, and in 1897 only 17.073. The high *ispán* of the county in his official letters to the prime minister annually reported the number of those who he was able to drop out of the list.<sup>16</sup>

Active electioneering preceded the voting. Candidates published their programmes and their party's straight tickets at mass meetings. County administrations worked hard to hinder the election campaigns of the "unwanted" candidates on every possible pretext. For example, one of the electoral meetings of Aurél Vlad Romanian candidate was impeded by a local officer because of the alleged influenza epidemic in the neighbourhood. At the same time the superior of this officer denied to authorise Aurel Vlad's campaign tour by car on the thin

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<sup>13</sup> "The Hungarian gentry" were in the middle of the social scale. Their families, former owners of smaller estates, had found it difficult to adjust to the dualist state's new economic system, but, because of their extensive connections, they could retain their social importance and their political influence in the counties. Many of them were absorbed into the state bureaucracy. – Sugar, p. 276.

<sup>14</sup> Hoensch, p. 27.

<sup>15</sup> Glatz, "Magyarok a Kárpát-medencében", p. 117.

<sup>16</sup> Szabó, p. 44.

excuse that the authorities would have been unable to control his movements in the district with their slower vehicles.<sup>17</sup> Trafficking in votes was a widespread canvassing technique, but financial means of the political forces were certainly not the same. While the governing party could make good use of state funds for the purposes of its campaign, the opposition parties had to cover their expenses by the party budgets and their supporters' contributions.

On the day of the election the voters of the different parties gathered separately and went together to the polls, where the series of abuses continued. Members of the electoral committee denied the voter if he did not pronounce his name as it was written in the register (this phenomenon caused many problems for the members of the national minorities), or if the authorities simply did not believe that the person in question was of electoral age.<sup>18</sup>

One has to realize that reprehensible canvassing tactics mentioned above were characteristic of all the political forces. Rigging was a kind of natural concomitant of the elections, bribery was part of the contemporary electoral "rules". As Zsigmond Várady, deputy of the Party of National Work put it in his speech in Parliament on the 13<sup>th</sup> of July 1910: "If you [the opposition] really want to annihilate unfair electoral methods, you are first of all supposed to repeat bravely and honestly after me that all these methods have been continuously used by all the parties in Hungary for centuries."<sup>19</sup>

Even if it probably would be an exaggeration to summarise the previous paragraphs by stating that the results of parliamentary elections during the period were determined by corruption and by the government's hardly disguised intervention, we can objectively conclude that they were strongly influenced by these techniques.

Functioning of the parliament was not less troublesome than the election of it, especially in difficult political situations. The obstructionist methods introduced against Lónyay's electoral bill in 1872 became commonly used political weapon of the opposition by the turn of the century. The main aim of the obstruction was to make the passing of the next year's budget impossible for the cabinet before the end of December. According to the law in this case the so called "ex lex status" occurred, which practically meant the dismissal of the government.

It was prime minister Count István Tisza, son of Kálmán Tisza, who started active campaign against paralysing obstructionist tactics in 1903. One of his first measures was to elaborate radical modifications into the rules of the Lower

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<sup>17</sup> Szabó, p. 45.

<sup>18</sup> Ibidem

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 44.



House. The real novelty of the proposal was that it rendered the dissolution of the Parliament impossible before the passing of the "legislative necessities" of the state, i.e. the defence bill and the budget. Furthermore, the proposal introduced additional sessions, it brought to an end the possibility for holding extra speeches and voting by names, it prohibited the spinning out of speeches by quotations, and it established a special parliamentary guard.

On the 18<sup>th</sup> of November 1904 the Speaker introduced Tisza's proposal in Parliament. As an answer, after signing the no-confidence provision against the Speaker, the majority of the opposition left the chamber and did not take part in the voting procedure. In the absence of the protesting 133 deputies it was certainly quite easy for the government to have the bill passed. No wonder that this made the remaining opposition absolutely furious, so they threw books and ink-pots at the Speaker who finally had to adjourn the session. The representatives were called together again on the 13<sup>th</sup> of December. At this time the parliamentary guard already functioned and was supposed to maintain order, but nevertheless it was certainly not authorised to assault deputies with parliamentary immunity. Before the governing party entered the floor, the angry members of the opposition simply had thrown the guards out, they had destroyed the Speaker's platform, the minister's armchairs, the Liberal benches, and finally some of them had lit cigarettes on the top of the ruins.<sup>20</sup>

#### **Attempt to introduce a more democratic franchise, the electoral bill of József Kristóffy**

The *Magyarországi Szociáldemokrata Párt* (Hungarian Social Democratic Party) was founded on the 7–8<sup>th</sup> of December 1890. In their programme the Social Democrats declared that they aimed at the complete democratization of political life by, first of all, introducing the universal suffrage. This latter demand of the party did not rely only on the current international examples and the support of the masses deprived of their electoral rights, but also on some precedents in Hungarian history. Universal suffrage was already part of Lajos Kossuth's draft constitution of 1851<sup>21</sup> and the straight ticket of the *Nemvlasztók Pártja* (Party of Non-Voters) founded in 1874 by Leó Frankel.

The Social Democratic Party (SDP) saw quite clear that it needed political partners in the struggle for a new and more democratic electoral law. The *Függetlenségi Párt* (Independence Party) appeared to be one of the possible allies, since universal suffrage was included in its, and already its predecessor's, the *48-as Párt's* ('48 Party) programme. The Independence Party was however

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<sup>20</sup> Glatz, "A magyarok krónikája", p. 508.

<sup>21</sup> Csizmadia, p. 354.

dominated by big landowners, like the Apponyis, the Zichys and the Andrássys, who rather looked after the political interests of their own social class than of those of the masses. This made the successful co-operation of the two parties practically impossible. Nevertheless, during the constitutional crisis following the millennium and also during the 1905 elections the Social Democrats supported the opposition coalition led by the Independence Party for they expected this political force to introduce the electoral reforms.

Since the coalition had won the above mentioned elections on national platform, the ruler did not appoint its leader, Ferenc Kossuth, the son of Lajos Kossuth, as prime minister. Given this political plight, in early 1905 the SDP started its own activities for the realization of democratic demands. The party organized mass demonstrations all around the country where the participants declared that the working classes were ready to go on general strike for the introduction of universal suffrage. The same was stated in the resolution adopted by the congress of the SDP in April. By all these manifestations the Social Democrats wanted to persuade the coalition to keep its national programme in the background for a while, and to concentrate first on the electoral issue in order to win also the lower social classes over to the national demands.

Despite all the efforts, the coalition insisted on its original preferences and ideas, and thus regrettably lost the political support of the SDP. This contributed on a large scale to the appointment of a non-parliamentary government led by Géza Fejérváry, a loyal and trustworthy general, in June. The coalition responded by proclaiming a state of national passive resistance which slowly escalated into a crisis of the entire political system. This was the moment when the interior minister of the Fejérváry government, József Kristóffy, made an attempt to break the impasse by proposing the introduction of universal suffrage to secure the support of the lower social classes.

The agreement between József Kristóffy and the head of the SDP, Ernő Garami, was signed on the 27<sup>th</sup> of July 1905. According to the famous Kristóffy-Garami Pact, in return for the introduction of universal and secret ballot and the abolishment of the political restrictions imposed on the Social Democrats by the Bánffy government, the SDP took upon itself to organise a series of pro-government demonstrations. The most important one of these mass meetings was held on the 15<sup>th</sup> of September in Budapest with the participation of 100.000 people. On the so called "Red Friday" the shops and the factories stopped working, traffic came to a standstill, and the masses, carrying flags, placards and banners, proceeded to the Parliament. "Just imagine the thousands of people resolutely standing in front of the magnificent house of the Hungarian Parliament, its cupola, its towers and the hundreds of its illuminated windows.

Imagine the crowd as it was cheering, scolding, yelling and shouting at the top of its voice, and imagine as the fists of the people almost reached the imposing main entrance and all the gates of the House ... It was a real revolutionary scene." – wrote about the happening Manó Buchinger, the secretary of the SDP, in his memoirs.<sup>22</sup>

Due to the demonstrations, the number of organized workers increased considerably in the whole country. New trade unions were established and the *Szocialista Földmunkások Szövetsége* (Union of Socialist Peasants) was founded with 30,000 members. The democratic movement received ideological support from bourgeois radicals gathered around Oszkár Jászi, the editor of the sociological periodical, *Huszadik Század* (Twentieth Century). The liberal *Budapesti Napló* (Budapest Diary) published several articles, written by for example Endre Ady, arguing for social changes. The *Társadalomtudományi Társaság* (Social Science Association) and the *Szabadgondolkodók Magyarországi Szövetsége* (Hungarian Society of Liberals) disseminated democratic ideology too, and they founded the *Általános Titkos Választói Jog Ligája* (League of Universal and Secret Ballot) on the 26<sup>th</sup> of August.

The nation-wide political struggle received a strong impetus from the simultaneous events in Austria. In 1905 a wave of electoral mass meetings swept through the other half of the Empire too. Thanks to these demonstrations, the Austrian prime minister, Gautsch, announced that his cabinet would introduce a democratic electoral bill. The law on universal suffrage was passed by the Parliament next year, and the 1907 elections were already held according to it. A short remark has to be made here, however. Even if the obvious Austrian influence on the Hungarian electoral rights movement cannot be denied, the Austrian and the Hungarian situations were not the same in this respect. The fact that in the western part of the Dual Monarchy it was possible to govern without the parliament's contribution – which was not the case in Hungary – made the introduction of the general franchise much easier there.<sup>23</sup>

Despite the activities of the progressive forces, the bill on universal suffrage received little support in the Hungarian Parliament. The Liberal Party was against the democratization of electoral rights, because "it would strengthen the radical political trends and it would expose the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy to danger".<sup>24</sup> Motivated more by tactical than by ideological reasons, the coalition did not back the proposal either. Since the parliamentary majority regarded Kristóffy's bill as an attempt of the caretaker government to stabilise its power

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<sup>22</sup> Mucsi, p. 48.

<sup>23</sup> Csizmadia, p. 354.

<sup>24</sup> Izsák, p. 61.

by constitutional means, it went on with its obstinate protest against the government.

The coalition's fears of the strengthening of the Fejérváry cabinet became apparent some weeks later, when the ruler finally decided to dissolve the stubborn parliament, to introduce the electoral reform by decree and to call election. Facing with these possible actions, the coalition retreated from the passive resistance. On the 6<sup>th</sup> of April 1906, Ferenc Kossuth and Gyula Andrassy Jr. accepted the agreement offered to them by the ruler in secret according to which the coalition was asked to form a government but at the same time it had to abandon its national demands.

The governmental crisis which lasted for more than a year was thus resolved, but it demanded really high price. By giving up the patriotic programme of the coalition, the only opportunity in the history of dualist Hungary to alter the rigidly pro-Compromise governmental policy of the Liberals and to introduce democratic social reforms was missed. After the appointment of the coalition government in April 1906 none of the parliamentary parties were any more interested in conceding of fundamental rights to the majority of the population.

#### **The coalition government and the electoral bill of Gyula Andrassy Jr.**

Although there was considerably less political chance of introducing universal suffrage under the coalition government than before, the working classes strove for it with the same enthusiasm. In October 1907 a nation-wide general strike and a series of demonstrations took place with altogether 200.000 participants.

On the one hand, in conformity with the ruler's instructions, and on the other hand being under the pressure of the lower social elements, interior minister of the coalition government, Gyula Andrassy Jr., son of the former prime minister, introduced a new electoral bill in Parliament in 1908. Since the cabinet did not really intend to democratize voting rights, it was not an easy task for Andrassy Jr. to work out a proper bill. The interior minister wanted to have the cake and eat it as well by proposing a weighted electoral system according to which more people would have been entitled to vote, but the votes would have been unequal. "To avoid the dangers which the immediate introduction of a fully democratic franchise would entail" men over the age of twenty-four and having secondary school degree or paying 100 *koronas* of direct tax a year would have been given three, those who had finished four classes of the secondary school or paid 20 *koronas* of direct tax a year two, and those able to read and write one vote. The illiterates would have received one vote for every twelve men.

Andrássy Jr.'s bill was obviously an attempt to retain the supremacy of the ruling classes, but, by the introduction of the general schooling qualification for voters, it was also a measure directed against the national minorities.<sup>25</sup> The non-Hungarian population was less educated in general and the rate of illiterates, except for the Germans, was higher amongst them.<sup>26</sup>

In spring 1908 the SDP organised large scale demonstrations against the introduction of the new electoral bill, but even in the Parliament it was supported only by the Liberal Party. István Tisza argued for the weighted electoral system because he saw it as a guarantee for the slow and safe social changes and also for the supremacy of the Hungarians over the nationalities. The governing coalition itself was divided on the issue. Since the proposal was in flat contradiction with the original straight ticket of the Independence Party including universal suffrage, the influential democratic left wing of the main governing party, the Justh faction, was against it. Given the general disapproval, the Parliament finally did not even debate Andrássy Jr.'s bill.

The fiasco of the electoral bill was not the only failure of the government, but probably the most disappointing one. In the second half of 1908 the coalition was starting to disintegrate and the cabinet's fall became only a matter of time. The last straw happened to be the dispute over the Hungarian National Bank. Since the majority of the coalition let this demand lie over for a long time, the Justh faction, 115 deputies, broke away from the Independence Party on the 11<sup>th</sup> of November 1909. This produced the government's demise and at the same time it also meant the survival of the "democratic deficit" of electoral law.

### **Preparations for the World War and the electoral law of 1913**

On the 17<sup>th</sup> of January 1910 a new caretaker government was appointed with the ruler's old advisor, Count Károly Khuen-Héderváry, who played a significant historic role in the preparations for the coming parliamentary elections. The prime minister acted in the interest of the former Liberals who reformed and renewed their party on the 19<sup>th</sup> of February, 1910 under the name of *Nemzeti Munkapárt* (Party of National Work) led by István Tisza. Khuen-Héderváry could temporarily win over the non-parliamentary political forces, the peasant parties and the Social Democrats, with the already well-tried but purely tactical promise of democratizing the electoral system. Khuen-Héderváry took good care of the effectiveness of electioneering too, and he had no inhibitions about using also the large variety of unfair means of canvassing. The efforts resulted

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<sup>25</sup> Sugar, p. 284.

<sup>26</sup> Glatz, "A magyarok krónikája", p. 487.

in success: in the elections of June the Party of National Work gained the absolute majority.

After a short period of consolidation in internal politics, the new Khuen-Héderváry government, practically led by István Tisza, submitted a defence bill in Parliament in May 1911, considerably raising military expenditure. Knowing that in the naval armaments race between the two alliance systems the Dual Monarchy was far behind, even the opposition agreed with the bill, but in return for its votes it asked for the electoral reform promised by the prime minister before the elections, and it started to obstruct parliamentary work again.

The struggle for universal suffrage went on also outside the Parliament. New democratic organisations were established, like the *Országos Reform-klub* (National Reform Club), the club of those deputies who supported the social changes, and the *Választójog Országos Szövetsége* (National Federation of Electoral Rights). The bourgeois radicals were continuously backing the electoral movement, and their new daily, *Világ* (Light), served as an organ of progressive publicists. As a remarkable incident, Gyula Justh, the leader of the group which had split from the Independence Party, made an alliance with the Social Democrats.

The new series of mass demonstrations organised by the SDP reached their culmination on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of May 1912. After the election of István Tisza as Speaker of the Lower House on the previous day – which practically meant that Tisza took the reins – a general strike developed against him and the proposed defence bill of the government. On the "Bloody Thursday" 100.000 people turned out in the capital and its suburbs, and six of them – including one policeman – died in the street fights. The "Revolution of Electoral Rights", as this noteworthy event is also called, was the first official common action of the Social Democrats, the Justh faction and the bourgeois radicals. It was also significant that the radical manifestation of the dissatisfaction of the working classes made the seriousness of social tensions obvious for the public.

Nevertheless, the massive protest had no impact on the activities of István Tisza, who was convinced that under the current internal and international circumstances it was no time for liberalisation. Thus, the Speaker tried his best to keep discipline in and outside the Parliament in order to protect the dualist political system which he believed to be the best possible one for the country at that stage. On the 4<sup>th</sup> of June, 1912 Tisza ordered the parliamentary guard to remove the recalcitrant members of the opposition from the chamber, and in this way he was able to make the rest of the Parliament pass the defence bill. The incomplete legislature nodded its assent also to the imposition of restrictions on

the rights to assembly and association, and the introduction of a new conservative electoral law.

The new electoral law (Law XIV of 1913) raised the number of voters only from 6% to 10% of the population, while at the same time 25–30 % of the population of Western Europe voted.<sup>27</sup> That is to say, this was the electoral law of the period which entitled approximately the same rate of people to participate in the parliamentary elections as the 1848 law did 65 years before. Meanwhile in the more developed regions of the continent the ratio of voters was almost tripled. According to the new law, the general qualifications for voters were the age of thirty (only people aged over twenty-four with secondary school degree were given electoral rights, what had been the general age limit before), the ability to read and write, one year of permanent residence in the locality, and ten years of Hungarian citizenship. As far as the special qualifications were concerned, a common criteria of property and schooling qualifications were introduced all around the country. Increase in the rate of voters was on a large scale due to the significant reduction of property qualification. Schooling qualification was the finishing of six classes of the secondary school which must be considered to be a high requirement, since – despite the progressive law of 1868 which made education compulsory for all children from six to twelve-year olds – only 20% of the villagers complied with it.<sup>28</sup> As a general rule the ballot remained open, secret ballot was introduced only in municipal towns.

The 1913 electoral law was never in fact implemented since, because of the breaking out of the First World War, the mandate of the Lower House elected in 1910 was prolonged until October 1918.

The parliamentary "putsch" of István Tisza and the conservative electoral law were indignantly received not only by the forces of progress but also by the whole nation. Protest started anew, and the cohesion of the opposition became stronger than ever. It had an influence of paramount importance on the coming historical events in that Tisza's "rule by force"<sup>29</sup> made one of the most well-off aristocrats of the country, Count Mihály Károlyi, to take sides with the democratic opposition. Károlyi, who had previously been the head of the notorious association of big landowners, the *Országos Magyar Gazdasági Egyesület* (Hungarian National Economic Association), from 1913 on actively co-operated with the Social Democrats and also with the bourgeois radicals who united themselves in the *Országos Polgári Radikális Párt* (Bourgeois Radical

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<sup>27</sup> Sugar, p. 289.

<sup>28</sup> Csizmadia, p. 355.

<sup>29</sup> Hoensch, p. 64.

National Party) on the 6<sup>th</sup> of June, 1914. Thus, as a result of the antidemocratic events of 1912–13 in internal politics, the leading forces of the Aster Revolution (*Őszirózsás Forradalom*) of 1918 found each other.

### Conclusion

The dualist state, for the very reason of the inherent rigidity of the Compromise law, was a system unable to develop. Since political decision makers of the period were confronted with the inflexible nature of the constitutional order every day, they were convinced that even the slightest modification of the system would have endangered the pure existence of it. Thus, being afraid of the collapse of their social positions and the country's great power status, Hungarian cabinets of the Dual Monarchy turned a deaf ear to the demands for political and social reforms. This was the way how during the decades the governing Liberals' policy was changed into stubborn conservatism and how the dualist political model became an obstacle to normal social changes and development. Electoral law, characterised by the low rate of voters, the open ballot and the disproportionate electoral geography, was one of the main supports of this conservative political system. Law XXXIII of 1872 was charged with the task of keeping democratic aspirations of the lower social elements away from Parliament. As a result, in the thirteen elections of the dualist age, with the only exception of the one held in 1905, the ruling party won, and thus governmental power could not rotate amongst the political forces representing different social classes and their interests.

Even if in vain, in this era of nostalgia for the Dual Monarchy, it is often nowadays asked whether it would have been possible to maintain the dualist state by reforming and developing it in due time. Today we already know how the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and also the old Hungarian Kingdom were heading to their own disasters, even irrespective of the international occurrences, because of the mismanagement of social problems. Seeing the events in their historical perspective, we must state that the only alternative would have been to take steps to a more democratic social and political system. As far as electoral law is concerned, on the basis of the previous argument we can agree with the following analysis of Gyula Szekfű: "In the period of the dualist state no organic public society existed. The national state is governed and made run by a small elite, which missed to integrate the masses. In the 1880s and 1890s (...) this integration could have been carried out without any danger by the means used for this purpose all over Europe: the democratization of electoral rights. Democratic electoral law would have disturbed the convenient positions of the ruling social classes a bit, it would have hastened the disintegration of



large- and medium-sized estates, it would have stopped the monopoly of aristocratic attitude and lifestyle, (...) and instead it would have created bourgeois and civilized peasant lifestyles.”<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Szekfű, p. 594.