HUNGARIAN SOCIETY AND SOCIAL CONFLICTS BEFORE AND AFTER TRIANON

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The two or three decades preceding the First World War are often referred to as "the happy times of peace" in Hungary. This label is not entirely unjustified. No wars took place on Hungarian soil between 1867 and 1914, even though armed uprisings engulfed the Balkans during the same period. Economic growth in the era was also impressive. The per capita GDMP tripled between 1867 and 1913, which meant, in other terms, an annual increase of 2.5 percent. In spite of this, it would be a mistake to overemphasize the importance of what had been accomplished. The rapid development notwithstanding, on the eve of the Great War Hungary still belonged to the group of relatively underdeveloped countries. Its per capita national product was only 69 percent of the European average, or 37–38 percent of the English, 48–51 percent of the German and 72 percent of the corresponding Finnish figures. The process of *embourgeoisement* in society had not been completed either. The relative number of those employed in agriculture did decrease gradually, but it still stood at 62 percent in 1910. Also, parts of the old, quasi-medieval social structure persisted. Many of the conditions and norms characteristic of a traditional society survived and existed side by side with emerging social groups and their new outlook on the world. This duality, coupled with the scarcity of national wealth, a multinational population and the precarious position of the country within the Habsburg monarchy gave rise to a host of problems. Some of these grew to proportions and represented dangers great enough to justify calling the *fin de siècle* the "unhappy times of animosity," rather than the happy times of peace. In the first part of my paper I propose briefly to discuss these problems, while in the second part I would like to examine their legacy following the war.

1. The Antinomies of the Pre-War Years

At the dawn of the twentieth century five great questions antagonized Hungarian society, political parties and Parliament. The first one of these was the legal debate between the supporters of the 1867 compromise and its opponents who adhered to the traditions of 1848. The second conflict arose out of the dif-

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ferences of values and interests of the Christian and Jewish middle classes, usually called the gentry and the Jewish question. The third antinomy pitted the poor peasantry and the owners of large estates against each other. This social struggle is usually referred to as the agrarian question. Opinions were also divided over the possible reform of the political system, especially that of suffrage. This fourth area served as the battleground for conservatives wishing to uphold the status quo and their reformist opponents, the radicals. The final, fifth great antinomy pertained to the conflicts between Hungarians and non-Hungarians, usually called the nationality question.

The first controversy, which divided those in support of and those in opposition to the Compromise of 1867, manifested itself primarily in matters concerning military affairs and the economy. The pro-Compromise groups supported Viennese plans of developing the common army, accepted the division of labour between the two parts of the Empire, and argued for developing home industries by relying on internal resources. These policies represented the interests of the great estate owners and of the great bourgeoisie, which was continually gaining in influence during the era. Their opponents, who stood for the principles of the 1848 revolution, criticized the economic policy of the government, labelling it disadvantegous for Hungary. They also opposed the customs union with Austria and the community of financial institutions such as the unified currency and banking system. As far as the military was concerned, the so-called "48-ers" were either opposed to generous funding of the common army or made their support dependent on the fulfillment of certain national demands. Such conditions were for instance the use of Hungarian flags and national symbols in the military, and the use of Magyar as the language of command in Hungarian units.

Viewed in a wide historic perspective it can hardly be doubted that the interests of the country were better served by the pro-Compromise camp. Some national and nationalistic slogans, however, had such a popular influence, that, by the eve of the Great War, the 48-ers had managed to effectively paralyse the government and political life in general. These opposition groups hoped that an eventual victory in the war would move the emperor-king to recognize the valiant efforts of the Hungarian nation by granting her further attributes of independence. Meanwhile, some personalities in support of the compromise, such as Gyula Szekfű, were predicting Hungary's final and complete integration into "Christian-German civilisation," or, in plainer terms, were mapping out the country's place in the German-dominated Mitteleuropa of the future. None of the parties, however, made preparations for a possible defeat.

The second conflict, which antagonized the Christian and the Jewish middle-class, arose out of a gradual social change that involved the slow decline of the gentry and the rise of the Jewry who made up five percent of the population. Previously there existed an informal understanding between the liberals of the Hungarian nobility and the Jews who were emancipated in 1848. This *entente* in

effect recognized the nobility's dominant position in running the state and controlling the political life, while guaranteeing legal equality and virtual freedom of action for all non-nobles, including Jews, in realizing the program of economic modernization. The gentry, however, when faced with the prospects of its relative downfall interpreted the situation not as a sensible division of social tasks, but rather as the aggressive expansionism of the Jewry, which offended national interests. This conflict of power was further aggravated by the different cultural backgrounds of the two sides. The outlook of the Christian middle classes was dominated by a romantic view of the past, and sometimes by stubborn nationalism. Parts of the gentry even seemed to live up to the old saying according to which a Hungarian nobleman need neither write nor read too much. The attitudes of the Jewish bourgeoisie and intelligentsia were radically disparate. They were more rationalistic, material and more open to the world, sometimes to the point of being truly cosmopolitan. Much like in Austria, Germany or France these incompatibilities led to the appearance of political anti-semitism in Hungary during the 1870s. The trend temporarily seemed to lose momentum in the 1890s, but regained its strength after the turn of the century, and especially during the First World War. The controversy prompted Oszkár Jászi, one of the most prominent figures of the radical wing of Jewish Hungarians, to devote a whole issue of his periodical, *The Twentieth Century* to an in depth discussion of it. In answering his query, thirty-seven of fifty contributors recognized the so-called Jewish question as an acute problem of Hungarian society. As far as the possible solutions were concerned, the majority of those asked still voiced their optimism with regards to the conflict-solving potential inherent in assimilation and democratization. The number of anti-assimilationist and anti-liberal anti-semites nonetheless rose considerably, as did that of Jewish nationalists who, as a reaction to attacks against them, started to promote a separate Jewish consciousness, with the claim to nationhood as the final, though distant, goal.[1]

The unhealthy distribution of arable land lay at the core of the third antinomy, the agrarian question. This meant that a small minority held disproportionally great estates, while the number of landless or sub-landed peasants who neither benefited from modernization nor could produce for the market amounted to several hundred thousand. The only country in Europe where a comparable anomaly in the distribution of land could be found was Romania. As a result of this, a process of *embourgeoisment* was observable only among the minority of peasants who held a considerable area of land. The lower strata of the peasantry, especially the day-labourers, had to face poverty and often even severe deprivation. As a consequence, certain socially deviant tendencies appeared among the peasants, such as adherence to religious sects and having only one child per family. The spread of strictly evangelical Christianity and egalitarian, revolutionary socialism also had their roots in the feeling of hopelessness over the pet-

rified structural anomalies of Hungarian agriculture. The ever more frequent strikes, demands for wage raises, and political demonstrations were inspired by these ideas. Unrest was usually met violently by the police or the military. Repeated clashes and the use of arms by the authorities resulted in several dozens of demonstrators being killed, and hundreds of them wounded or imprisoned.

At the same time, it cannot be said that the conservative-liberal government and the ruling elite in general remained completely insensitive to the social troubles of the lower strata and the peasantry. Some restricted attempts were made to raise the standard of living for the urban working classes, but in the countryside their extent remained even more limited than it had been in the cities. Resettlement or the division of land on a larger scale was out of question. István Tisza, the most influential politician of the era, held views that rested on the ideology of classical liberalism in unambiguous terms. He declared that

> one cannot be firm and unyielding enough in asserting that the question of the working classes shall never be remedied by putting theories about resettlement and the division of lands into effect. [...] We cannot change the order of the world, an order according to which not every man can possess capital, financial or landed.[2]

During the war this typical orthodox approach changed only negligibly. Socially more sensitive conservative politicians such as Ottokár Prohászka, a Christian-Socialist bishop, proposed rewarding service on the front by small plots of land, but no serious reform plan could be conceived.

The stipulations of the 1874 electoral law meant that about 25 percent of adult men, or 6–7 percent of the total population had the right to vote. This reflected the nineteenth-century liberal notion that believed in legal, but not political equality. Opposing all privileges by birth, it proposed instead the principle of political equality only for the wealthier or learned groups of society. Until the turn of the century not even the total exclusion of women was perceived as unusual, as they were considered to be subject to the influence of their husbands. Neither these restrictions, nor open balloting, however, were compatible with the more democratic notions of the 1900s, and this anomaly became the fourth area of tension in Hungarian society.

Members of the conservative camp did not substantially revise their position during the first years of the century, and contemplated insignificant changes at most. Opposed to them stood those emerging social groups that were looking to increase their influence in the country's life: the bourgeois middle classes, the workers and the peasantry. Their main demand was universal and secret suffrage. The unresolved conflict grew into a long-lasting and intense political strife, which culminated in a 1912 street battle between the police, the military and the demonstrating masses. Nevertheless, in spite of popular activism, the conservatives managed to uphold their privileges and made only minimal con-

cessions. The new electoral bill, which was passed in 1913 but never enacted, raised the number of voters from 1,162,000 to 1,838,000 a 74 percent increase. In addition, it introduced secret ballotting in the municipalities. In 1918 the heated political situation induced a second reform aimed at reducing tensions. With it the number of eligible voters rose to two million sevenhundred thousand, or 15 percent of the total population. At the same time, in Great Britain, Norway and Denmark about 40, in France 30 and in Spain and Greece approximately 25 percent of the population had the right to vote.

While the four above-mentioned antinomies (the Austro–Hungarian relations; the gentry- and Jewish-question; the plight of the peasantry; and the question of democratic suffrage) were grave problems, their solution by no means represented a challenge to historic Hungary. The political aspirations of the non-Hungarian peoples, however, grew to endanger the continued existence of the millenary state. These nationalities made up almost half of the country's population, excluding Croatia. If one considered Croatia too, their share actually rose to above 50 percent. The Hungarian elite, which had negotiated the terms of the Compromise of 1867, attempted to defend itself by granting equal citizenship and legal status to every individual without any regard to race, language or religion, and by offering limited cultural autonomy on the one hand, while on the other refusing to acquiesce to the Romanian, Serbian and Slovak claims for recognition as political nations and equal partners within the state. This also meant rejecting the propositions of the nationalities for instituting territorial autonomy, and a determination to make Hungarian the official language in accordance with the West-European and North-American concept of the nation state. This view was reflected in the nationalities law of 1868 which declared that "politically, all citizens of Hungary form a single nation, the indivisible and unified Hungarian nation, of which every citizen is an equal member regardless of his nationality."

> The leaders of the nationalities refuted this argument claiming that one cannot attribute to Hungary the characteristics of a national state, for Hungary's character is exactly the aggregate of the peoples which make up the state. The nature of the Hungarian state does not allow that a single people, which does not represent even half of the total population, assert itself as constituting the state. It is only together that the peoples of Hungary can identify themselves as the state.[3]

Based on this argument they requested in their 1895 assembly that "non-Magyar peoples in Hungary be given full liberty, according to language boundaries. The national character of a given region should be reflected in the administrative language of autonomous districts, be it a county, a town or a village."[4]

The two positions were never to be even partially reconciled. In fact, despite of the efforts of mediators on both sides the gap only grew wider. The leaders of the nationalities demanding territorial autonomy pinned their hopes on the

eventual election victory of the democratic Hungarian opposition, which appeared more flexible on the issue, and the enthronement of archduke Franz Ferdinand. Sympathies for their ethnic brethren or relative, however, strengthened during these years, and with them grew separatist sentiment, which was partly fuelled by propaganda from Bucharest, Belgrade and Prague. When Hungary entered the war in 1914, the nationalities made up approximately half of the population. Their loyalty, or at least that of their intellectual elites, was highly questionable.

2. Attempts at Conflict Management during the Revolutions of 1918–1919

The tensions that arose around the turn of the century and were aggravated during the harsh years of the war represented a problem both for the liberal democratic régime of 1918–1919 and for the short-lived Soviet Republic. With the *de facto* dissolution of the monarchy and the abdication of Charles IV on 18 November 1918, the conflict between the pro-compromise and pro-1848 parties seemed to have been solved. It soon became apparent, however, that Charles' stepping down from "interfering in matters of the state" could be understood in different ways, and that the country's public was still divided by pro- and anti-Hapsburg sentiment. To make matters worse, even the anti-Hapsburg groups were divided into royalists and republicans. The act of the National Council which proclaimed the People's Republic of Hungary on 13 November 1918 was supported neither by a referendum nor by the decision of a regularly elected legislative body, and so its legitimacy could easily be questioned.

The revolution did not directly address the conflict between the gentry and the Jews. Both members of the National Council and later those of the government, however, belonged to the opposition of the *ancien régime* and were mostly bourgeois radicals or social democrats. The changes in personnel at all levels of government indicated that the aristocracy and the gentry were losing most of their influence, as they were being replaced by representatives of the bourgeoisie, the intelligentsia, the working classes, and the peasantry. This transformation had been heralded by the membership of the National Council. Nearly one half of which was made up of Jewish Hungarians. In provincial towns, too, intellectuals hitherto excluded from power mobilized politically, and came into the forefront.

The leaders of the October revolution wished to solve the agrarian question by expropriating all estates over 500 yokes (705 acres) and all Church holdings over 200 yokes (280 acres). These estates were to be turned into farming plots of 5–20 yokes (7 to 28 acres), which were thought sufficient to ensure the livelihood of a peasant family. Similarly radical changes were planned in the question

of suffrage. The decree of 3 March 1919 gave every literate man above the age of twenty-one and every woman above the age of twenty-four right to vote. The share of voters within the total population rose to 50 percent, a figure similar to that of the Scandinavian democracies. The implementation of these two acts would have meant the end of the economic and political privileges held by the prewar elite.

In the handling of the nationality question the government's position rested on the doctrine of preserving the territorial integrity of Hungary. At the same time, the nationalities were offered territorial and political autonomy, which would have included local governments and assemblies, as well as the right to delegate a minister to the central government. These concessions exceeded those demanded by the leaders of non-Hungarians before 1914. Among the latter, however, secessionism had become a dominant force by the autumn of 1918, and the majority of them were hoping for unification with their co-nationals. They found additional support in the program of the victorious powers, which, by 1918, had agreed upon dissolving the monarchy and forming nation-states in its wake. By the end of 1918 or early 1919 historic Hungary – even without the sanctioning of a peace treaty – had *de facto* disintegrated.

Summing up the program of the 1918 revolution, one could observe in it an attempt to put the democratic reform agenda of the prewar years into practice. This transformation, had it been accomplished, would have meant a change of the elites and – as a result of the redistribution of land – a radical restructuring of the society and the economy. The liberal principles of private property and political pluralism were nevertheless to be honoured and fully developed. In this sense, the revolution stood for continuity and for change at the same time.

The socialist programme followed by the Hungarian Soviet Republic too had certain roots in the not very distant past. It resembled the conceptions of a society without exploitation and private property, which were inherent both in the radical social democratic vision of the future and in the messianistic egalitarianism of some agrarian socialists. However, these utopias which had sprung from the same sources did not merge into a consistent political agenda before the end of 1918, and their influence was very limited. All in all, 21 March 1919 represented a much greater break in the continuity of Hungarian history than 31 October 1918 had.

Following the Soviet-Russian example, the old administrative system was replaced by a network of workers', soldiers' and peasants' councils, while a body dubbed the Revolutionary Governing Council fulfilled the functions of the government. The traditional elites had no representation in these councils, and even the bourgeosie and the bourgeois intelligentsia were all but excluded. Sixty-five to seventy percent of the posts of people's comissars and deputy-comissars were held by men of Jewish origin, while in the country-side young workers and peasants often assumed important administrative positions. To en-

sure that these trends would not change, the "capitalists" – meaning estate owners, industrialists and the greater part of the upper classes – were denied the right to vote, and all candidates for the April elections had to be nominated by the Socialist Party.

The radicalism and the lack of an organic approach which characterized the attitude of the Soviet Republic became most apparent in its handling of the agrarian question. The fact that the size of the estates that were to be expropriated was reduced to 75 yokes (105 acres) caused distress among wealthier peasants, as well. But the greatest miscalculation and political error turned out to be the attempt at establishing cooperatives and state-owned farms, rather than distributing the expropriated lands. While this corresponded to socialist doctrines, together with other similarly radical measures, such as alcohol prohibition and anti-religious decrees, it alienated even the initial supporters of the Soviet Republic.

The nationality question was not even considered by the bolshevik leadership, as their ideology recognized only the common interests of the international proletariat, regardless of race, colour and language. They believed instead in a brotherly alliance of soviets uniting the whole of Europe. The naivity and unfounded optimism of the concept needed no theoretical proof after fighting with Czech and Romanian troops broke out, forcing the more realistic leaders of the Soviet Republic to face their initial delusion.

3. Policies of the Horthy-Regime

The fall of the Soviet Republic on 1 August, 1919 was followed by a few chaotic months. In the end it was the conservatives who emerged triumphant from the feuding political factions. They held on to power from 1920–21 to 1944, while trying to address the inherited social troubles in a manner very different from that of the preceding two years.

The conflict of the pro-Compromise and pro-1848 parties lived on in that of pro-Hapsburg legitimists and those favouring the eleciton of a new ruler. Some aristocrats regarded the return of Charles as a guarantee of the full restoration of their prewar power and influence. Parts of the officer corps and the Christian middle classes hoped that his ascension might lead to the resurrection of historic Hungary and of the Austro–Hungarian Monarchy. Legitimism on the part of some liberals expressed, more than anything else, their reservations vis-à-vis Miklós Horthy, who had been elected temporary head of state in 1920 by the Parliament. Their opponents, the free electors, were composed of the Protestant members of the aristocracy who had never favoured Vienna, as well as the larger part of the officer corps under the influence of Horthy and, perhaps most importantly, of members of the Smallholders Party who sympathized with the 1848 revolutionary tradition.

The struggle of the two camps was decided by the determined anti-Hapsburg stance both of the neighbouring countries and the Great Powers. The international opposition thus rendered restoration impossible. Hungary remained a kingdom, though, until 1945, but was not allowed to invite either Charles or Otto, his son, to the throne. In the 1930s, when both the Anglo-Saxon powers and France were inclined to lend support to Otto in an attempt to set up some framework of regional cooperation, the declared interests of Nazi Germany still prevented a return of the Hapsburgs. With no pretender able to realize his claim to the throne, Horthy could stay in power as regent for a quarter of a century, and no referendum on his primacy or the general question of the form of state was held.

The antinomy between gentry and Jewry further escalated during the interwar years, with anti-semitic tendencies sometimes receding, but never disappearing from government politics. The first official act was the law of *numerus clausus* passed in 1920. It decreed that among university students the "racial groups" of Hungary had to be represented according to their share in the population. Jewish students who had made up 34 percent of the student body before the war were limited to 5 percent by the law. In reality, they continued to make up about 8 to 12 percent. This policy was coupled with conscious support for the university education of children of public and state officials. This course too was codified by a 1927 law. As a result of such concentrated efforts, children of industrialists, estate owners and intellectuals made up 65 percent of all university and college students around the middle of the 1930s. This even surpassed the already high prewar figure of 57–58 percent. At the same time the children of small tradesmen and businessmen, fifty percent of whom were Jewish, accounted for only 6 percent, as opposed to 12 percent before the war. The very low representation of the other categories, including the urban working classes and the peasantry, did not change considerably.

The relative economic and social boom of the second half of the 1920s led to a loss of momentum in Hungarian anti-Semitism. The trend was reversed, however, by the Great Depression, which coincided with radical changes in the international environment. Before the depression, Hungarian anti-Semitism was held at bay partly by international factors. This changed radically when Nazi Germany started to lend overt support to it, using its prestige as Hungary's most important diplomatic partner. The coincidence of internal and foreign events eventually led to the enactment of a series of heavily discriminatory bills against Jewish citizens between 1938 and 1941. These imposed drastic control on their representation in the intellectual life of the country, as well as in trade and industry, and in the end virtually excluded them from the body of the Hungarian nation. The 1941 law forbade marriage between Jews and non-Jewish Hungarians and declaimed extramarital relationships as "debasement of the race," making them criminal acts. In spite of such discriminatory legislation, the lives of Hungarian Jews were not endangered until 1944. This changed, however, after

the German occupation of the country in March 1944. During the following months, almost half a million Jews and, after the Arrowcross putsch in October, further tens of thousands were deported, facing almost certain death. More than two-thirds of Hungarian Jews perished, with hardly more than one hundred thousand surviving the Holocaust. The strife between the two great social groups of the middle classes in Hungary continued after the second World War, although under radically different circumstances, and many observers of contemporary Hungary claim that it is in fact still going on today.

In the handling of the agrarian question, the conservative regime had two main priorities: protecting large and middle-sized estates to the greatest possible extent, and peacefully containing the agrarian proletariat, which was always prone to unrest. To reconcile these two policies, the 1920 land reform law distributed about one million yokes (one million and five hundred thousand acres) of arable land in the form of extremely small plots, with the average size of the new parcels around 1.7 yokes (2.5 acres). The share of estates over 100 yokes (140 acres) thus decreased only minimally, from 53.5 to 48 percent, with half a million landless or sublanded peasants receiving acreage. Including family members, the law touched the lives of approximately two million people. The moderate land reform did reduce the number of peasants without property by over two hundred thousand, but the small size of the plots also meant that the new landowners could still not live off their land, and the one-sidedness of the distribution of the land was not corrected.

The unaltered situation and continuing agony of the agrarian proletariat provided a fertile soil for the different sects which experienced an upsurge during and after the Great Depression, as their message of otherwordly happiness appealed to those in need and suffering in their lives. Radical egalitarianism reappeared too, although this time in a form closer to national socialism than to communism. In the thirties, the members of the "scythe-cross movement," as they called themselves, were preparing to move against Budapest and other cities and do justice by distributing the wealth of the rich. These apparent signs of a nearing social cataclism prompted the enactment of two further reform bills after 1935, which promised to provide land for the poorest stratum of the peasantry. Their scope, however, was even more limited than that of the 1920 law, and until 1941 only 230,000 yokes (325,000 acres) were distributed, partly as private property and partly as lease. In addition, many of the estates that were divided up had been owned by Jews. As a result of such half-hearted actions, the agrarian question emerged immediately after the Second World War as a problem that was no less acute than it had been after the First World War.

In terms of political rights, the fourth great antinomy, the conservative leadership of the interwar years held fast to its antidemocratic, elitist principles. Their policy rested on the thesis that a country's natural leaders were the social groups which possessed a "well-developed and strong sense of national identity

and sentiment." They claimed that the political alternative, the rule of "the masses smelling of beer and onions" would bring about the end of the country.[5] The secret and quasi-universal suffrage of 1919 which gave 40 percent of the total population the right to vote, was limited by a government decree of 1922. As a result of the restrictions, the share of voters fell to 28 percent, and open ballotting was reintroduced everywhere but in large municipalities. The percentage of the population possessing the right to vote still conformed to European standards, as it was similar to the situation in France and Switzerland, but the practice of open ballot was unprecedented in other parliamentary systems. The effects of the restrictions soon became visible. The proportion of middle-sized and large estate owners rose from 15 to 20 percent after the 1922 elections, and peaked at 23 percent in 1927. The share of peasant representatives decreased from 15 to 7 percent, and in 1927 to 3 percent, resembling prewar conditions. At the same time, aristocrats, who had made up 15 percent of the assembly before the war, but only 5 percent in 1920, reclaimed a good part of their influence and occupied 10 percent of the seats after 1922. The gentry gained in strength too, as their ranks climbed from 25 percent in 1920/21 to no less than 34 percent in 1927. These numbers are proof of the effectiveness of the suffrage system, which served the purpose of ensuring the position of those in power and stabilizing the existing social order. The only significant change affected was the return to secret ballotting in 1938. But in the given situation this reform was exploited most by the fascist extreme right, whose radicalism and demagogy could not be matched by the democratic parties.

After 1945 the Horthy-regime was routinely described in Hungarian historiography as fascism. Later it was referred to as semi-fascism or fascistoid dictatorship. These labels are obviously unfounded. Horthyist Hungary exhibited none of the most important characteristics of national socialist totalitarianism. But it is no less obvious that it cannot be termed a parliamentary democracy either, as it excluded large segments of the population from effective participation in the political life of the country. In general, the interwar Hungarian state and government is probably best described as a subtype of authoritarian political regimes.

The fifth great antinomy of prewar Hungary was addressed radically in the Treaty of Trianon signed in 1920. The peace agreement fundamentally changed the character of the previously multi-ethnic country, turning it into a virtual nation-state. The share of non-Hungarian speakers decreased form 46 to 10 percent. The trend, although much slowed down, continued during the interwar years, and by 1930 non-Hungarians made up only 8 percent of the population. The greatest ethnic group were the Germans who accounted for 7 and 5 percent of the populace respectively, but lived dispersed all over Hungary. The number of Romanians, Slovaks, Serbs, Croats and Ruthenes became insignificant. In general, it can be safely said that the nationality question ceased to be one of the principal and acute problems of Hungarian society. It was, however, replaced by

a diplomatic dilemma, which assumed equally great dimensions. It centred around the fate and future of the three million Hungarians who found themselves in a minority and separated from their mother country after 1920. The dismemberment of the nation, as it was perceived by the political elite, the society, and the minorities themselves, was looked upon as a temporary situation, which could and had to be remedied.

The considerable success of Hungarian revisionism between 1938 and 1941 led to four consecutive border changes. Not counting Croatia, more than half of the territories lost in 1920 were reclaimed in the process. The country grew from 93,000 square kilometers to 172,000. Its population increased from 9 to 14.6 million. Approximately half of the five million new citizens were ethnic Hungarians, while Romanians made up 20, Ruthenes 10 and South Slavs 8 or 9 percent. The rest were composed of Germans and Slovaks. The reacquisiton of minorities along with the territories raised the nationality question anew. The alternative remained the same, and the central question was whether the Hungarian majority should pursue a policy of assimilation or taken a more conciliatory course by either recognizing the other ethnic groups as state-forming nations or at least offering them territorial autonomy. The ruling elite was divided over the question, and no substantial steps were made before the end of the Second World War. No steps were necessary after the war, as the 1947 peace treaty restored the borders of 1920. With this, the nationality question was once again turned into a diplomatic affair.

Evaluating the series of attempts at conflict management in the first half of the twentieth century, we have to conclude that only one of the five great social or sociopolitical problems of pre-Trianon Hungary – the antagonism between the pro-compromise and the pro-1848 parties – had been solved by the end of Second World War. The rest survived – either in its old or in a new form – and were still awaiting answer.

Notes

1. *Huszadik Század* [Twentieth Century] 1917 Vol. I. – The most relevant contributions have been republished in Péter Hanák, ed., *Zsidókérdés, asszimiláció, antiszemitizmus* [Jewish Question, Assimilation, Antisemitism] (Budapest: Gondolat, 1984), 15–114.
2. József Barabási Kun, ed., *Gróf Tisza István képviselőházi beszédei* [Speeches of Count István Tisza in the Parliament] Vol. I. (Budapest: Magyar Tudományos Akadémia, 1930), 401.
3. Quoted in Gábor G. Kemény, *A magyar nemzetiségi kérdés története* [History of the Nationality Question in Hungary] Vol. I. (Budapest: Gergely R. R.-T., 1946), 107.
4. *Ibid.*, 145.
5. *Bethlen István gróf beszédei és írásai* [Speeches and Writings of Count István Bethlen] Vol. I. (Budapest: Genius Könyvkiadó R.-T.), 228.