

## CHAPTER IV

### THE FUNDAMENTAL ANTAGONISM BETWEEN THE AUSTRIAN AND THE HUNGARIAN SYSTEM

This very summary parallel between the chief tendencies of the Austrian and Hungarian nationality policy will suffice to make the reader understand the basic and unbridgeable antithesis of the two systems.

Though, as we saw, the old feudal structure survived in Austria too and manifested its influence conspicuously in the more backward parts of the country, nevertheless the general character of life became more and more bourgeois-like in the Austrian part of the monarchy and the control of the great popular parties had a growing influence. Even the most casual observer could realize very easily the great change in the inner and outer character of social life when he passed the Austrian frontier and entered Hungary. Putting in a single formula the whole difference, I would say that Austrian feudalism became more and more bureaucratized whereas Magyar bureaucracy became more and more feudalized. City life had a decisive influence on Austria, while in Hungary the village character of the country continued. And this village character was substantially colored by the masses of a wretched, uncultured, agricultural proletariat. Even the great urban agglomerations, especially in the Magyar plains, retained this distinctly peasant character. For instance, in 1912, in sixteen important provincial towns there was not a single public bath, a situation the more amazing as there were practically no private baths in the single apartments. The intellectual consumption was of a similarly low level. Charles Keleti, a noted Hungarian statistician, came to the conclusion that under normally healthy conditions—according to their financial possibilities—at least 100,000 men should buy and read books in Hungary whereas even popular works seldom reached a circulation of 2,000 to 3,000 copies, while a scientific book had 1,000. On the basis of such and similar facts a careful Hungarian observer, Dr. Robert Braun, who made a comparison between the Austrian and the Hungarian cultural structure, came to the conclusion that the relative cultural power of the Hungarian cities in the second decade of the present century was not greater than that of the Austrians about 1880.<sup>1</sup>

This contrast becomes even more striking if we compare the composition of the Austrian and the Magyar Parliament. The Austrian

<sup>1</sup> "A Parallel Between the Austrian and the Hungarian Inner Policy," in the review, the *Huszadik Század*, September-October, 1917. In Hungarian.

parliament, based on universal, equal, and secret ballot, was a tolerably true expression of the relative force of the various nations.

Among the chief parties of the Austrian parliament the seats were divided in 1911 as shown in Table XVI.

On the other hand in the Hungarian parliament in 1910 there were as already mentioned 405 deputies belonging to the Magyar parties and only 8 deputies (3 Slovaks and 5 Rumanians) belonging to the nationalities; whereas, if the nationalities had been represented according to their ratio in the population, 215 Magyar and 198 non-Magyar deputies would have been seated in the Hungarian parliament (Croatia-Slavonia excluded). But if we assume a cultural and economic advantage of 100 per cent in favor of the Magyars and if we further assume that the Magyars would have conquered in consequence of this supremacy 100 mandates more than corresponded to

TABLE XVI

Parties	Mandates
German . . . . .	185
Czech . . . . .	82
Polish . . . . .	71
Jugo-Slavs . . . . .	37
Ruthenians . . . . .	30
Italians . . . . .	16
Rumanians . . . . .	5
Socialists . . . . .	81
Other smaller groups . . . . .	9
Total . . . . .	516

their numerical strength (manifestly a very improbable assumption), even in this case beside the 315 Magyar deputies there should have been 98 non-Magyar deputies in the Hungarian Parliament!

This difference in the social and political structure makes us understand that, whereas the nationalities of Austria progressed year by year on the road of their national culture, the nationalities of Hungary showed rather an opposite tendency and the strongest Hungarian nationality was in its political and public life weaker than the weakest of the Austrian nationalities. So for instance 3 million Hungarian-Rumanians sent to the Hungarian parliament as many deputies as less than 300 thousand Austro-Rumanians sent into the Austrian but with the difference, however, that whereas the Rumanians were almost outcasts in the former, it became a custom in the latter to retain one of the vice-presidencies for the Rumanian club.

In the cultural fields we find this same glaring contrast. The Hungarian writer just mentioned compared the cultural situation of the strongest of the Hungarian nationalities, of the Rumanians (2,948,000) with that of one of the weakest Austrian nationalities, the Slovenians (1,250,000), on the basis of the latest statistical figures before

the war. His chief results were as follows: the number of university students were 414 Rumanians, and 375 Slovenians; the number of polytechnical students were 54 Rumanian, and 141 Slovenian; the number of middle schools were 1 Slovenian, and 7 Slovenian-German, giving a total of 8; 5 Rumanian (2 of them with lower classes), and 2 Rumanian-Magyar, totaling 7; the number of the students in middle schools were 4,164 Rumanian, and 3,827 Slovenian; the number of elementary schools were 2,257 Rumanian with 227,234 students, and 995 Slovenian with 167,915 students; the number of newspapers were 39 Rumanian, and 101 Slovenian; the number of dailies were 2 Rumanian, and 5 Slovenian; the number of literates were 830,809 (28 per cent) Rumanian, and 952,234 (76 per cent) Slovenian.

And whereas the Slovenians had a very intensive political and cultural life and the organs of local administration were mostly Slovenians, the political and cultural life of the Rumanians of Hungary was severely controlled and persecuted by the police, and the number of Rumanian officials compared with the Magyar employees was the following: in the state administration there were 135 Rumanians, and 8,124 Magyars; in the county administration there were 137 Rumanians, and 4,130 Magyars; in the city administration, 91 Rumanians, and 4,680 Magyars. This disproportionate participation becomes even more conspicuous when we know that the Rumanian officials occupied generally the lowest grades in administration.

If we compare the elementary education of the two countries (which is the most important from the point of view of the masses), we can generally say that it was an acknowledged principle in Austria that the peoples should be instructed in their maternal tongue from which there were only rare exceptions, as survivals of older conditions, whereas in Hungary there was a constant tendency, which became very much accentuated after the eighties of the last century, to enforce Magyar public instruction to the detriment of the languages of the nationalities. The results of this policy have been already explained.

Parallel with these cultural and political facts, the ideology of the public life was diametrically different in the two countries. The equality of all the nations was a political axiom in Austria, at least theoretically accepted, while the idea of the united Magyar national state and of the Magyar supremacy was the common dogma of all the Magyar parties, the questioning of which was equivalent to high treason. There was no official state language in Austria, the German had a certain hegemony only as far as the inner language of the central administration made a certain unification necessary. (*Innere Amtssprache.*) In Hungary the Magyar state language was enforced even in the smallest spheres of local administration. This antagonism found an almost symbolical expression in the common notes of the Austro-

Hungarian bank. Whereas on the Austrian side of these notes the inscriptions were made in the languages of all the peoples of Austria as coequals in the state, on the Hungarian side only Magyar inscriptions could be read. (And what is still more characteristic of the mental attitude of the two countries is that after the World War, when in consequence of the Peace Treaties, Austria became an almost exclusively German state and Hungary almost exclusively Magyar, the Austrian bank notes of today have only German inscriptions whereas the Magyar notes are printed not only in Magyar but also in the languages of all those nations which previously belonged to Hungary in order to emphasize the inalienable right of the Crown of St. Stephen to the "conquered territories.")

This fundamental contrast between the Austrian and Hungarian system made, as a matter of fact, a more intimate moral penetration between the two countries impossible. On the contrary, the more the nations of Austria progressed along the road of national self-determination, the greater was the contempt of the Magyar upper classes concerning this so-called "confused conglomerate of peoples." And what was still more dangerous for the future of the monarchy was that the more the nations of Austria grew in political and cultural power and the more they demanded the remolding of the dualistic, oligarchical Constitution into a new one satisfying the claims for national independence of the Czechs and the Jugo-Slavs, the more vehement and exacerbated became the reaction of the Magyar ruling classes against these endeavors which menaced not only their political and administrative monopolies in the empire but, at the same time, their national supremacy in Hungary proper. Therefore, any serious effort for the reform of the Constitution broke down on the irresistible wall of the Magyar oligarchy. Even so late as 1917 when the menacing dissolution of the monarchy became manifest, Dr. Wekerle, the Hungarian premier, declared emphatically that the Hungarian parliament would not tolerate any plan for the federalization of the monarchy and the old frontiers of the crownlands must be maintained.

The German-Magyar hegemony, however, offended more and more the feeling of *Ebenbürtigkeit* ("of equal dignity") of the other nations, exactly to the extent to which their equality in actual life was established. For instance the Czechs could employ against the Magyar monopoly in constitutional life the following arguments: "On the basis of what right did the Magyars arrogate to themselves a monopolistic situation in the Constitution of the monarchy, when our industry surpasses conspicuously the Magyar; when we have practically no illiterates in contrast to the 31 per cent illiterate in Hungary; when in our Czech elementary schools we have as many pupils as they have in their Magyar schools; when we have in the Czech university of Prague 4,200 Czech students, that is, only 1,800 less than

are Magyars at Budapest University but at the same time we have 3,000 Czech students at our polytechnical schools at Prague and Brünn, that is, almost 800 more than the Magyars have at their polytechnical institution at Budapest; when the 1,500 Hungarian newspapers are confronted by 1,300 Czech; when the co-operative organization of the Czech peasants is far more democratic and efficient than that of the Magyars? Or do you oppose our equality on the basis of historical right? But your greatest men, Széchenyi and Kossuth themselves acknowledged that we have the same right of national independence as you have. . . .”

Such and similar facts began to attack the Dualistic Constitution, which lost more and more its basis in the economic and cultural conditions. Austria, however, menaced in its existence, could not rejuvenate itself because the Magyar upper classes in the possession of their “united national parliament” shouted a *noli tangere* against all plans of reform of the Constitution which would diminish their relative influence in the monarchy. Hungary was sufficiently powerful to force Austria to remain in the Procrustean bed of the Dualistic Constitution.

Therefore an impossible situation arose which could only have been transitorily maintained provided the two hegemonic nations, the German and Magyar, had stood in a close alliance with each other and the Magyars had established a tolerable compromise with the Croats. But just the opposite happened, there broke out a violent constitutional crisis between the two hegemonic nations and the Magyars came into a violent conflict with the Croats. The German-Magyar conflict manifested itself at the same time as one between the Magyar upper classes and the Crown because the Dualistic System was a compromise between these two factors of the Constitution. In this manner not only the unsolved national problems of a dozen peoples but also two grave constitutional conflicts pressed heavily upon the Habsburg monarchy. We must now turn to the analysis of these conflicts.

## CHAPTER V

### HUNGARY VERSUS AUSTRIA

As we have seen, the chief cause of the Dualistic System was the débâcle at Königgrätz and the longing of Habsburgs for revenge against triumphant Prussia. That is the reason why the new era inaugurated by Beust tried to appease Hungary at any price. Without a loyal and satisfied Hungary nothing could be undertaken for the restoration of Austrian hegemony. In order to achieve this aim the Emperor guaranteed the independence of Hungary in the spirit of the laws of 1848, restored the rule of the Magyar noble classes in the internal administration of their country, and delivered his former allies, the nationalities of Hungary, without any check or counterbalance to the will of the Magyar ruling classes. On the other hand the Dualistic Constitution, with the help of an artificial electoral system, secured the supremacy of the Germans in Austria who received at the same time, as a second gift of the Compromise of 1867, the "Constitution of December" on the basis of a parliamentarian government. As compensation for these concessions the German liberals accepted, though unwillingly, the Compromise which the Emperor concluded almost without their consultation with the Magyar ruling classes.

There can be no doubt that Austrian public opinion (not only the Slav but the German too) regarded the Dualistic Compromise with great dissatisfaction, and from the beginning serious voices arose which denounced the *Reichsteilungspakt* ("the Empire-Division Pact" as it was bitterly called) as shaking the very foundations of the monarchy. Later events demonstrated that this point of view was justified because the Compromise concealed in itself the germs of unavoidable crisis. The chief cause of this uncertain equilibrium was the fact that the new "constitutionalism" which the Compromise created, delivered the great majority of the peoples of the monarchy to the German bourgeoisie and bureaucracy on the one hand and to the Magyar feudalism on the other. In both countries the system from the beginning was only workable on the basis of a very restricted and artificial electoral law which was combined in Austria with the application of the ill-famed "paragraph 14" of the Constitution (giving to the crown practically an absolute power in all issues which could not be settled by parliament) and in Hungary with administrative corruption and use of armed force in the face of electoral difficulties. But what made the situation even more unbearable was the fact that both the Germans and the Magyars became more and more resentful against the Compromise which was the very basis of their hegemony in spite