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THE POLITICAL ROLE OF HUNGARY'S NINETEENTH-CENTURY CONSERVATIVES AND HOW THEY SAW THEMSELVES*

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Around the middle of the nineteenth century, the Hungarian conservatives made a number of attempts decisively to influence the course of events in the Austrian empire and in the kingdom of Hungary, but failed on each occasion. What exactly had they wanted, and why did they fail to achieve it? How did they try to appear to others, and how did they see themselves? What political identity, if any, did they have? Was there anything special about the way their political activity and their perception of themselves bore on one another as compared to other nineteenth-century conservatives? What follows is an attempt to give answers to these questions.

I

Modern European conservatism – as Karl Mannheim, Klaus Epstein, Hannah Arendt, István Bibó and others have shown – was a reaction to the challenge the Enlightenment, the French and American revolutions and liberalism had posed to feudalism and monarchy, and was, in effect, the attempt to defend their legitimacy. This is probably why we seldom find thoroughgoing analyses of the ideology of conservatism: while modern liberalism posited a relatively independent and specific value system, conservatism was primarily negative in nature: it did not so much assert as deny.[1] Modern European conservatism, then, was a reaction to the French revolution, at once the most and the least successful of all revolutions, as István Bibó and Hannah Arendt recognized.

It was a success in that very quickly and spectacularly the people did away with the old order. It was a failure in that the revolutionary elite in restoring centralization turned the violence of the revolution on the population as a whole. With this loss of perspective, the revolution also lost credibility; the Reign of Terror (and its ideology) laid it wide open to a conservative critique.

This took the form of a revised version of the revolutionary mythology, with

* The author would like to express his thanks to the translator, Ms Éva Pálmai.

[1] K. Mannheim, *Essays on sociology and social psychology* (ed. by P. Kecskeméti, London, 1959), pp. 74–164; K. Epstein, *The genesis of German conservatism* (Princeton, New Jersey, 1966), pp. 3–22; H. Arendt, *On revolution* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1973), p. 283; I. Bibó, *The paralysis of international institutions and the remedies: a study of self-determination, concord among the major powers, and political arbitration* (Hassocks, Sussex, 1976), pp. 42–5.

the main characters, 'the sterile figures of the professional revolutionary and the obdurate reactionary', to use István Bibó's expression, the clashing forces of a secularized 'good' and 'evil', being presented in opposing roles.[2]

A number of authors, Anthony Quinton for example, have maintained that the principles of English conservatism (generally recognized to have been the only really effective conservative movement) rested on the recognition that political man was morally imperfect, and that no solution was absolute, nor could it be. Hence the English tradition of dedication to organic development and fundamental political scepticism.[3]

Mannheim's classic analysis of the theoretical core of (primarily German) conservatism, written as a refutation of the liberal natural law theory and its methodology, presents conservatism as synonymous with political romanticism. The conservatives, he tells us, put history , life, and the nation in the place of reason, rejecting a static, rational reality and positing a dynamic, irrational one. And in place of the liberal commitment to the equality of all, they supported the hierarchy of a prearranged order, clinging to the notion of individual differences in an organic society, and precluding deliberate and violent change. With this, however, they relegated each man's peculiar freedom to the private sphere; in the public eye, it was a man's place in society that determined his liberty, and his opportunities.[4] It was a line of argument designed to prove the qualitative inequality of mankind, and to support a hierarchy of privilege.

The modern conservative ideology, we may conclude from the above, was flexible in its polemics, past-oriented and relativist, and the inversion of the argument from natural law. It supported monarchist legitimacy and privilege in the face of the liberal democratic challenge.

If we look at who organized a conservative party in Hungary in the 1840s and why, we come to the problem of Hungary's peculiar constitutional position, and to the issue of the conservative's place in Hungarian society. It was these two circumstances that made for the dilemma Hungary's conservatives

[2] I. Bibó, 'Az európai társadalom fejlődése' *Kézirat* [The development of European society], (Typescript in the Hungarian Academy of Sciences Library, archives, MS 5113/5, written in Budapest, 1971–2), pp. 29, 31; Arendt, *Revolution*, pp. 21–140, 179–281. See also F. Furet, *Interpreting the French revolution* (Cambridge–Paris, 1981), and 'L'héritage jacobin', *Le Débat*, XIII, 6 (1981), 27–65.

[3] A. Quinton, *The politics of imperfection: the religious and secular traditions of conservative thought in England from Hooker to Oakeshott* (London and Boston, 1978), pp 16–23. See also: G. Kitson Clark, *The making of Victorian England* (London, 1965); P. Smith, *Disraelian conservatism and social reform* (London and Toronto, 1967); M. Cowling, *1867: Disraeli, Gladstone and revolution: the passing of the second Reform Bill* (Cambridge, 1967); G. Himmelfarb, *Victorian minds* (London, 1968); *The nineteenth-century constitution 1815–1914: documents and commentary* (ed. and intr. by H. J. Hanham), (Cambridge, 1969); R. Blake, *The Conservative party from Peel to Churchill* (London, 1970); N. Gash, *Aristocracy and people: Britain 1815–65* (London, 1979); P. Smith, 'Tories, Whigs' in *Il Mondo Contemporaneo* (Rome, 1980), II, 1249–67, 1314–26.

[4] Mannheim, *Essays*, pp. 116–19. Of the literature of the theory of liberalism, I profited greatly from: G. De Ruggiero, *The history of European liberalism* (London, 1927); H. J. Laski, *The rise of* European liberalism: an essay in interpretation (London, 1936), and especially: I. Berlin, *Four essays on liberty* (Oxford, 1979), and *Against the current: essays in the history of ideas* (Oxford, 1981).

faced, namely the question of whether playing a conservative political role within the empire was compatible with being a national conservative party, an issue crucial to their chances of effectiveness on both fronts.

Hungary, at the time the conservatives made their appearance on the political scene, was a part of the Habsburg empire, comprising almost half of its territory and more than forty per cent of its population. The kingdom of Hungary was an independent constitutional feudal monarchy: it passed its own laws, had its own judiciary, and its own administrative bodies. An examination of the country's laws (written, until 1844, in Latin), and especially a study of Law 10 of 1790, gives a clear picture of Hungary's constitutional status: its hereditary head of state was the ruling Habsburg; thus, the two countries were linked only through the person of the monarch. In fact, however, every Hungarian government authority was subordinate to the corresponding imperial government organ. The imperial authorities saw the kingdom of Hungary as just another crown land; one that was, however, more difficult to handle, for its Diet's right to vote Vienna taxes and recruits – or to refuse to do so – gave weight to its demands.

Hungary's independent estates were, in fact, engaged in a constant tug-of-war with Viennese absolutism, and the best they could realistically hope for was a deadlock.

What was the sociopolitical framework in which the conservatives had to operate? More than three-quarters of the population belonged to the socially and economically heterogeneous peasantry; the middle class and the intelligentsia were a much smaller group than their social weight would lead one to expect. Public life and public offices were, however, dominated by the nobility, a unified group of coequals constitutionally speaking, but in fact a social group that was differentiated and disintegrating. Most of the nobility consisted of the 'common nobles', proportionately the largest and the poorest group of non-commoners in Europe, Poland excepted; most important was the landowning gentry, comprising about one-eighth of the Hungarian nobility. The aristocracy was the smallest in Europe, 250 clans, about 600 or 700 families in all; it was also one of the wealthiest of Europe's aristocracies.

Ethnically, Hungary's population was mixed: the Magyars comprised much of it (about half the population of Hungary, about a third of Transylvania); in the north, however, a great many of the inhabitants were Slovaks (they comprised between a sixth and a seventh of the population). In the northeast, the Carpatho-Ukrainians were a significant group; in the towns and cities, the Germans; in the southern regions, the Serbo-Croats; in Transylvania, the Rumanians. Altogether, non-Magyars comprised more than half of Hungary's population. Roman Catholicism was the country's official religion, with most of the population adhering to it; the various Protestant denominations and the orthodox churches (the latter had faithful mostly among the Serbs and Rumanians) were 'accepted' religions; the Jewish faith was 'tolerated'. Political life was shaped by the aristocracy and the higher clergy, to a smaller extent by the representatives of the towns and the lower clergy, and by the

gentry, whose voice was determinative. The king of Hungary resided in Vienna, the Royal Hungarian Chancellery (the office that framed the royal ordinances and proposed the royal rescripts) was located in Vienna, while the Royal Hungarian Treasury was in Buda, as was the Consilium Locumtenentiale (the royal Hungarian governor-general's council, which was the chief executive organ) presided over by the Palatine. The bicameral feudal Diet met in Pressburg: the aristocracy and higher clergy in the upper, the nobility representing the countries, and the towns' delegates and the lower clergy in the lower house.

The peasantry lived in a condition of feudal dependence; it had no political rights; and could only hope that one of the estates at the Diet might espouse its cause. The traditional political polarization was the court party vs. the opposition's policy of grievances. Neither of the two major groups questioned the basically feudal structure on which this political construction rested. The first to do so was the liberal reformist opposition that emerged in the 1830s, politicians who, in addition to their thoroughgoing critique of the status quo, came forward with a programme for social and economic development based on national self-determination. To all spheres of political life – from the serf-lord relationship right up to the mechanisms of absolute government – they applied the yardstick of liberalism, issuing a challenge as much to all former groupings within the Diet as to the real wielders of power at the Viennese *Staatskonferenz*. They cannot be said to have made a breakthrough in the 1830s; but their political weight is indicated by the fact that by the 1840s the political scene had expanded to include political journalism and thoroughgoing debates at the county assemblies, the main spheres of liberal influence. In fact, the liberal challenge appeared so effective that it was to counteract its repercussions at the coming Diet that the conservatives organized first as a group, then as a party.[5]

Naturally, conservatives were to be found in Hungary earlier as well. With some exaggeration, we might say that most of the politicized public was conservative in the sense that it subjected neither the country's basically feudal social relations nor its political subordination to fundamental critique; to do so would have touched on its own positions of privilege. As in the rest of Europe, here, too, the conservative stand was articulated in response to the liberal challenge.

The Hungarian conservatives defined their platform as 'progressive conservative', but were rather hazy when it came to saying just what this stood for. Most unclear was their attitude to the power relations and values that had traditionally characterized Hungarian society. There were, however, good reasons for this lack of clarity.

[5] This summary is based on: Zs. Trócsányi, *Wesselényi Miklós* (Budapest, 1965); I. Barta, *A fiatal Kossuth* [The young Kossuth] (Budapest, 1966); Gy. Szabad, *Kossuth politikai pályája ismert és ismeretlen megnyilatkozásai tükrében* [Kossuth's political career in the light of his statements, well and less well known] (Budapest, 1977), and *Hungarian political trends between the revolution and the compromise 1849–67* (Budapest, 1977).

Since, as we know, Hungary at the time was not really a sovereign nation, and its king was not a national sovereign, Hungary's conservatives could not play one of the roles typical of conservative parties in general, that of supporting and idealizing the national dynasty. Nor was the possibility of identifying the cause of the majority religion with that of the nation open to them, since Roman Catholicism had become the state religion in the seventeenth and eighteenth century primarily through the force – in every sense – of the Habsburg counter-reformation, while the national movements – resistance to Habsburg absolutism – had traditionally been associated more or less directly with Protestantism. As for posing as the defenders of the nation's past, the Hungarian conservatives had trouble there, too, when it came to more than a declaration of principle, for any concrete steps to this effect would have meant espousing the cause of the independent Hungary of old.

The conservative role objectively open to them in a Hungary just then in the throes of a rapid transition to capitalism – that of the paternalist committed to protecting those who fell by the wayside in the ruthless struggle for the survival of the economically fittest – this, given the peculiarities of the Hungarian social and economic scene, would have necessitated either playing the part of the protector of the serfs and that of the explicit enemy of economic change, or espousing the causes of personal and national self-determination in a way that went beyond even the liberal demands.

The Hungarian conservatives thus found themselves with the following critical problem of identity: to the extent that they were Hungarian, they were faced with a *de jure* constitutional relationship that *de facto* did not exist, and so could hardly be conserved; to the extent, however, that they conserved a *status quo* that served imperial interests, they were not Hungarian.

II

Our sources for the conservatives' platform and ideology during the 1840s are the following: the series of articles that appeared in the latter half of 1841 in the course of the press attacks on Kossuth and the policies he voiced in the *Pesti Hírlap*; government records for the period between 1844 and 1848; the conservatives' pamphlets; and the minutes and documents of the conservative party's conferences of 1846–7.

> We see the spread of something dangerous, and think an antidote... is required...
>
> Kossuth... acknowledges but one power besides the counties, the publicity of the press. In his system... the chief factors are: the press, which debates the issues; the counties, which draft them into bills; and the Diet, which passes them... Kossuth's theory... reduces the role of the highest authority in every case without exception to that of the benevolent spectator. It cuts right into the administrative and legislative bodies, and would absorb them; it is nothing short of veritable federalism.[6]

The quotation is from one of Count Aurél Dessewffy's articles of the autumn

[6] *X.Y.Z. könyv* gróf Dessewffy Auréltól [*X, Y, Z, a book* by Count A. Dessewffy] (Pest, 1841), pp. 51, 73, 75.

of 1841. It was just one of the occasions on which he used constitutional arguments to cast aspersion on the motives, honesty and purpose of the reformist opposition's activities.

Dessewffy, the leader of the 'neo-conservatives', charged that the opposition wanted to see the counties and the press determine legislation, a clear violation of the constitution which specified the king together with the Diet as the sole competent legislative authority. The opposition's real aim, Dessewffy charged, was not the declared one of the constitutioned reform, but radicalism and subversion. But for reform to have any real chance of success, this radical pressure had to cease; the necessary reforms – and here Dessewffy became very vague – had to come from those preordained to rule: from the aristocracy and better-off nobility, from the legislative and the executive branches, particularly those responsible only to the crown. The two great European models of modern sociopolitical development, Dessewffy maintained, were the English and the French. Of the two, the former was to be followed, the balanced English way, made stable and organic by the decisive weight of the great landowners, who continuously served as a counterweight to the more radical social forces; the upheavals and excesses of the French pattern of development, on the other hand, were due to the failure of the landowning class to exert such determinative influence.[7]

The argumentation summarized above was presented in the conservatives' journal *Világ* [Light] *à propos* the debates within the liberal camp as to the tactics most helpful to the cause of reform. More specifically, Dessewffy was concerned to discredit the reform programme Kossuth had put forward in the *Pesti Hírlap* [Pest Journal] to repeat the statutes passed by Pest, Bihar and Borsod counties giving non-noble intellectuals the right to vote in the county elections, and to defeat also Pest county's proposal that at least some of the procedures of the criminal courts be made public. Other counties' statutes, however, Dessewffy hailed as paragons of independent action: Fejér county's decision, for instance, to veto the opposition's proposal that the nobility, too, share in the tax burdens he welcomed as rightful resistance to unjust pressure.[8]

Kossuth addressed himself to a great many of Dessewffy's arguments in his articles in the *Pesti Hírlap*, and was concerned to refute particularly his mode of argumentation: Kossuth sensed that Dessewffy's aim was to divide the opposition by calling some of them reformers, some of them radicals. Dessewffy's presentation of the Fejér county events as the confrontation of 'propertied' and 'propertyless', and his branding of the reformist opposition programme as illegal was an attempt to polarize the aristocracy and the lesser nobility – in fact, to divide the government and the nation. As Kossuth saw it, the nobility, legally speaking, was one; it was this basic equality that was to be extended to the common people; their becoming a part of the body politic would mean not

[7] Based on: Count A. Dessewffy, 'Nyilatkozat és igazolás' [Statement and apology], also 'Megyei hatóság és törvényhozási jogok fenyítő eljárás körében' [County authority and legislative rights in the sphere of criminal proceedings], *Világ* [Light], 24, 27 Nov. 1841.

[8] Count A. Dessewffy, 'Megyék állása' [The counties' stand], *Világ*, 6 Nov. 1841.

the fragmentation, but the multiplication of liberty. Kossuth envisaged the middle nobility of the county assemblies as the likely motors of this integration. If the aristocracy wanted primacy, in this case, it would have to be primacy in action. Hungary's aristocrats, he went on, commenting on a favourite delusion that Dessewffy also had voiced, was *not* like the English aristocracy; the English aristocracy did not segregate itself from the people, was not a party to itself; the Tories were not the English aristocracy! Defending the French achievement (whose crises he attributed not so much to the great landowners' lack of weight but rather to the finance aristocracy's preponderance), Kossuth himself preferred the English model, whose essence, however, he saw in the security of private enterprise.[9]

Dessewffy withdrew from the press debate in December of 1841. For one thing, the focus of political activity had switched to the sittings of the Diet's special committee on criminal law and to the Pest county assemblies; more important, however, was the fact that Dessewffy's presumed purpose in entering the fray in the first place had been frustrated he had not managed to pit the liberal aristocrats and the well-off middle nobility against the poorer reformist nobility and the intellectuals. Nor had he been able to win over to his side Baron József Eötvös, to whom he had dedicated the volume containing his best articles.

Also, Aurél Dessewffy probably thought that the influence of the *Pesti Hírlap* on the counties was being adequate neutralized by the rescripts issued by the Consilium Locumtenentiale, and that, with the chancellery's powers practically in his hands, the need to win public opinion was no longer so pressing. All in all, Dessewffy's short career in journalism can hardly be called ineffective: in five months, the number of the subscriptions to *Világ* had grown fivefold; and in Vienna they were counting more and more on the leader of the 'neoconservatives'. His appointment as chancellor, however, was forestalled; he died unexpectedly on 9 February 1842.[10]

[9] L. Kossuth, 'Birtok-aristocratia' [Landed aristocracy], also 'Példa külföldről' [An example from abroad], *Pesti Hírlap* [Pest Journal], 1, 8 Dec. 1841. Kossuth's critique of Dessewffy's view can be taken as the refutation of the official conservative stand of the later 1840s. For a realistic evaluation of England's sociopolitical development, Kossuth maintained, we must keep in mind that her much-admired gradualism came after the political air had already been 'cleared' by revolution in the seventeenth century. For it, cf. B. Moore Jr, *Social origins of dictatorship and democracy: lord and peasant in the making of the modern world* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1979), pp. 3–39. For the social, political and cultural development of modern France, see: T. Zeldin, *France 1848–1945* (5 vols. Oxford, 1979–81).

[10] Some basic books and articles dealing with Hungarian political history between 1840 and 1843 written by János Varga: 'A kormányszervek előkészületei az 1843. évi diétára' [The preparations made by the government for the 1843 Diet], *Századok* [Centuries], CXIV, 5 (1980), 727–51; *Deák Ferenc és az első magyar polgári büntetőtörvénykönyu tervezete* [Ferenc Deák and the draft for the first modern Hungarian code of law] (Zalaegerszeg, 1980); 'Megye és haladás a reformkor derekán, 1840–3' [The counties and progress in the midway through the Reform Era, 1840–3], *Somogy Megye Múltjából. Levéltári Évkönyvek* [From Somogy county's past. Archival Year-Books], XI–XII, (1980–1), 177–243, 155–94; *Helyét kereső Magyarország. Politikai eszmék és koncepciók az 1840-es évek elején* [Hungary in search of an identity. Political principles and ideals at the beginning of the 1840s], (Budapest, 1982). On the *Világ* and A. Dessewffy's role, see: Kabinettsarchiv,

III

Between 1844 and 1848 the leading conservative publicist and economic policy maker was Emil Dessewffy, Aurél's younger brother. We shall attempt, in what follows, to give an outline of his arguments. Hungary's economic interests – and options – were determined by her ties to the Empire and this, Emil Dessewffy argued, was no more a threat to her than was the German nation, 'her natural and sole ally', and the cradle of her culture. An independent economic policy of the kind Kossuth envisioned was illusory; joining the Zollverein, on the other hand, would jeopardize Hungary's interests, for the multinational Habsburg empire would have a preponderant weight in the customs union, so that it would hardly be German, let alone be able to 'Germanize'. On the out-and-out credit side was the consideration that the Zollverein would profit Hungary economically and would strengthen the middle class.

The two main planks in the platform of the reformist opposition were the introduction of a protective tariff between Hungary and the rest of the empire, and the taxing of the nobility. The essence of the conservatives' economic policy, on the other hand, was free trade between the two halves of the Empire, and the setting up of a Hungarian national credit bank using the proceeeds of the proposed tobacco monopoly. Hungary's industry, the conservatives maintained, was not developed enough to benefit from protectionism; at any rate, an intra-empire tariff wall was a contradiction in terms. As for having the nobility share in the country's tax burdens, this, the conservatives argued rather circularly, could hardly be the road to the country's development, for such development had to benefit first of all the nobility, the 'nation' par excellence. Not the nobility's taxation, but economic modernization was the answer; for this, however (given that Hungary herself was to have no increase in tax revenues) she had to stay an organic part of the imperial economy; Hungary, far from introducing protectionism, had to make herself as attractive as possible to foreign investors through improving her transport networks, achieving uniformity in her county administrations, encouraging urban development and establishing a savings bank. Hungary's constitution, the conservative argument went on, had to be shown to be compatible with her imperial ties, so that Vienna would have no reservation about investing in her development; as for the Magyars, they had to keep in mind that they were a minority within their own country, and needed the government's backing to become a modern nation. Loyalty to Vienna was in their best interest, and the conservatives – the younger Dessewffy realized – had to make haste to convince them of this, since authority was rapidly being undermined by the opposition, whose proposed

Staatskonferenzakten a. 1841, Staatsarchiv, Wien, 259, 519; J. Havas to A. Mednyánszky, Pest, 20, 28 Nov., A. Mednyánszky to Archduke Palatine Joseph, Buda, 7 Dec., Archduke Palatine Joseph to A. Mednyánszky (memorandum), Buda, 9 Dec. 1841. The secret archives of Palatine Joseph, Praesidialia, Hungarian National Archives (MOL), Box 31240. For the debate between the *Pesti Hírlap* and the *Világ* see I. Z. Dénes, 'A kiváltságőrzés "hamis realista" logikája' [The 'spuriously realistic' logic of safeguarding privileges], *Magyar Tudomány* [Hungarian Scholarship], XXIII, 12 (1978), 894–909.

solutions appeared all the more appealing as Hungary's backwardness became ever more evident to an increasingly politically aware public. The two-fold task at hand was thus to restore respect for authority, and to do away with economic backwardness.[11]

Emil Dessewffy's proposed policy rested on a rather unusual interpretation of 'free trade', for it would have left intact the tariff wall excluding foreign competition from the Empire as a whole. Nor would it have affected the monopoly enjoyed by the Cisleithan industries (a monopoly guaranteed for nearly a century by internal tariffs and transport restrictions), for with imperial protection intact, Hungary's nascent industries could hardly hope to compete with the well-established Austrian and Bohemian firms. The younger Dessewffy's proposal that tobacco growing and marketing become a court monopoly in Hungary, too, was as far from being a free trade policy as the liberal opposition's economic plans were from being the simple-minded protectionism he would have liked his readers to believe them to be. The liberal position was that Hungary's feudal relations were obstructing the development of the national economy, and the imperial market threatened to swamp whatever did develop. They proposed a twofold solution: feudalism had to be abolished; and the imperial ties had to give way to the interests of the national economy. For imperial protectionism was cutting Hungary off from making contact with more developed western partners; what was needed was genuine, thoroughgoing free trade. But given that Vienna refused to hear of this, the opposition insisted at least on a say for Hungary in setting the imperial tariff wall, and on the termination of the monopoly enjoyed by the Austrian and Bohemian industries. The proposed intra-empire tariff they recommended was a *faute de mieux* means to this latter end. We might, thus, sum up the essence of the conservative and liberal policies as follows: integration in the empire and the persistence of mostly untouched feudal relations as the former programme; and a developing national economy, the abolition of feudal restrictions, and the free choice of economic partners as the latter.

IV

After the 1841 prelude, a long and intensive offensive was launched by the Hungarian conservatives. It started after the government and the conservative

[11] The argument has been reconstructed on the basis of the following sources: Count E. Dessewffy, *Parlagi eszmék, igénytelen nézetek, szerénytelen tervek a függő kérdések és az országgyűlése körül* [Uncouth ideas, simplistic views, immodest plans regarding the problematic questions and the Diet], (Pest, 1843), also: *A magyar vám és kereskedési ügy és annak végeligazítási módja* [Matters of Hungarian tariff and trade, and how they are to be settle], (Pest, 1847), also: *Fizessünk! Mennyit becsülettel elbírunk, magunknak, magunkért* [Let's pay ourselves as much as we honestly can, for our own sake], (Pest, 1847), Kabinettarchiv, Staatskonferenzakten s. 1844, St. A. 193, 212; Papers and letters dealing with the *Budapesti Híradó*, Dessewffy family archives, Acta Publica, Political letters of E. Dessewffy. MOL, P 90 5/l. For the political journalism of E. Dessewffy see I. Z. Dénes, '"Fontolva haladás" és kiváltságőrzés' ['Progressive conservatism' as a means of safeguarding privilege], *Valóság* [Reality], XXII, 12 (1979), 13–27, and 'A "fontolva haladás" illúziókeltő érvei és elvei' [The illusory arguments and principles of 'progressive conservatism'], *Magyar Filozófiai Szemle* [Hungarian Philosophical Review], XXIV, 2 (1980), 168–94.

majority of the upper house defeated the passage of practically every substantial reform bill at the Diet of 1843–4. A secret commission was set up by the Hungarian chancellery in Vienna for the explicit purpose of saving the country from 'anarchy', and the sovereign named the leaders of the 'neo-conservatives', Count György Apponyi and Baron Samu Jósika, vice-chancellors of Hungary and Transylvania. The two men had come up with a long-range plan for raising Hungary to the economic level of the hereditary lands. This, however, required the transformation of the country's political structure. The Diet and the counties were to be made pliable servants of the executive authority as the rigour of the law, national security, and imperial unity required. The reform proposals to be worked out for the next Diet were to reflect this spirit; the first task, however, was to quash the opposition.[12] It was to this end that the two new vice-chancellors set about organizing the government majority for the Diet due to meet in 1847. Using the obsoleteness of the county system and the amateurishness of its officials as excuse, they appointed vice-lords-lieutenant to head each county, their main task being to suppress the opposition and to rally a pro-government majority. This, however, was an innovation, not an instance of conserving: the counties were being reformed to become pliable tools of absolutism.

In the press, the conservative offensive took the form of pamphlets, and articles in the *Budapesti Híradó* [Budapest Courier] and the *Nemzeti Újság* [National Gazette], especially those written by Emil Dessewffy and Sándor Lipthay. It was the latter who initiated the founding of the Conservative party as a society in Pest in the autumn of 1845; as a political party, it started to operate in Pest on 12 November, 1846. Its programme, based on the draft penned by Sándor Lipthay, and following the memoranda written by Pál Somssich and Count Antal Szécsen, was given its final form by Emil Dessewffy, and was interpreted at the constituent assembly by Antal Szécsen.[13] Registering 125 members, the Conservative party chose a committee of nine: four aristocrats (two of them vice-lords-lieutentant, one of them a dignitary of the realm), one Roman Catholic prelate, one lawyer, two non-aristocratic vice-lords-lieutenant, and one government councillor – a good reflexion of the com-

[12] *A nagybirtokos arisztokrácia ellenforradalmi szerepe 1848–49-ben* [The counter-revolutionary role of the great landowning aristocracy in 1848–9], (ed. by E. Andics) (3 vols., Budapest, 1952–81), Andics, *Arisztokrácia*, I, 117–19, 131–41, 172–91, 218–49; Memorandum on Hungary's political situation (no author and date), C. Kübeck's draft, Vienna, 30 Jan., Gy. Apponyi's memorandum, Vienna, 15 Mar. 1845, Kabinettsarchiv, Staatskonferenzakten s. 1844–5, St. A., 634, 37, 160.

[13] The proposals on the formation of the Conservative party: S. Lipthay to Gy. Apponyi, Pest, 16, 18, 19, 22 Oct., 2 Nov., 7 Dec. 1845, The Royal Hungarian Chancellery, Presidential papers, Irregestrata 1838–48, MOL, A 135; P. Somssich, 'Igénytelen nézetek a Conservativ pártnak alakitása... eránt [Modest views on the formation of the Conservative party], A. Szécsen, untitled note, S. Lipthay, 'Conservativ pártalkotási programm és programm-okadatolás' [Founding programme of the Conservative party and arguments for the programme], Dessewffy archives, MOL, P 90 5/k; E. Dessewffy, 'Conservativ párt-programm [Programme of the Conservative party], Pest, 14 Nov. 1846, National Széchényi Library, Archives, Analecta 11085; Andics, *Arisztokrácia*, I, 206–16; see also: The Royal Hungarian Chancellery, Informations-Protocolle der Ungarisch-Siebenbürgischen Sektion, MOL, A 105, XV, 1846, II, XL, 28 Nov. 1846, 782, 56–62.

position of the party membership. The conservatives' declared programme was to carry out reforms through constitutional means, to check the influence of the opposition which they saw as an impediment to such reforms, and to support the government: all in the name of political honour, of the sanctity of property, and of the nation, in defence of the government's constitutional authority, and of the influence of the propertied class, one of the chief guarantors of stability. The concept of 'political honour' was meant as an alternative to the opposition's principle of independence; as for the reference to the interests of the 'nation', the conservatives were trying to make sure the opposition did not appear as its sole advocate. In posing as the defenders of the 'nation', they claimed to be committed to Hungary's constitutional self-government, to be secured through 'peaceful reforms'; their real commitment, however, was to Hungary's imperial ties, the second axiom of their concept of 'national interest'. The reforms they proposed for discussion at the next Diet were the following: the free expression of opinion in public debates (i.e. the elimination of pressure from those not qualified to take part in them); the settlement of the problems of feudal land-tenure (meaning that they had been willing to support the voluntary redemption of feudal dues passed by the Diet – with minimal practical consequence – in 1840 and were willing to support it now, six years later, when the liberal opposition was already calling for the emancipation of the serfs through the compulsory redemption of feudal dues). Further problems to be dealt with were: the housing and feeding of the standing army (long on the agenda of earlier Diets); prison reform, the revision of the criminal code and the introduction of a uniform civil code (the liberal suggestions on these issues had been stalled by the conservatives, who proposed to 'settle' them in the spirit of greater rigour); the country's finances (just what was meant here was not specified); the improvement of the counties' administration (through the newly appointed administrators); the free royal boroughs' right to vote at the Diet, and their better administration (the plan was to strengthen the wealthy burghers' monopoly of local politics); the rationalization of the nobility's property relations (not further specified); the facilitation of low-interest loans to landowners (without, however, establishing a mortgage bank, or abolishing *avicitas*); matters of trade and transport, and a law code to regulate mining (the conservatives' trade policy we know from Emil Dessewffy's writings; their views on the other two issues remain vague); and finally, the regulation of associations and societies (with the purpose of restricting the opposition's activities. Whatever there was in the nature of genuine reform in the above, its passage had been frustrated by the conservatives at earlier Diets. The rest were vague generalities, or measures clearly aimed at curtailing the activities of the opposition. For the conservatives had a rather unusual idea of what made reform 'constitutional'. While the opposition dominated the lower house of the Diet, they held, the government could not sanction the reform bills introduced, for to do so would be to act under duress. The opposition's insistence on the right to introduce reforms was, in fact, a claim to power; it was tantamount to reducing the government to an

instrument executing the opposition's will, to an executive that had ceased to govern. This, however, was out of keeping with the constitution, and would paralyse political life. It was in order that the necessary reforms might be brought by those entitled to bring them that the conservatives claimed to be suppressing the opposition, and creating a pro-government majority.[14]

In 1845 László Szalay had had this to say about the conservative statesmen:

> The gentlemen have no concrete idea... of government... for when we ask them to give us a draft of the kind of government they are proposing, they tell us that these are fruitless issues as far as we [Hungarians] are concerned, that we should remember our circumstances, should keep to our roles, and should not imagine ourselves to be French or English journalists... An entire ocean separates these gentlemen and us, not because they are statesmen, but because they believe themselves to be constitutional statesmen, something they will, thus, never become as long as they live, just as a prisoner, who believes himself at liberty... shall never be free.[15]

The conservatives' plan failed, and the offensive they launched in the counties ended in fiasco: they were the minority in the lower house at the 1847 Diet. Their own analysis of the situation was that they had failed because the wheels of power were not oiled enough; there was no central government organ competent to issue orders at every level, and thus no effective centre for their operations; the time available to them had been too short, and public opinion unready to receive them.[16]

Indeed, the Conservative party as well as the government-initiated Conservative offensive was most unpopular, for it was evident to most politically aware citizens that the reform movement had been started by the liberal opposition, and had been frustrated by the government and the Conservatives.

How did the conservatives' unpopularity relate to the part they played during these decades, to the arguments they advanced and to the way they saw themselves? What could have given the Conservatives at least a semblance of credibility, and some sense of identity, and why was there nothing to do so?

To be able to answer these questions, we need to examine the options open to the Hungarian Conservatives.

V

The Hungarian conservatives wanted to make politically ineffective those who dared to issue a liberal challenge to the putative alternatives of imperial

[14] Dessewffy archives, Count E. Dessewffy's lithographed accounts of the Conservative conferences, MOL, P 90 5/a.

[15] L. Szalay, 'Nyílt levél Considerant Viktorhoz, a Democratic pacifique főszerkesztőjéhez' [Open letter to Victor Considerant, editor of the *Democratie Pacifique*], *Pesti Hírlap*, 2 Feb. 1845, 72. The Conservatives' views and activities were criticized by Kossuth in pseudonymous articles in the *Magyar Szózatok* [Hungarian addresses], and the *Ellenőr* [Observer]: 'A magyar conservativ párt és a nemzetiség' [The Hungarian Conservative party and the nation], in *Magyar Szózatok* (Hamburg, 1847), 'A magyar politicai pártok értelmezése' [An interpretation of Hungary's political parties], in *Ellenőr*. Szerkeszté a Pesti Ellenzéki Kör megbízásából Bajza [The editor charged by the Pest Opposition Circle to publish it: Bajza], in Germany, 1847.

[16] Graf E. Dessewffy, 'Offenes Sendschreiben an den "Lloyd"'. *Der Lloyd*, 3, 5, 6, 8, 12, 13, 14, 17 Feb. 1850.

centralization or conservative compromise; with this, they were underwriting what had been the imperial strategy *vis à vis* Hungary for the past 150 years.[17]

Vienna's efforts at centralization had generally been attended by reforms, and practically always by attempts at Germanization. The last of these had been Joseph II's enlightened absolutist experiment; its aim, a uniformly modernized, unilingual empire. The defeat of this attempt was followed – as on other occasions – by Vienna's giving up on reforms and Germanization alike; the Hungarian estates continued to enjoy their feudal prerogatives untouched, though naturally within the framework of absolutism. Hungary's conservative forces were neither willing nor able to initiate reforms, and were content to safeguard the *status quo*. The conservative compromise – that Vienna would not meddle with the Hungarian ruling class's feudal privileges if the Hungarians proved supportive of Habsburg absolutism – made at the end of the eighteenth century, seemed to be working well at the beginning of the nineteenth, and the traditional villain and hero roles – the 'threatening reformist outsider' and 'alert nation defending its liberties' – seemed permanently fixed in the public mind. It was this simplistic picture that was shattered by the challenge the Hungarian liberal opposition issued – in the wake of important antecedents – in the 1830s and 1840s: namely, that the initiation and carrying out of social and political reform were the only means to securing Hungary's independence, and that only a nation possessed of self-determination could become a modern European state. It was the repudiation of the conservative compromise, with the new alternatives being imperial centralization or national self-determination. Under the circumstances the Hungarian Conservative party had no easy time of it: they could hardly openly espouse the cause of imperial centralization, and did not want to espouse the cause of national self-determination which, among other things, would have meant alliance with forces overtly hostile to the country's feudal order and imperial ties alike.

The conservatives' own position, to be at all credible, had to be defined in terms of the traditional alternatives of imperial centralization or conservative compromise. In doing battle with their liberal opponents, the conservatives were left with verbally defending the conservative compromise, but in fact using the weapons of imperial centralization. The traditional conservative position had been that of the straightforward compromise; the Conservative party seemed to have no choice but to stand for something somewhere between imperial centralization and this compromise. This was the cause of its vacuousness and unpopularity; for given the challenge of the liberal opposition, the latter seemed ineffective, the former untenable. The Conservative party lacked credibility, because the essence of what it stood for rested on the assumption that it could turn back the clock to the options traditionally available to the nation. It was in this inherent contradiction that we must see its painful lack of a positive identity.

[17] The inspiration for this section came from: I. Bibó, 'Eltorzult magyar alkat, zsákutcás magyar történelem' [Distorted Hungarian make-up, dead-end Hungarian history], *Válasz* [Answer], VIII, 4 (1948), 289–319.

VI

The 'neo-conservatives' role and ideology in the years between 1848–9 and the compromise of 1867 was, for the most part, consistent with their earlier stand, but was also different in significant ways. These differences (we might call them 'old conservative' features) were due to the fact that, after the annihilation of the liberals and during the ensuing years of repression, the traditional alternatives appeared again to be the only viable ones: integration in the empire, or the conservative compromise. It is the features specific to this changed situation that we shall be concerned with here.[18]

In the course of the revolutions that shook the Habsburg empire and at the initiative of the liberal opposition, a law was passed and received royal sanction in the spring of 1848 transforming the feudal constitution of the kingdom of Hungary into that of a restricted parliamentary system, doing away with her imperial subordination and making her a sovereign state. In the war of independence that followed, the Hungarian national army managed to win a series of victories over Baron Jelačić, Ban of Croatia, the first to launch a military attack on the Hungarian revolution, over the Serbian, Rumanian and Slovak nationals of Hungary who sided against them, and most spectacularly, over the Austrian regulars led first by Prince Windischgrätz and then by Baron Welden, one to be defeated by the combined Russian and Austrian armies in the summer of 1849. The cause of self-determination had to give way to a decade of forced integration in the empire: Hungary was degraded to the status of an intimidated and subdivided crown land under military occupation. In less than two decades, however, the Austrian empire had become the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, and Hungary a co-equal nation. This new compromise followed the failure of the attempt to assimilate her; and was initiated by the conservatives.

The Hungarian conservatives – like Metternich's system of conservative compromise – fell in the 1848 revolutions. Most of them played an active role as advisers to the counter-revolutionary forces or as the executors of their schemes, and were pushed into the background only when Vienna chose to rule the country without them in the years that followed. The conservatives, thus, could not reconcile themselves to the constitution of Olmütz – the constitution, never really in effect, that Vienna had uniformly imposed on all the empire – and pinned great hopes on its being annulled. But when Franz Joseph did annul it in 1851, they had to realize that the court was determined to go on ruling without them, only now unencumbered by as much as the semblance of constitutionality.[19]

[18] The section as a whole is based on research by György Szabad: *Forradalom és kiegyezés válaszútján, 1860–61* [At the crossroads of revolution and compromise 1860–1], [Budapest, 1967), Szabad, *Kossuth;* Szabad, *Political trends.*

[19] J. Redlich, *Das Österreichische Staats- und Reichsproblem*, (2 vols., Leipzig, 1920–6); R. A. Kann, *The multinational empire: nationalism and national reform in the Habsburg Monarchy* (2 vols., New York, 1950); F. Walter, *Die Österreichische Zentralverwaltung*, III/1. *Die Geschichte der Ministerien Kolowrat, Ficquelmont, Pillersdorf, Wessenberg-Doblhoff und Schwarzenberg* (Vienna, 1964).

It was at about that time that the conservatives – ironically dubbed 'old conservatives' by Prince Schwarzenberg for their nostalgia for the Metternich system – set about trying to convince all parties involved of the benefits of reviving the conservative compromise. What follows is the essence of their argument, based on an early pamphlet by Pál Somssich. The subversive forces raging over Europe had swept Hungary, too, into the illegality of revolution in 1848–9, and it was to restore the legal order that the sovereign had taken up arms. Hungary's right to independence within the empire was guaranteed by law. No reputable politician could deny the necessity of the country's independence; what distinguished the conservatives' position, however, was that they had long insisted that Hungary's imperial ties were as necessary to her as independence. The revolution had been a break with the past and with historic right; the sovereign had had to pacify the nation living in terror under the subverters' dictatorship by force of arms; but Hungary's sole legitimate position, independence within the Empire, had not been restored. For the imperial ministry was committed to a policy of assimilation: power had been centralized, local government annihilated, and Germanization was being practised in the name of equality. The revolution, the conservatives admitted, was quashed in the name of historic right, but what followed was not the restoration of the country's legitimate status, but imperial centralization, and Germanization. The only guarantor of the monarchy's unity, however, was respect for historic right, and this was incompatible with violating it in the case of Hungary.[20]

The conservatives, who condemned revolution and Germanization alike in the name of the idealized conservative compromise of the past, saw themselves as the repositories of the nation's historic individuality and the guardians of legitimacy, as the aristocracy called on to save the country in its hour of need. Their arguments carried greater weight than in the reform era just preceding, for the context now was Vienna's policy of imperial assimilation practised towards a nation which – so the argument ran – had 'forfeited' its historic rights through revolution. The Hungarian conservatives, thus, could play the role of the national party, and their right to presume to this position seemed confirmed by their participation in the country's cultural life at a great many levels, from Count Emil Dessewffy's post as president of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, to the conservatives' patronage of the commemorative services held in honour of the writer, Ferenc Kazinczy.[21]

[20] P. Somssich, *Das legitime Recht Ungarns und seines Königs* (Vienna, 1850).

[21] E. Zsedényi, *Ungarns Gegenwart* (Vienna, 1850); Gy. Andrássy, 'The present position and the policy of Austria', *Eclectic Review*, XXVIII, 11 (1850), 604–29; Graf A. Szécsen, *Politische Fragen der Gegenwart* (Vienna, 1851); E. Zsedényi, *Die Verantwortlichkeit des Ministeriums und Ungarns Zustände* (Vienna, 1851); Anon. *Ungarns politische Charaktere* (Mainz, 1854); E. Zsedényi, *Vertheidigungs-Rede* (London–Edinburgh, 1860); M. Ludassy, *Drei Jahre Verfassungsstreit* (Leipzig, 1864); Count E. Dessewffy, *A magyar Tudományos Akadémia és nemzetiségünk feladatai* [The Hungarian Academy of Sciences and the tasks facing the nation] (Pest, 1866); A. Berzeviczy, *Az absolutismus kora Magyarországon, 1849–1865* [The Age of Absolutism in Hungary, 1849–65] (4 vols., Budapest, 1922–37).

When Vienna's foreign policy crises of the late 1850s made it impossible to go on ignoring the fact that minister of the interior Alexander Bach's attempts to assimilate the country had failed, the court was again obliged to reconsider the problem of how to handle Hungary, and turned with considerable attention to the conservatives' proposals for a revived conservative compromise. Their influence, however, dwindled as the court realized that they were unable to see the matter through.

The man who had done the most to raise the court's hopes in their regard were the conservative leader, Baron Samu Jósika, and, after his death in 1860, Count Emil Dessewffy, the group's ideologue. The 'old conservatives' came into power in 1860: Count György Apponyi, formerly chief chancellor of Hungary, became Judex Curiae (the chief justice of the land) in 1861; Count Antal Szécsen – who had defended the conservative programme at the party's constituent assembly in 1846 – was imperial minister; Baron Miklós Vay was Hungarian chancellor; and György Mailáth was president of the Consilium Locumtenentiale (both had been of the Conservative committee of 1846–7, as had been Emil Dessewffy and Antal Szécsen). By 1861, however, Franz Joseph had dismissed them, for their restoration of some of the pre-1848 political institutions had not proved sufficient to keep the parliament that met in 1861 from declaring the Laws of 1848 to be the sole legitimate basis of the country's constitutional government. The conservatives had failed to persuade the nation to make the compromise whereby, in return for the court's restoring some of the country's pre-1848 liberties by the terms of the October Diploma, Hungary would accept subordination to the imperial government, and the Hungarian parliament would pretend that 1848–9 had never been.[22]

As in the reform era, so now, too, the conservative experiment foundered on the resistance of the Hungarian public (and on an unfavourable shift in the balance of the power within the imperial bureaucracy). Parliament was dissolved, and the conservatives had again to retreat behind the scenes for a time. Absolute government was temporarily restored until, in 1867, Article 12 (conceding that foreign affairs, war, and finance were joint affairs) was added to the Laws of 1848, in the spirit Count György Apponyi had suggested to the emperor at the end of 1862; the Laws, thus reinterpreted, became the basis of the compromise made by Vienna and Hungary's moderate liberals, Ferenc Deák at their head. Throughout this period, the conservatives' role as initiators and mediators was decisive: in 1865 they were again put in charge of Hungary's affairs, their task being to lay the groundwork for the next parliament's approval of the compromise.

Chancellor György Mailáth and Baron Pál Sennyey, president of the Consilium Locumtenentiale, had learned their lesson in 1860–1, and neglected to restore county self-government before parliament was convoked so as to

[22] *Emléklapok vajai báró Vay Miklós életéből* [Memoirs of the life of Baron Miklós Vay] (intr. by J. Lévay) (Budapest, 1899); *Deák Ferencz beszédei* [The speeches of Ferenc Deák] [ed. by. M. Kónyi) (6 vols., 2nd edn Budapest, 1903), II–III; *Idősb Szőgyény-Marich László országbíró emlékiratai* [The memoirs of Lord Chief Justice László Szőgyény-Marich, Sr.] (3 vols., Budapest, 1903–18), II; Szabad, *Forradalom*, Szabad, *Political trends*.

prevent the counties' becoming the seats of opposition to the proposed compromise. The Hungarian parliament that met in 1867 had a smaller electoral base than the previous one, and was politically less diversified. Thanks to the effectiveness of the state machinery manipulated by the conservatives, Deák's adherents formed the majority, and passed the Compromise Bill.[23] The conservative compromise had triumphed but six and a half years after the issuing of the October Diploma; the price, however, had been the conservatives' withdrawing from the centre of the political stage, and the moderate liberals' assuming a conservative role.

The members of the Conservative party still active were, for the most part, to be found on the right wing of the Deák party in the 1860s; in 1875, when the Deák party amalgamated with the left-of-centre to form the Liberal party, some of them left to form a right-wing opposition party led by Baron Pál Sennyey, and then by Count Albert Apponyi. During the 1870s, the conservative opposition seemed to be negligible as a political force; the functions of the old Conservative party had, in many respects, been taken over by the governing Liberal party.

But while Sennyey's party as such had not much influence on Hungarian politics, the members of the former Conservative party still alive were, for the most part, high dignitaries of the kingdom of Hungary, and Franz Joseph's confidants.[24] Though not in the most important posts, they were influential enough to foster the birth of a new myth, soon to become a very effective one. It was a myth rooted in an idealized version of the role the conservatives had played, especially in the 1850s. It was a myth that started to develop in the 1870s and 1880s, received a new dimension in the first decade of the new century, and acquired official history's seal of authority in the interwar years.

VII

The Hungarian conservatives were mostly aristocrats and government officials. They came from various parts of the country, and were for the most part, Roman Catholics.

It would be a mistake to regard the Hungarian conservatives as representative

[23] Szabad, *Forradalom;* Szabad, *Political trends.* See also Menyhért Lóynay's diary, the entries for 13, 21 Feb., 22 June, 21 Oct. 1865, 28, 29, 30, 31 Dec. 1866, 28 Jan. 1867. Manó Kónyi's papers II, School of Slavonic and East European Studies, Library, University of London.

[24] The following will give some idea of the kind of offices in question: Count György Andrássy, Judex Curiae (1863); Count János Barkóczy, imperial councillor and lord steward; György Mailáth, chancellor (1865), Judex Curiae and president of the upper house (1867); Baron Pál Sennyey, president of the Consilium Locumtenentiale (1865), Judex Curiae and president of the upper house (1884); Pál Somssich, president of the lower house (1869); Count Antal Szécsen, imperial minister without portfolio (1860–1), imperial earl marshal (1885); László Szőgyény, vice-president of the upper house (1875), its president, Magister Tavernicorum, Judex Curiae (1883); Baron Miklós Vay, chancellor (1860–1), lord keeper and president of the upper house (1888); Count Ferenc Zichy, lord-lieutenant (1861), ambassador to Constantinople (in the 1870s), Magister Tavernicorum (in the 1880s). For the details see *Révai Nagy Lexikona. Az ismeretek enciklopédiája* [The unabridged Révai lexicon: an encyclopaedia] (21 vols, Budapest, 1911–35), I, 600, II, 617, XIII, 289–90, XVI, 751, XVII, 28, 427–8, 716, XIX, 100, 674. See also Andics, *Arisztokrácia.*

of the Hungarian aristocracy as a whole; they were, rather, playing one of the types of role possible to it.

Quite a few of Hungary's magnates openly opposed the conservatives, and though they were a minority, we cannot consider them exceptions. It would be just as mistaken to equate conservatism with the Roman Catholic aristocracy or, in spite of a number of conservatives coming from some area, to regard any one region of the country as out-and-out conservative.

The Hungarian conservatives adopted the slogan 'progressive conservatism' but were, in fact, continuing and reviving pro-court traditions when they organized their party in the 1840s. Since they had no solution to the country's basic social problems, having failed as much as to recognize them, since they stood neither for a national dynasty nor a national religion nor for the national heritage, and since their social policies and policies toward the nationalities were mostly manoeuvres aimed at safeguarding their own prerogatives, the party's purpose – that of rallying a Dietal majority around their leaders who had been given the reins of government – was necessarily unpopular and doomed to failure. The conservatives, while launching an attack on parliamentarism, had themselves to play by the rules of parliamentary government, for determinative as absolutism was for the country's political life, the political scene was not so restricted as to make personal loyalty to politicians governing with absolutist methods an explicitly tenable, let alone attractive, political programme. The vacuousness of the programme they did come up with, the lack of principle in their real goal, and the need to make tactical allowances for the rules of the political game as it had come to be played in the late 1840s prevented their public acceptance as the advocates of a truly 'progressive' conservatism, and excluded their seeing themselves as the representatives of the public interest.

In 1848–9, most of the conservatives gave Viennese absolutism a helping hand in quashing the Hungarian war of independence; one of them, as we have seen, rode at the head of the czar's army of intervention. Only a small minority refused to take part in the events. In the 1850s, these same conservatives were trying to persuade Franz Joseph in person, in pamphlets and in memoranda to trade the 'neo-Josephinian' forms for the trappings of national king with national traditions; in short, to replace the policy of imperial assimilation with the conservative compromise. The conservatives supported their proposals, arguing that they would serve to preserve the empire's integrity and to make Hungary easier to govern; at the same time, they acted the part of the opponents of absolutism, of the politicians called to lead the nation in its hour of need, and this role gained credibility in the public eye, for Franz Joseph repeatedly rebuffed them. Those who believed that the only alternative open to the nation was that of imperial assimilation or the renewal of the conservative compromise had no difficulty in believing that the conservatives were showing the only way out of the dead-end street of absolutism.

It was thus easy enough to see them as the guardians of the nation's finest traditions, as the representatives of the nation's best interest. And indeed, while the conservatives' appeal to national tradition in their efforts to discredit the

'subversive' and 'radical' liberal reformist opposition was but a poorly veiled attempt to safeguard their old prerogatives, their appeal to historic right in the face of the imperial policy of assimilation was truly a conservative stand, a principle in virtue of which the Hungarian conservatives approximated to the mainstream of European conservatism.

Right into the early 1860s, however, the conservatives and their proposed solutions held no credibility for the Hungarian political public, for their identity – and their appeal – rested on a peculiar way of seeing things: of seeing the conservative compromise not so much as an instrument of maintaining the empire's integrity, pure and simple, but as the only solution in the nation's interest. And yet, while Hungarian public opinion was loath to subscribe to this at the beginning of the 1860s, it was in fact on a modified version of the above premiss that the foundations of Dualism were laid in Hungary in the second half of the decade. As for the conservatives, they practically withdrew from all parliamentary forms which would have made them liable to public account, had no part in the government's responsibility, but enjoyed the king's confidence, many of them as members of the upper house. Concurrently with their loss of political weight as a group, most of the conservatives as individuals made it to the top of the honours list kept by the dynastic state. They had been pushed 'aside and up', away from the centre of the Dualist political stage, so that by the late 1870s or early 1880s the part they had had in initiating the compromise could become the object of idealization. As official ideology – and public opinion – became ever more confirmed in the view that assimilation by the empire had been the only alternative to the Dualist system that had, in fact, been opted for, so did the conservatives' role become mythicized. The parts they had played in the reform era and in 1848–9 became lost in the mist of time, and their overall role was seen in terms of the idealized picture they themselves had formed of what they had stood for during the years of absolutism. Public memory proved selective in recalling the 'representative' conservative: it concentrated on Count Aurél Dessewffy, untainted, in virtue of his early death, by the blood and dross of the late years; in Count István Széchenyi, who was posthumously co-opted among the conservatives, and who enjoyed a veritable cult by the 1870s. After the turn of the century, even Antal Szécsen could enter the pantheon of conservative ideals, his disreputable – to put it mildly – political past having fallen into oblivion, and the emphasis being put on his exaggerated accomplishments as a scholar, writer, and Anglophile.[25]

[25] Antal Szécsen's brother, Károly, had died in 1848 fighting against the Italian revolutionaries. In the same year Szécsen had married the daughter of Lieutenant-General Count Ferenc Lamberg, commander-in-chief of the imperial army in Hungary, and royal commissioner; in the autumn of 1849, he had gone to London to try to convince the British, outraged by the bloody reprisals Vienna had taken against Hungary, that the execution of Count Lajos Batthyány, Hungary's first responsible prime minister, had been justified. In later decades, Szécsen was the president of the Hungarian Historical Association, and a member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and of the Kisfaludy Society. In 1894 he withdrew from these bodies in protest against their sending official delegates to attend Lajos Kossuth's funeral. See L. Thallóczy, 'Gróf Szécsen Antal', *Századok*, xxxv, 4, 5, 6 (1901), 289–309, 385–411, 481–506; Á. R. Várkonyi, *A pozitivista történetszemlélet a magyar történetírásban* [Positivism in Hungarian historiography] (2 vols., Budapest, 1973), I, 211–12, 217–18, II, 57–8, 209–10, 240; Szabad, *Political trends*, p. 39.

The most effective exponent of the 'conservative myth' in the 1870s and 1880s was János Asbóth, the ideologist of the Sennyey (then Apponyi) party, who made use of the laudatory pamphlets and articles written in the 1850s and 1860s by Károly Vida and János Török. Even in some articles by Ferenc Pulszky and Farkas Deák we find some idealized references to the part that had been played by the conservatives (and can assume that their main source was an article by Antal Csengery of the early 1850s). Mihály Réz, an adherent of István Tisza, writing at the beginning of the century, further elaborated on the conservative myth, so that by the 1920s Gyula Szekfű could pronounce with the historian's authority that the difference in the programme of the reformist opposition and of the Conservative party in the reform era had been but a matter of emphasis.[26]

The narrow-mindedness of Hungarian political thinking, its loss of its sense of reality (conditions fostered by the dualist system, and then by the shock of the Trianon treaty) had resulted in the conservatives' having become political idealists. Totally subscribing to their view of themselves, the myth spoke of them as 'national' conservatives, wise men of foresight, mature realists. That they had failed to win public support was proof only of the immaturity of the public; their lack of popularity was the burden they shared with all who saw into the future. Responsible realists they were held to have been, and some

[26] A. Csengeri, 'Dessewffy Aurél' in *Magyar szónokok és státusférfiak* [Hungarian orators and statesmen] (Pest, 1851); J. Török, *Magyar életkérdések, összhangzásban a közbirodalmi érdekekkel* [Questions vital to Hungary, as these relate to the interests of the Empire as a whole] (Pest, 1852), also: *Publicistikai és nemzetgazdasági némely dolgozatai* [Some essays in politics and economics] (Pest, 1858), also *Emlékirata s azon nemzeti petitiók, melyek az októberi diplomát megelőzték* [Memorandum, and the national petitions preceding the October Diploma] (Pest, 1864); *Koszorú gr. Dessewffy Aurél emlékére* [A wreath in memory of Count Aurél Dessewffy] (Pest, 1857); K. Vida, *A növekedő új világhatalom. Szózat a földbirtok érdekében* [New world power: an oration in defence of landed property] (Kolozsvár, 1860), also: *Restauratio vagy revolutio? Őszinte szó a magyar nemzethez* [Restoration of revolution? A candid word to the Hungarian nation] (Lipcse, 1861); also: *Ausztriával-e vagy a nélkül? Második szó a magyar nemzethez* [With Austria or without her: a word more to the Hungarian nation] (Pest, 1862); F. Pulszky, 'Jellemrajzok II. Gróf Dessewffy Aurél és társai' [Character sketches II. Count Aurél Dessewffy and his circle], *Budapesti Szemle* [Budapest Review], IV, 7 (1874), 41–56; Baron F. Fiáth, *Életem és élményeim* [My life and times] (2 vols., Budapest, 1878); *Zsedényi Ede emlékkoszorú* [In memoriam Ede Zsedényi] by L. Klestinszky (Kassa, 1879); Count A. Szécsen, *Mailáth György emlékezete* [György Mailáth recalled] (Budapest, 1884); Fs. Deák, *Gróf Dessewffy Aurél* (Pozsony, 1885); J. Asbóth, 'Dessewffy Aurél, 'Széchenyi István', A conservativok a forradalom után' [The Conservatives after the revolution], 'Báró Sennyey Pál' in *Jellemrajzok és tanulmányok korunk történetéhez* [Character sketches and studies in contemporary history] (Budapest, 1892); G. Éble, *A cserneki és tarkeői Dessewffy család. Genealógiai tanulmány* [The Dessewffy family of Csernek and Tarkeő: a genealogical study] (Budapest, 1903); M. Réz, 'Gróf Dessewffy Aurél', *Budapesti Szemle*, CXXIV, 346, 347 (1905), 177–88, 367–88; B. Szádeczky, *Báró Jósika Samu erdélyi kancellár (1805–1860)* [Baron Samu Jósika, Chancellor of Transylvania, 1805–60] (Kolozsvár, 1912); Count A. Apponyi, *Emlékirataim. Ötven év. Ifjúkorom-Huszonöt év az ellenzéken* [Memoirs. Fifty years. My youth–Twenty-five years in opposition] (Budapest, 1926); also *Élmények és emlékek* [Experiences and recollections] (ed. by S. Jánoky Madocsány) (Budapest, no date [1933]); L. Véssey, A. Somssich, *Somssich Pál élete és működése* [Pál Somssich, his life and work] (Budapest, 1944); Gy. Szekfű, 'A tizenkilencedik és a huszadik század' [The nineteenth and twentieth centuries] in B. Hóman–Gy. Szekfű, *Magyar Történet* [History of Hungary] (7 vols., Budapest, no date), VII, 153, 162–6, 428.

apologists even went so far as to claim that they had had a programme for solving Hungary's ethnic problems!

Thus it came to be that the role the conservatives had played in Hungary's nineteenth century political life carried less weight for Hungarian political consciousness than the myth that had grown up around them, a myth that could flourish because their descendants set no store by Hungary's self-determination, by her democratic development, nor by her openness to the rest of Europe. It was a myth which – as we have seen – rested not so much on what they had done, as on what they had seen themselves to be. And it is this myth that gives us the clue that most distinguishes Hungary's nineteenth-century conservatives from those of other European nations: they were *Hungarian* conservatives in that they had helped to captivate Hungarian society with a way of thinking that did not permit one to call things by name;[27] and they were *conservatives* in that they had tried – with no small success – to adapt the pro-Habsburg heritage of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to the circumstances of a new age.

[27] The expression was used by István Bibó: 'During these nearly 100 years, Hungary lived in a political and social framework wherein calling things by name was not only impossible but explicitly forbidden, where facts were interpreted and explained not in terms of simple chains of causes and effects, but in terms of assumptions and expectations quite independent of such chains, where pseudo-problems consumed fine energies, where people treated real problems by mumbling magic spells, and acted – and had to act – as if they didn't really exist, and where there was no objective standard of right and wrong for a moral standard, but instead only a certain system of fears and grievances. Every distortion to be found in Hungarian society during this period can, in some way, be traced to the falsehood of the basic political and social framework [i.e. the compromise].' Bibó, 'Alkat, történelem', p. 309.