

## Social Democracy and the Nationalities Question

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The Hungarian Social Democratic Party's (MSZDP) 1903 Declaration of Principle's fourth point included the party's rather laconically formulated political objective: "To achieve total equality of all nations living in the country."<sup>1</sup> Although the Serbian delegates' proposal to also include the demand of self-government<sup>2</sup> gives insight into the theoretical setting, the nationalities issue itself unquestionably carried much less weight in this decisive program of Hungarian social democracy than it actually did socially and politically. This reticence is all the more conspicuous with respect to the 1899 Brunn Program of the Austrian sister party and Karl Renner's relevant works of Austro-marxism.<sup>3</sup> It is important to note, however, that the nation-nationality problem is not an integral part of Marxist social theory, in spite of the fact that Marx and Engels discussed the problem of national independence in detail primarily in connection with 1848, hence it does not necessarily occur in party programmes.

At the turn of the century social democratic parties took a position on the question of nationalities only when they were forced to do so, either by political competition, societal transformation, or, in close relation to these, by organisational matters of the movement. In this regard, the "extra-theoretical" nature of the national question could have been both an asset or a liability. The problem could have been neglected based on the primacy of class struggle,

or a serious theoretical Marxist treatment could have been given to the issue, in which case the evident lack of authentic interpretation would have been most favourable.

When the Declaration of Principle was issued, the ways the two social democratic parties of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy approached the problem were diametrically opposed. This was due to their distinctive organisation, differentiation, along with their different positions within the political institutional structure in the first place. The Austrian party had already been a highly organised parliamentary party with a mass appeal, represented in the Imperial Council (Reichsrat) and in the legislative assemblies (Landtag). National conflicts intensified inside the party too, since it practically operated as the federation of national (German, Czech, Polish, Italian, South Slav and Ruthenian) subparties.<sup>4</sup> In Austria the national struggle jeopardised not only the movement's unity but also the effectiveness of the tactics based on parliamentary representation. The persistent obstruction, which might have been called forth by the plan to introduce bilingualism in Bohemia or by the establishment of a Slovenian secondary school in Maribor, paralysed legislation and, as social democrats were concerned, it hindered social reforms.

In contrast, as a result of census suffrage and its weaker structure the Hungarian party did not stand a chance of ensuring parliamentary representation; it was taking the preliminary steps towards it. Poorer organisation had not led to the need for fragmentation or national division yet; societal transformation was evidently the primary objective. Furthermore, the institutional structure did not offer scope for national particularism either; it did not provide a framework similar to the crown territories (Kronland) in Austria.

At the same time, it is clear to see that both parties considered adaptation to changing circumstances and answering topical questions of primary importance. This is what the opposite views of the two parties may be traced back to as regards one of the most important questions of

the turn-of-the-century politics as well, not independent of the nationalities problem or its solution: the Austrian party proposed a customs union, whereas MSZDP supported the notion of a separate customs territory and resolved to uphold this stance in the teeth of Austrian opposition.<sup>5</sup>

Two parts of the Monarchy, two parties, two fundamentally different views and problem-solving strategies; two viewpoints, two ways of tackling the same problem—as we can see, the parties had the chance to freely form their own opinions about the nationalities question. Having said that, it is rather conspicuous to what limited extent Hungarian social democracy was fertilised by the national theory of Austromarxism and its proposal for solution.

*The future of the Danubian basin  
and the nationalities question*

The problem of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy's future had become most acute after the turn of the century. Following the attempt to introduce bilingualism in Austria, all obstacles to the reconciliation of the Czech-German conflict became obvious. In Hungary the drafting of an economic compromise encountered fierce opposition and the success of the coalition questioned dualism itself.

Due to national disagreements threatening the party, and the Austrian parliament's occasional hiccups, and also because they believed that there was a danger of millions of Germans becoming a provincial minority, the Austrian social democrats also joined the not so small camp of those who devised plans for the future of the Empire. Among the ideas that presented themselves were the maintenance of dualism, personal union, any version of federalism (either that built on the crown council, or that of an ethnic basis) and centralism. Starting from the analysis of the practical consequences of the nationalities question and drawing conclusions of universal validity, from the above options the

social democrats proposed a unique, mixed version of federalism which entailed the compromise of sharing total state sovereignty.<sup>6</sup>

There was a special division of labour between the two most influential theoreticians, Karl Renner and Otto Bauer. While Renner laid emphasis on practical political analyses and political law, Bauer conducted empirical-historical investigations and tried to construct the comprehensive theory of the nation-nationality problem on a Marxist basis. Their results reciprocally influenced each other, although Renner's political and practical proposals were of an earlier origin, and, therefore, they provided the foundation for Bauer's suggestions.

Bauer's definition became the subject of heated debate within the international workers' movement. His national ideal was both cultural and historical. He believed that the nation was a community of destiny and character, which takes shape in national culture, and consequently in national history. Bauer's nation was not based on blood relations, thus, it was not a community of race, however, it was rooted in traditions. At the same time, he described it as a formation of modernisation, when he said that only those who were the vehicles of national culture could be part of the nation. In capitalism, these are primarily the members of the citizenry and the intelligentsia.<sup>7</sup>

Bauer, in conformity with the modernising interpretation of the nation,<sup>8</sup> differentiated between historical and non-historical nations, which corresponds to the dichotomy of state-forming and stateless nations in Hungarian political theory. Historical nations are present all throughout history and their ruling classes embody their national culture and class interests. Non-historical nations do not have ruling classes, or a national elite, consequently, they do not cultivate and articulate a national high culture. For Bauer, change was not irreversible: a historical nation can become a non-historical one, while a non-historical nation can turn into a historical one through

advancement and the spreading of capitalism.<sup>9</sup> Nations become participants in history again as a result of capitalism's culturally equalizing and unifying role and a widespread dissemination of culture.

The awakening of non-historical nations, as Renner put it, makes the fight of nations for the state imperative. Renner distinguishes between the so-called atomistic-centralised and the organic state organisation. Absolutism destroyed corporate-communal organisations and connected the citizens individually to state power. This was also accepted by liberal state philosophy, which composed the theory of individual rights and which did not transform the state organisation inherited from absolutism.<sup>10</sup> Since absolutism does not acknowledge national differences, it contributes to the awakening of non-historical nations with cultural reforms, especially with the introduction of public education. The liberal state and its constitution recognise only the individuals and provide for their protection (freedom of language use, freedom from obligatory language learning, etc.). However, citizens organising into nations can only expect the furtherance of their national culture from the state owing to the fact that they do not have the right to impose or collect taxes. As a national majority—German, Polish, or Czech—is given in each legislation, culturally disadvantaged nations can only hope to have their national culture acknowledged and supported by canvassing the help of the legislative majority; this inevitably leads to the nations' fight for the state.<sup>11</sup>

The solution, which was worked out by Renner and was adopted by Bauer with some alterations, and which transcended the Brunn program's territorial self-determination, was the recognition of collective rights. Each nation can acquire collective rights, irrespective of their territorial position, based on a national cadastre to be set up. The national communities thus established can elect their national council, which would have the exclusive right to organise the communities' cultural life. This would be

made possible by the right of taxation. Obviously, Renner aimed to confine the conflicts paralysing the workings of the Austrian parliament—administrative language use, school matters—not least with respect to the future of Germans in Bohemia.

At the same time his plan included other radical transformations. The most important alteration is the possibly nationally separated, regional divisions, which are based on real democratic self-government. Regional self-governments are, on the one hand, the executive bodies of the central government, and, on the other hand, autonomous institutions of social administration. National separation for the most part solves the problems of administrative language use. Wherever it does not do so—as Renner estimated, this is 10 percent of the regions to be founded—the inhabitants, grouped into national chambers, would elect and handle their business in their mother tongue. These national regions and national chambers would make up national collectives, which would elect national councils. With such a method, only the significantly bilingual regions' educational administration should be doubled.

Nonetheless, in the transformation of the components of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy he assumed a more prominent role to other, primarily eco-geographically organised units, which would only partially correspond to national territories. He would separate the South Slavs with the coastline in Cisleithania, the Alpine lands inhabited by Germans, the Czech lands, and Galicia combined with Bukowina. These regions would deal with economic matters, and everything else which does not fall within the competence of the Imperial Parliament. He would integrate Hungary in the same way as well, emphasising the fact that the later they start the transformation—whose *conditio sine qua non* is universal suffrage—the more likely it would be that the restructuring of the country could only be done on a national basis.

Renner would also democratise the management of common affairs. He would not widen their present scope, but he would introduce real parliamentary supervision, naturally in the form of an Imperial Parliament. Democratisation, even in a forceful manner applied by the dynasty, would extend over Hungary as well.<sup>12</sup> Universal suffrage would be introduced, by which Hungarian “oligarchic” and “feudal” state organisation would be eliminated. Thus, we have an overall picture of widespread democratisation, decentralisation with an obscure content, and collective rights to nationalities. The base of all this is the Monarchy’s economic unity, which requires the existence of a customs union. Renner has another argument, left unsaid: the maintenance of the Monarchy is necessary in view of a European balance.

Democratisation would facilitate the expansion of national culture into the proletariat as well. A true national unity could be created under the condition that the proletariat’s vernacular culture is developed, strengthened, and the integration of the proletariat into the national culture is achieved. This would also mean the implantation of real class struggle, while the tackling of the national problem would lead to the unity of the proletariat. Neither Renner, nor Bauer questioned the fact that national struggle would make it impossible for workers to fight against exploitation in the hope of success.

Renner, Bauer and the Austrian social democrats, conforming to current political realities, consistently represented these notions up until 1918. Similarly, Hungarian social democrats held rather strong views about this problem, too.

First and foremost, it is worth noting that the Austrian and Hungarian social democrats’ viewpoints were fundamentally different: Hungarian social democrats, and even members of the Hungarian left wing analysed the problem of the Monarchy’s future, with the nationalities question involved, with a view to Hungarian detachment. In the reception of Renner and Bauer’s works in Hungary a key

role had been assigned to the rejection of the ideas of constitutional unity and economic unity; in fact, this was a predominant element in social democratic reaction.<sup>13</sup> MSZDP supported the idea of a separate customs territory and the coalition's national programme (partly for the sake of franchise reform), and after the agreement between the Crown and the coalition the party turned into its fiercest and most resolute critic, not least as a result of the concessions made in this respect.<sup>14</sup> The party did not assert the views of the empire in the nationality issue either; it confined itself to investigating the Hungarian situation, and similar to other political powers, it ignored the fact that ultimately, on the Monarchy's scale, the future of dualism is a nationalities question, that of the Hungarian nationality.

Before World War I, the nationalities question had often been reduced to a theoretically approached, strategic-tactical problem: how long could nationalities and parties be allied to social democracy in the fight for the direct aim of universal suffrage, or in a wider sense, in class struggle. This was accompanied by the daily problems of party organisation and agitation, especially among non-Hungarian workers and in the agrarian proletariat. However, it is important to point out that the integration of nationalities inside the party, in spite of all conflicts, might well have been an effective method of tackling the problem.

Evidently, this approach was based on a solid theoretical and methodological foundation. While the Hungarian comrades' views were not particularly influenced by Austromarxist notions, they tried to weigh up the possibility of an alliance between nationalities and the proletariat on a sociological basis. The significance of this matter is clearly indicated by the fact that several writings were dealing with it in the first volume of the party's theoretical magazine entitled *Szocializmus* (Socialism).

The most extensive work was Ernő Bresztovszky's five-piece study, which dealt with the phenomenon of assimilation.<sup>15</sup> He tried to depict the process of "Magyarisation"



through the social structure of each nation, the differences in demographic data and their distribution based on settlement types and regions. As a result, he defined assimilation as a phenomenon of modernisation, a concomitant of social progress. His report revealed that the focal point for Hungarian processes were towns, where “Magyarisation” based on an increase in wealth and in cultural consumption made up a substantial share of national “profit.” He finally concluded: however much absolutistic politics strikes nationalist notes or attempts to instigate national action (such as colonisation), in effect, it protects the interests of latifundia, keeps the masses in ignorance, and deprives them of the opportunity for education and social mobility; therefore, it is a “nation-killing” policy. This corresponds precisely to the interpretation of Austromarxists.<sup>16</sup> Clearly, a remedy for this situation would be to elevate the working class and involve them in cultural life.

The other pivotal question, with which statements of theoretical character were dealing in detail, looked at the possibilities of and limitation to an alliance between nationality parties and social democracy. Although many people shared the view that in the fight for the topical political objective—universal suffrage—national movements and the workers’ movement were each others’ natural allies, opinions about the possibilities of a future cooperation differed greatly.

Jenő Rozványi explained that since nationalities do not have their own bourgeoisie—they assimilate into the Hungarian bourgeoisie because of their class interests—and the petty bourgeoisie cannot assure a livelihood for the intelligentsia, besides the fight for universal suffrage the nationalities cannot withdraw themselves from the language struggle either.<sup>17</sup> Until they succeed in that struggle, their existence is also dependent on the situation of the national proletariat. Even though state positions would open up for them with the conclusion of the language struggle, since they do not have a bourgeoisie, they will

remain much more connected to their own proletariat than the Hungarian bourgeoisie.

Others, such as József Strasser<sup>18</sup> and Lajos Tarczai<sup>19</sup> regarded a cooperation possible only after the franchise struggle had been resolved. After that, in their opinion, class interests would set the proletariat against the nationality parties of civil recruits. However, Tarczai and Rozványi agreed that in the given situation the nationality clergy—or its influence on the nationality proletariat and smallholders—could not be described as reactionary, since the common goals of the national case corresponded to the class interests of the oppressed classes.

Tarczai's short book review<sup>20</sup> provides a clue as to the current explanation of the point of equal rights of nationalities in the social democratic program. With reference to the argumentation of a moderate Romanian author, he remarked that after the bloodshed in Cernova, the implementation of the Nationality Law could no longer satisfy the nationalities. He believed that a complete freedom of language use would be the only solution.

In the next half decade, theoretical interest in the nationalities problem declined and it only revived during the restoration of the Croatian constitutionality and the negotiations between István Tisza and the Romanian National Committee. Zsigmond Kunfi brought up this question in two of his works: can Tisza come to a compromise with the Romanians?<sup>21</sup> He arrived to the conclusion that the attempt was hopeless. Although it would be possible to reach a compromise among the national bourgeoisies, the national intelligentsia and the Hungarian elite (in a way realising Tarczai's idea of providing language rights), the majority of the nationalities is comprised of those smallholders and poor peasants, who are oppressed by the system and the ruling classes because of their social status. This social oppression would not weaken due to a compromise of the elite, and since it is an immanent element of the system, there is no chance to mitigate or eliminate it.

In the period before the world war, the key to approach the problem of nationalities was class struggle. They considered national conflicts as factors obstructing class struggle,<sup>22</sup> however, they could not put forward a better solution than raising awareness of this fact through agitation among nationalities, which was not necessarily an effective method. The situation was further aggravated by the fact that, as is shown in Bresztovszky's study, the party did not reject the notion of a peaceful assimilation of nationalities. Moreover, this was emphasised quite frequently, as necessitated by political tactics—to join forces with parties adopting the national policy in the franchise struggle—presenting the movement itself as a melting pot and a valuable tool of assimilation.<sup>23</sup>

Even when they made gestures towards nationalities, it never went beyond the administrative treatment of the problem. They marked democratisation as an answer to the problem, thereby sharing the illusion of the liberals of the reform era: nationalities would be loyal and devoted if their freedom was granted. This became vital in handling the situation. The extension of suffrage, societal reforms, and the eradication of social and economic oppression might have been able to put an end to the misery of nationalities.

As for Hungarian social democratic visions, there is an apparent lack of plans on the imperial level, or of future goals for the Monarchy. Obviously, social democrats espoused the undermining of dualism and the introduction of economic self-determination, nevertheless, these steps were not accompanied by a comprehensive concept. Unlike the Austrian party and movement, Hungarian social democracy had simply never been confronted with these problems in political battles. Hungary's territorial integrity had never been questioned publicly by any national movement, thus, the country had been able to evade having to take a carefully designed theoretical stance.

However, the war forced the pace on taking a stand about the possible transformations after the advent of peace. The victory of both the Entente and the Central Powers promised changes: the relations between the Monarchy and the Balkans, Poland, which was to be reconstructed, the Mitteleuropa program, the restructuring of the Monarchy in accordance with Woodrow Wilson's principles; they all signalled sweeping changes.

Peace without annexation was the basic principle of Hungarian social democracy. In addition, they often emphasised national self-government, although this was accompanied by the intention to at least partially preserve the Monarchy.<sup>24</sup> At the same time—along the lines of Kunfi's pre-war stance—they viewed nationality struggles as antithetical to class struggle, espoused the policy to create bigger economic units, while rejecting the Mitteleuropa program.

This rather eclectic view and the changes in world politics are reflected in the works published in *Szocializmus* in the last year of the war.<sup>25</sup> Jenő Varga, still rejecting dualism, argued for a renewed Monarchy, organised on the basis of self-determination for nationalities, a more close-knit cooperation, and democratic parliamentarism for settling common affairs. However, he failed to fully define the concept of self-determination. Consequently, a parallel could just as well be drawn between these ideas and the civil radical transformation program and its principle of integrity, or Renner's widely known theories, or even the concepts of the Austrian party's left wing.

Traditionally, the common element in all of these cases is the upholding of the principle of territorial integrity. Neither the proclamation published in *Népszava* (The Voice of the People) on October 8, 1918, nor the opinions issued afterwards defined the scope of freedom of nationalities and national self-determination. This stance is characteristic of the politics of social democrats coming into power during the October Revolution.<sup>26</sup> It includes the quoting of Wilsonian principles and the ambition to hold

referendums that would help implementing them. This is not incomprehensible and cannot be termed as national imperialism or chauvinism, although under those circumstances it was without a doubt a case of entertaining illusions. It is quite clear, however, that Hungarian social democracy did not and actually could not come up with a viable alternative to secession in order to put national self-determination into practice. This remains to be a serious problem, even if we know that neither the mature concept of Austromarxists nor Jászi's "Eastern Switzerland Plan" of cantonal autonomies could prevent the dissolution of the Monarchy and Hungary.

### *Hungary's situation in the Danubian Basin*

Naturally, after the Treaty of Trianon, the nationalities question was raised in a completely different way. The fact that Hungary lost two-thirds of its lands, the minority of three million in the successor states, and the trauma caused by the injustice of the peace treaty all pointed to a small state-small nation perspective. In the remaining area there was a mere 10 percent minority, therefore, the weight of this problem in internal politics fell off, foreign policy gained in importance, and instead of pressing assimilation, emphasis shifted to the protection of minorities. At the same time the objective of the revision provided a more complex framework for the matter. None of the legal parties gave up the idea of remedying the injustices of the peace treaty, which strengthened the role of plans of a future set-up in the Danubian or Carpathian Basin.

The Social Democratic Party also advocated the necessity of revision. In keeping with governmental policy and accepting international realities at the start, the party did not deal with the matter openly, however, when foreign policy grew more and more active, standpoints on the question of revision came to be published. Nonetheless, the

need for a theoretical approach to the problem was still lacking. The affirmation (if qualified) of the revision and the provision of its necessary conditions, the treatment of the country's minorities, especially the Germans carrying substantial weight among the party's supporters, and the rearrangement of the region constituted the framework of action. After Hitler's coming into power, but mainly after the *Anschluss* and during the war the idea of national independence accompanied this policy.

The problems related to minorities in Hungary were primarily presented by Vilmos Zuschlag on the pages of *Szocializmus*; he was also the one who commented on the plan conceived in *Magyar Szemle* (Hungarian Review), called the "New Hungary Plan" by László Ottlik.<sup>27</sup> Zuschlag levels strong criticism at the nationality policy of Bethlen and its continuity of pre-war policy. His criticism is twofold: on the one hand, he objects to the "Magyarising" tendencies of the educational policy; on the other hand, he regards nationality struggles as an obstacle in the fight for democratic transformation. As for the educational policy, he not only argues against restricting education in the minorities' mother tongue, but by reviving pre-war arguments he points out the connection between "Magyarising" education, low cultural standard, and a high illiteracy rate. As a result of these factors, the nation's power inevitably weakens along with the democratic movements.

Further on he puts the problem in the context of revision, too. He argues that if Hungary does not abide by the regulations of the minority agreement, it has no right to enforce it on minorities in Hungary either. With such a two-faced policy, people of the seceded territories could not be won over, and any kind of "New Hungarian" concept, which is not willing to transcend the limitation of pre-war policy, and which considers the nationalities policy important only until it has regained its lands, is perforce an illusion.

He also expresses his views about the issues of democracy, class struggle and the nationalities question. He believes

that to establish the Germans' own native culture in Hungary, social development and prosperity are the most essential conditions. At a time of oppression, this could only be made possible through the set-up of a Hungarian democracy. Consequently, the place of nationalities is within the social democratic party, whose objectives could lead to the realisation of those of the nationalities.

A similar line of thought can be observed in ensuing standpoints. Zuschlag's German brochure,<sup>28</sup> a political propaganda written before the 1939 elections, sets the goals of realising minority agreements and—not independent of the demands of the *Volksbund* based on nationalities—of establishing the cultural autonomy of Germans. At the same time, in his view the conquering of unemployment and a fair distribution of lands should come before these steps. His cultural and schooling demands included the suggestion—which was unexpected given his earlier works—that in the case of Germans living in or close to cities, the introduction of bilingual education is unnecessary, as it would be disadvantageous for them not to be able to assimilate into the Hungarian urban environment. Although this proposition is surprising, it is not entirely incomprehensible, since the *Volksbund* aimed to take control of schooling as well with the help of Nazi Germany. Zuschlag's proposition served partially to avert this danger.

Others treat the problem in relation to democracy as well, partly along with the nationality policy before Trianon, and partly as opposed to the aspirations of German fascism. Sándor Lipcsei tried to present social democracy as an authentic representative of the national ideal, maintaining that democracy is the only possible way to realise social equality and freedom as opposed to fascism.<sup>29</sup> Zoltán Rónai criticised the former nationalities policy in relation to Miklós Asztalos's work entitled *A nemzetiségek története Magyarországon* (The History of Nationalities in Hungary), and denounced the methods of former imperialists. As contrasted with these views, he pointed up the legal protection

of minorities, and set “the right of the weak” and democracy against “the right of the powerful”, represented by Asztalos.<sup>30</sup> Last but not least, he revived Bauer and Renner and the ideal of cultural autonomy in reference to László Buza’s work entitled *A kisebbségek jogi helyzete* (The Legal Status of Minorities).

Another opportunity to revive Austromarxist theories had arisen when Otto Bauer died on July 4, 1938 in Paris. The authors of the lengthy commemoration in *Szocializmus*—Zoltán Rónai and Manó Buchinger—took the opportunity to expound Bauer’s theory concerning the national question (in a more professional way than László Rudas in 1907) and also to set it against fascism to some extent.<sup>31</sup> It was Buchinger in particular who stood for the idea that personal autonomy might have been able to solve the problems of the Monarchy (or, in fact, of Austria).

Zuschlag’s proposition of cultural autonomy may well be the sign of this short Bauer-renaissance, however, in 1939, in the national euphoria following the First Vienna Decision, the nationalities question did not figure among the most significant issues. The emergent theoretical approach was abandoned and the concepts of Austromarxists were no longer exemplary.

*Népszava*’s comments on the events of October 1938—on the turns of the Hungarian-Slovakian negotiations—did not differ from those of the other papers. The start of negotiations, the occupation of Ipolyság and of the train station at Sátorajjúhely were received similarly euphorically, the breakdown in negotiations similarly bitterly.

The party welcomed the Vienna Decision and deemed it appropriate, just like the re-annexation of North Transylvania. At the same time the future of the enlarged Hungary in the Danubian Basin became more vital than the regulation of national minority issues. Not long after the re-annexation of the southern part of the Northern Region (Felvidék), László Ákos had already voiced his belief that the enlarged Hungary was to assume a more decisive role in



Central Europe. In his opinion, although a Hungarian and Czechoslovakian bloc based on free trade did not seem realistic, Bohemia was to gravitate economically towards Germany, while Slovakia towards Hungary.<sup>32</sup>

Similar thoughts—of the mission of the enlarged Hungary in the Danubian Basin—were expressed in the article published in March 1943 in *Népszava*.<sup>33</sup> The article discussed the significance of the “complete and intact,” that is, Saint Stephen’s Hungary. Within this country, the foundations of minority reconciliation are equality before the law, the predominance of a social way of thinking, solidarity and understanding. The idea that nationalities should regard the country as their homeland did not differ much from the concept of the dualist era represented by Mocsáry or Jászi; nor did the illusions related to it, as I mentioned earlier, from the analogous concepts of liberals of the reform period. The reference to the topicality of the Danubian Confederation, the cooperation of small nations, links the article to Kossuth in particular. The importance of this is emphasised by the fact that soon afterwards the booklet entitled *Kossuth demokráciája* (*Kossuth’s Democracy*) was published under the editorship of Árpád Szakasits, which included Kossuth’s relevant works.

This school of thought, although the reference to the historical calling linked it to the official standpoint of the era,<sup>34</sup> had obvious antecedents in the social democratic party. It was Ernő Garami whose works dealt with the necessity of a certain kind of economy-based association of the Danubian nations, with Hungary as its natural centre as a result of its eco-geographical position. Garami listed the practical difficulties of realisation; he consistently insisted that democratisation and the penetrability of borders are the ways to solve national problems or at least establish a *modus vivendi*.<sup>35</sup>

The primacy of democracy was still the most essential element of the social democratic vision. Party stands did not go beyond that, however, there were some politicians

who stressed the need for a more definite representation of collective rights and nationality interests. József Junger demanded, on the one hand, that state power be cleansed of class interests. Partly following Renner's thoughts, he talked about the different classes' fight for state power in multinational states, and emphasised the importance of state neutrality.<sup>36</sup> On the other hand, he proposed considering the collective rights of nationalities.<sup>37</sup>

Zuschlag, who referred to Bauer as well, suggested a change of party policy in the nationalities question in a petition in 1943. He advised to clarify the concept of "nation" based on Bauer's definition, to express the principle of socialist national self-government, and to launch a detailed action programme that would provide a differential treatment to national minorities. At the same time he rejected territorial autonomy.<sup>38</sup> His proposition was partly an evocation of the ideas supported by Transylvanians at the congress debate of December 1942, which, in contrast, aimed to build principally on democratisation.<sup>39</sup>

#### *Pragmatism without theories*

After the turn of the century the nationalities question was not regarded as one of the principal problems by Hungarian social democracy. Inside the party, interest in the theoretical fundamentals of the problem dwindled, and in practice the social democratic stance was determined by the possibilities of federal policy and franchise reform. Fear of accusations of antinationalism, the overlaps between the national programme of the independence opposition and the economic program of social democrats (especially in the question of a separate customs territory), and the lack of an ally undertaking the nationalities programme did not facilitate the drafting of a nationalities programme.

The social democratic party's judgement of the problem did not differ greatly from the patient schools of Hungarian

political life, or from Mocsáry or Jászi. The question was treated in a broader sense, extending over national institutions, primarily as an administrative and a schooling problem. They trusted in the success of natural assimilation, moreover, they believed that democratic transformation would be vital to achieve this end.

Besides topical tactical changes the acceptance of the priority of class struggle was a permanent element. Hungary's social democrats, as opposed to those of Austria, did not press for an immediate solution to the nationalities problem; they wished to surpass that through socialism and democratisation. Out of the two, democratisation was of course more realistic in the first half of the previous century, consequently, that was the overriding aim of Hungarian social democracy.

The changes brought about by the world war and the revolutions did enforce a more mature and comprehensive theory encompassing the whole region, nevertheless, it did not compare with Renner and Bauer's theories with respect to either its depth or its theoretical fundamentals. While the implementation of these theories was motivated earlier by the lack of external pressure as well as by the fear of a Great Austria believed to have been hidden in them, after the break-up of the Monarchy, the plans designed for it might have seemed to have partly lost their topicality or their authors might have deemed them outdated and set out to realise a pan-German unity.

The fate of Hungarian minorities did not further the party's theoretical turn either. Between the two world wars, besides the theories of revision, the protection of minorities and national independence, the cooperation of the Danubian Basin's small nations constituted the framework of the policy on nationalities. Although the party considered the consistent reciprocal realisation of minority protection crucial, the faith put into the necessity of revision did not urge the elaboration of a universally valid standpoint on the issue of nationalities, apart from the empha-

sising of the importance of class struggle, which came to be the priority of democratisation.

After a brief Austromarxist renaissance, which did not actually become the basis of the party's official program, and the re-annexation of lands, Hungary's Central European significance came to the forefront in social democratic concepts, too, similar to the influential, anti-German, conservative and liberal groups of the political social elite (see the memorandum of István Bethlen or the Szegedy-Maszák memorandum). This could not have been changed either by the sensitivity of the Northern-Transylvanian comrades towards this problem, or the urging by Zuschlag, who feared to lose the remaining influence among Germans living in the country.

The social democrats' trust, lasting for almost half a century, in the problem-solving class struggle, leading to the not so clearly defined freedom of nationalities, and in the seemingly more easily realisable democratisation did not prove to be well-founded. Although the stances adjusted to emerging situations and the absence of a solid theoretical basis did not prove to be less successful than the principled policy-making of other political forces, they definitely highlight the shortcomings of the social democratic line of thought, which we cannot let pass without a remark—even if it was not part of the great ideology—especially in the case of a party which nailed its colours to the mast of freedom. Nevertheless, it does have one advantage: our social democratic predecessors did not bequeath the dead weight of their authority to their late followers.

*Translated by Ágnes Tóth*

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> *A magyar munkásmozgalom történetének válogatott dokumentumai* (Selected Documents of the History of the Hungarian Workers' Movement), 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Budapest, 1995), 140. Karl Kautsky participated in the drafting of this point in the program.
- <sup>2</sup> Ibid.; also in Kende, János. *A Magyarországi Szociáldemokrata Párt nemzetiségi politikája 1903–1919* (The Nationalities Policy of the Hungarian Social Democratic Party 1903–1919) (Budapest, 1973), 29.
- <sup>3</sup> See program in Bauer, Otto. *Die Nationalitätenfrage und die Sozialdemokratie* (The Nationalities Question and Social Democracy) (Vienna, 1907), 458. Renner's most influential works until then: Synopticus [Karl Renner], *Staat und Nation* (State and Nation) (Vienna, 1899); Springer, Rudolf [Karl Renner]. *Der Kampf der Oesterreichischen Nationen um den Staat* (The Austrian Nations' Fight for the State) (Vienna, 1902).
- <sup>4</sup> Máté, István. *A nemzeti kérdéstről. A nemzeti kérdés lenini elméletének kialakulása 1896–1914*. Bevezetés (On the National Question. The Development of the National Question's Lenin's Theory. Introduction) (Budapest, 1988), 16.
- <sup>5</sup> See standpoint of Austrian social democrats in Otto Bauer's book above, or in Springer, Rudolf. *Grundlagen und Entwicklungsziele der Österreichischen-Ungarischen Monarchie*. Politische Studie über den Zusammenbruch der Privilegialparlamente und die Wahlreform in beiden Staaten, über die Reichsidee und ihre Zukunft (The Fundamentals and Development Objectives of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy) (Vienna and Leipzig, 1906); see Hungarian arguments—partly against those of Bauer—in Varga, Jenő. "Az önálló vámterület és az osztrák proletariátus" (Separate Customs Territory and the Austrian Proletariat), *Szocializmus* (Socialism), no. 7, 1 (1906), 565.
- <sup>6</sup> See Otto Bauer above, Karl Renner. *Grundlagen...*, and Renner, Karl. *Der Deutsche Arbeiter und der Nationalismus* (The German Worker and Nationalism) (Vienna, 1910); Renner. *Was ist Nationale Autonomie? Was ist Soziale Verwaltung?* (What is National Autonomy? What is Social Administration?) (Vienna, 1913); Renner. *Die Nation als Rechtsidee* (The Nation as Legal Concept) (Vienna, 1914).
- <sup>7</sup> See István Máté above; Gáll, Ernő. "Az újraolvasandó Otto Bauer" (Otto Bauer Reread), in *Kelet-európai írástudók és a nemzeti-nemzetiségi törekvések* (Budapest, 1987), 189–211. At the same time Bauer's Marxism, materialism and, consequently, his historical positivism invalidates this argument, since for him history is not an interpretation or a myth (an idea embraced by Andersen), but tangible reality.

- <sup>8</sup> Eric Hobsbawm and Ernest Gellner are of a similar opinion. See also Smith, Anthony D. "A nacionalizmus" (Nationalism), in *Eszmék a politikában: a nacionalizmus* (Ideas in Politics: The Nationalism), eds. Zoltán Bretter and Ágnes Deák (Pécs, 1995), 9–26; Plamenatz, John. "A nacionalizmus két típusa" (Two Types of Nationalism), *ibid.* 52–67; Romsics, Ignác. *Nemzet, nemzetiség és állam Kelet-Közép- és Délkelet-Európában a 19. és 20. században* (Nation, Nationality and State in Eastern, Central and South-Eastern Europe in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries) (Budapest: Napvilág Kiadó, 1998), 9–15; Schultze, Hagen. *States, Nations and Nationalism. From the Middle Ages to the Present* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), 95–114.
- <sup>9</sup> Both processes developed in the case of Slovenes and Czechs. The former turned into a non-historical nation in the 9<sup>th</sup> century, the latter after the Fehérhegy battle, and in the second part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century they became historical nations again.
- <sup>10</sup> This line of thought is not unique; it appeared first, among others, in Tocqueville, Alexis de. *A régi rend és a forradalom* (The Old Regime and the French Revolution) (Budapest, 1994). Tocqueville argued that in effect it was absolutism which eliminated the collective bodies of the order era, thereby making way for the individualism and the omnipotent state power of the revolution.
- <sup>11</sup> His line of thought and argumentation on questioning the ethnic neutrality of the liberal state has much in common with the latest school of liberal philosophy represented by Will Kymlicka. See Kymlicka's theory in Salat, Levente. *Etnopolitika—a konfliktusoktól a méltányosságig* (Ethnopolitics—from Conflicts to Fairness) (Marosvásárhely, 2001).
- <sup>12</sup> Contrary to Renner's readings [See Jászi, Oszkár. *A nemzeti államok kialakulása és a nemzetiségi kérdés* (The Formation of National States and the Nationalities Question) (Budapest, 1986); Jászi. *A monarchia jövője és a Dunai Egyesült Államok* (The Future of the Monarchy and the Danubian United States) (Budapest, 1918)], his ideas about the national councils elected by the national cadastre differed both from the idea of religious self-government and also from Kossuth's constitutional plans on emigration. Kossuth imagined a primarily civil organisation, which fell within the scope of the Assembly Act and did not exercise governmental power; while Renner believed that the sharing of state sovereignty and the replacement of territorial basis with individual basis would have been a viable solution.
- <sup>13</sup> Varga. "Az önálló vámterület és az osztrák proletariátus".
- <sup>14</sup> The reports about the economic compromise in *Népszava* in 1907 are a good example of this. Civil radicals shared a similar view, too. Jászi,

- Oszkár. "Az új Magyarország felé" (Towards a New Hungary), in *Írásai Oszkár publicisztikája* (Budapest, 1982), 89–106.
- <sup>15</sup> Bresztovszky, Ernő. "Adatok a nemzetiségi kérdéshez" (Figures of the Nationalities Question), *Szocializmus*, no. 7, 1 (1906), 503–507; 555–558; 604–608; 631–635.
- <sup>16</sup> Criticism of the hypocrisy of national politics was not missing from social democratic argumentation. For instance, Jenő Varga published an informative compilation in 1918 about how much land was sold to Romanian smallholders and landowners by Workers' Party politicians who propagated the need to secure national landed property. Varga, Jenő. "Eladó ország" (A Country to Sell), *Szocializmus*, no. 12: 403–406.
- <sup>17</sup> Rozványi, Jenő. Dr. "Szociáldemokrata párt és a nemzetiségek" (The Social Democratic Party and Nationalities), *Szocializmus*, no. 7, 1 (1906), 513–521; 545–550.
- <sup>18</sup> Strasser, József. "Érdekközösségeink" (Our Community of Interests), *Népszava*, March 22, 23, 30 and April 14, 1907).
- <sup>19</sup> Tarczai, Lajos. "A politikai helyzet és a nemzetiségek" (The Political Situation and the Nationalities), *Szocializmus*, no. 8, 2 (1907), 266–273.
- <sup>20</sup> Tarczai, Lajos. "Két könyv a nemzetiségi kérdéstről" (Two Books on the Nationalities Question), *Szocializmus*, no. 8, 2 (1907), 479–480.
- <sup>21</sup> Kunfi, Zsigmond. "A nemzetiségi béke és az országharc" (National Peace and Class Struggle), *Szocializmus*, no. 14, 8 (1913), 97–106; "Fajok és osztályok Magyarországon" (Races and Classes in Hungary), *Szocializmus*, no. 14, 8 (1913), 337–347.
- <sup>22</sup> Kende. *A Magyarországi Szociáldemokrata Párt nemzetiségi politikája 1903–1919*, 42–43.
- <sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 55–74.
- <sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 83–89.
- <sup>25</sup> Varga, Jenő. "Gondolatok a monarchia jövőjéről" (Thoughts about the Future of the Monarchy), *Szocializmus*, no. 18, 12 (1917), 16–22; "Az osztrák szociáldemokrata párt balszárnyának programja" (The Left-wing Programme of the Austrian Social Democratic Party), *Szocializmus*, no. 18, 12 (1917), 489–493.
- <sup>26</sup> Kende. *A Magyarországi Szociáldemokrata Párt nemzetiségi politikája 1903–1919*, 95–121; Vincze, Sándor. "Impressziók az aradi tárgyalásokról" (Impressions of the Arad Negotiations), *Szocializmus*, no. 18, 12 (1917), 555–558.
- <sup>27</sup> Zuschlag, Vilmos. "Új Magyarország felé. Egy-két szó az úgynevezett nemzetiségi kérdéstről" (Towards a New Hungary. A few words about the so-called nationalities question), *Szocializmus*, no. 18 (1928),

- 463–467; Zuschlag. “A kisebbségi kérdés Németországban és Magyarországon” (The Minority Question in Germany and in Hungary), *Szocializmus*, no. 19 (1929); Zuschlag. “A Bethlen-kormány tízéves kultúrpolitikája nemzetiségi szempontból” (The Ten-year Culture Policy of the Bethlen Government from the Perspective of Nationalities), *Szocializmus*, no. 20 (1930), 243–246; Zuschlag. “A magyarországi németiség és a – politika” (The Hungarian-German Population and Politics), *Szocializmus*, no. 21 (1931), 312–313.
- <sup>28</sup> Zuschlag, Wilhelm. *Ziele und Vorderungen der deutschsprechenden Sozialdemokratie* (The Aims and Demands of German Social Democracy) (Budapest, 1939).
- <sup>29</sup> Lipcsei, Sándor. “Fasizmus, szociáldemokrácia és nemzeti eszme” (Fascism, Social Democracy and National Identity), *Szocializmus*, no. 28 (1938), 186–189.
- <sup>30</sup> Vándor [Rónai], Zoltán. “Kisebbségi múlt—kisebbségi jövő” (*Minority Past—Minority Future*), *Szocializmus*, no. 25 (1935), 66–69.
- <sup>31</sup> Vándor [Rónai], Zoltán. “Otto Bauer jelentősége” (The Importance of Otto Bauer), *Szocializmus*, no. 28 (1938), 315–322; Buchinger, Manó. “Otto Bauer küzdelmei és igazságai” (Otto Bauer’s Struggles and Truths), *Szocializmus* 28 (1938), 322–328.
- <sup>32</sup> Ákos, László. “Új Közép-Európa felé” (Towards a New Central Europe), *Szocializmus*, no. 28 (1938), 410–412.
- <sup>33</sup> “Magyar és szerb” (Hungarian and Serbian), *Népszava*, March 6, 1943.
- <sup>34</sup> See, for example, the so-called “Szegedy-Maszák Memorandum”, in Juhász, Gyula. *Magyar–brit titkos tárgyalások 1943-ban* (Hungarian-British Secret Negotiations in 1943), (Budapest, 1978), 190–219.
- <sup>35</sup> Varga, Lajos. *Garami Ernő. Politikai életrajz* (Ernő Garami: A Political Biography) (Budapest: Napvilág Kiadó, 1996), 267–269; 297–302. The ideas tie in with the theoretical debates which took place in Romania between the two world wars among the Hungarian minority and in which the left wing actively participated, too.
- <sup>36</sup> Junger, József. “Állam és nemzet” (State and Nation), *Népszava*, May 22, 1941.
- <sup>37</sup> Tilkovszky, Lóránt. *Nemzetiségi politika Magyarországon a 20. században* (Nationalities Policy in Hungary in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century) (Debrecen, 1998), 115.
- <sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 121.
- <sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 117.