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BRITISH FOREIGN POLICY AND THE HUNGARIAN QUESTION 1848-1867

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Abstract

This article seeks to show how Hungary became an important factor in British foreign policy, with particular reference to the crisis of 1848-9. The controversial Lord Palmerston's response to the Hungarian Revolution and War of Independence is analysed here in the contexts of British liberal opinion, Britain's position as great power, her strategic interests in Europe (especially in relation to Russia and Turkey) and the commercial considerations which tended to underpin British policy. Ultimately, the major concern of London was the survival of a stable Habsburg Empire. Quite apart from liberal sympathies for the Hungarian national cause, British support for the Austro-Hungarian compromise of 1867 aimed at the consolidation of Habsburg power in the Danubian region.

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In modern times the affairs of Hungary have comparatively rarely come to prominence on the European stage. However, on the few occasions when they have done so, namely during the revolutionary years of 1848-9, in 1919-20 and in 1956, they have been important enough to involve the great powers and the future of Central Europe. Although Britain was one of these great powers, the Hungarian question and the affairs of Central Europe have usually been viewed as of marginal interest to the British Foreign Office. Indeed, it has invariably been assumed that Britain had, at most, a passing interest in them which peaked at important moments and then faded away.

Recent work has begun to cast more light upon this aspect of British foreign policy: the British role in the dismemberment of historic Hungary at Trianon and in the establishment of the Horthy régime, has perhaps received the most attention in this respect.¹ Other studies have suggested that British influence in Central Europe was often exerted

¹ G. Bátonyi, *Great Britain and Central Europe 1918-1933*. Oxford: Clarendon Press. 1999.

through methods of loan diplomacy, which accorded with the British perception of her interests in the region.²

It was however the earlier Hungarian Revolution and War of Independence of 1848-9 which first brought the Hungarian question to the attention of the British Foreign Office, although apart from *Palmerston and the Hungarian Revolution*, a groundbreaking work by Charles Sproxton published in 1919, the matter has escaped the close scrutiny of historians of mid nineteenth century British foreign policy.³

Moreover, British writing on the subject has frequently been influenced by the controversies of the twentieth century: R.W. Seton-Watson, writing on 1848-9 in the early twentieth century, was more concerned to denigrate the Hungarians, accusing them of suicidal intolerance towards the national minorities. Then A.J.P. Taylor, influenced by the nationalist controversies of the mid twentieth century, claimed that 1848-9 did not represent a progressive step and that Kossuth might have become a nationalist dictator.⁴ Later in a complete reversal following 1956, after the suppression of the Hungarian Revolution by Soviet forces, the Hungarians, in the British view, became heroic freedom fighters.

The matter of Hungary's relations with Britain and the West has naturally aroused interest from the Hungarian side, where some Hungarian historians have taken the view that their country, which has tended to look to Britain and the West at important moments, has usually been abandoned by them in her hours of greatest need. One of the earliest of these historians was Mihály Horváth, who in the bitter aftermath of Hungary's defeat by

² M. Lojkó, *Meddling in Middle Europe: Britain and the Lands Between 1919-1925*. Budapest/New York: Central European University Press. 2006.

³ C. Sproxton, *Palmerston and the Hungarian Revolution*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1919.

⁴ See R.W. Seton-Watson, *Racial Problems in Hungary*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1908; R.W. Seton-Watson, *Britain in Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1937; A.J.P Taylor, *The Habsburg Monarchy 1809-1918*. London: Hamish Hamilton. 1948.

Austro-Russian forces in 1849, reproached the western liberal powers for their lack of support.⁵ In the period of the Cold War, when it became obligatory for Hungarian historians to take a critical view of the western imperial powers, it was even suggested that they had acted directly against Hungary in 1848-9. Erzsébet Andics for example, at an international conference in 1948, launched a bitter attack on British and French foreign policy in 1848, claiming that the Russian intervention in Hungary had been approved of and even encouraged by Britain.⁶ In 1951, Éva Haraszti went further in suggesting that British foreign policy in 1848-9 was actively directed against Hungary. She represented Britain as 'one of the prime movers and driving forces of the reactionary plot against the Hungarian War of Independence'.⁷ The end of the Cold War and the fall of Communism in Hungary has led, however, to a more open debate on Kossuth and the question of Hungary and international politics in 1848-9.

The Hungarian question became important in European politics and came to the attention of the British Foreign Office in 1848, when the Hungarian revolutionaries attempted to establish an independent Hungary with a liberal constitution within the Habsburg Empire, a vast conglomeration of territories and nationalities in the centre of Europe. The Habsburg Empire had been guaranteed by Britain in 1815 at the Congress of Vienna, as the lynchpin of the European order, a barrier against French resurgence in the west and Russian expansion in the east.

⁵ M. Horváth, *Magyarország függetlenségi harcának története 1848 és 1849-ben* (History of Hungary's War of Independence 1848-9), Geneva: 1865. See also D. Kosáry, *Hungary and International Politics in 1848-9*. New York: Columbia University Press. 2003. pp.586-607.

⁶ E. Andics, 'La France, l'Angleterre et la Révolution Hongroise de 1848' in *Actes du Congrès Historique du Centenaire de la Révolution de 1848*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1948.

⁷ É. Haraszti, *Az angol külpolitika a magyar szabadságharc ellen* (*English Foreign Policy Against the Hungarian War of Independence*). Budapest: Közoktatásügyi Kiadó. 1951.

British diplomatic coverage of the Habsburg Empire was however, fairly sparse, unlike that of the Ottoman Empire, where British diplomatic outposts were numerous and which was considered at the Foreign Office as of key importance to Britain. Apart from the Embassy at Vienna, Britain had only a handful of Consulates at ports and trade centres such as Venice, Trieste, Milan, Ragusa (Dubrovnik) and Fiume. There were none in Hungary.

The British image of Hungary, as the ‘sword of Austria’, had been reinforced at the time of the Napoleonic Wars. Hungary was known to the British Foreign Office at that time only in terms of the Habsburg Empire, of which it had been a part since the early sixteenth century. Indeed, in 1711, after the Rákóczi rebellion, Britain had taken part in the negotiations for the Peace of Szatmár to reincorporate Hungary within the Habsburg Empire. The popular Prince Pál Esterházy, was Hungarian, but was regarded as Habsburg Ambassador.⁸ Thus it is not surprising that when the Hungarian revolutionary government sent an envoy, László Szalay, in November 1848, to seek diplomatic recognition, Edward John Stanley, later Lord Eddisbury, the Under Secretary at the Foreign Office refused to meet him, on the diplomatically correct grounds that the ‘British government has no knowledge of Hungary except as one of the component parts of the Austrian Empire’.⁹

Hungary’s approach to Britain, the greatest imperial power in the west has sometimes been condemned as naïve and unrealistic. Yet Britain’s reputation as an ‘advanced’ and liberal power, whose commercial and political progress was much admired by some Hungarians of the Reform Age, may have suggested otherwise. Dominating the aristocratic élite which ran the British Foreign Office at that time was the controversial Lord

⁸ See T. Frank, *Picturing Austria-Hungary. The British Perception of the Habsburg Monarchy 1865-1870*. New York: Columbia University Press. 2005.

⁹ *Correspondence Relative to the Affairs of Hungary*, FO 425/17/93, Eddisbury to Szalay, December 19th 1848.

Palmerston, then in his second term at the Foreign Office in the Whig administration of Lord John Russell, which had come to power in 1846. In foreign policy Palmerston has been viewed as both a sympathiser and opponent of the liberal/national movements of 1848-9 in Europe.¹⁰ On the one hand, during the 1830s, he had built on Canning's policy to establish an independent Greece and had acquired a reputation for supporting the rights of small nations, largely due to the part he had played in the creation of an independent Belgium. In the Iberian Peninsula he had supported the constitutional cause and was later credited, somewhat undeservedly, with support for a united Italy. Although Palmerston showed few signs of support for the rights of small nations in 1848-9, Disraeli, in a parliamentary duel of August 15th 1848, accused him of being a convert to the 'modern and new-fangled doctrine of nationality'.¹¹

Britain's position as an imperial power, herself faced with demands, for instance, for the liberation of Ireland, indicates that this was, on the whole, unlikely. In the British Empire, which faced similar problems of imperial overload as did the Habsburgs in Europe, the response to popular disturbances such as those in Malta and the Ionian Islands, was to contain civil disorder by conciliation and concessions.¹² Thus when in 1848 the first volume of Macaulay's *History of England* appeared it reflected the Whig view of English History as the history of progress, culminating in the protestant monarchy of the mid nineteenth century. It was this model, in which the English were supremely confident, that Palmerston advocated to beleaguered European rulers in 1848. It would, he lectured them, hold at bay what he considered to be the twin evils of revolution and republicanism and

¹⁰ D. Southgate, *The Most English Minister*. London: Macmillan. 1966. p. 229.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² E. Calligas, 'Lord Seaton's Reforms in the Ionian Islands 1843-8: a Race with Time', *European History Quarterly* 24 (1994)

preserve the monarchical status quo. In this way Palmerston had gained a reputation as a fierce critic of Austrian absolutism and of the Metternichean system, although he always advocated their reform rather than their overthrow.

The Hungarian historian, László Péter, has characterised British liberal opinion as usually sympathetic to national causes, critical of oppression and anxious for justice, yet in practice always balanced by expediency and a tendency to support stability and the existing order.¹³ In Palmerston's case, considerations of expediency, stability, and British interests meant that he was only a late convert to Italian unity, never a convert to the liberation of Poland; that he was lukewarm, at most, in his support for German liberalism; and that he was never converted to the idea of Hungarian Independence. Admittedly, he did express sympathy for the Hungarians, especially, his critics noted, after their cause became a lost one.

The response of the British Foreign Office to the early stages of the Hungarian Revolution of 1848 reflects these features of British foreign policy. There was much in the proposals of the Hungarian revolutionaries which was potentially appealing to Britain's Whiggish cabinet and to Palmerston, foremost critic of Austrian absolutism. The proposed Hungarian constitution, based on the Belgian constitution of 1831, was close, albeit with a rather wider franchise, to that of Britain. Hungarian claims for national rights stressed their historical and lawful, rather than revolutionary nature. Comparisons were drawn between the Hungarian Golden Bull of 1222 and the English Magna Carta of 1215, both of which, in the popular view, were regarded as guarantees of political and personal liberty. The concept in Hungarian liberalism of the extension of individual rights in a unitary political nation

¹³ L. Péter, 'R.W Seton-Watson's Changing Views on the National Question of the Habsburg Monarchy and the European Balance of Power', *Slavonic and East European Review* 82/3 (2004)

also had parallels with what those in the Whig/liberal tradition felt had been achieved in the formation of the United Kingdom. The largely aristocratic leadership of the Hungarian reform movement in the first half of the nineteenth century also had much appeal for the class which dominated the conduct of British foreign policy in this period.

In addition, in the period before 1848, some interest had been aroused in Hungary after two writers had drawn attention to potential commercial opportunities (always of interest to the British) and the strategic importance of Hungary's geographical position close to European Turkey. One of these was John Paget (1808-1892), who published *Hungary and Transylvania with Remarks on their Condition* in 1839. The second was Joseph Andrew Blackwell, another of the few Englishmen of his time to speak fluent Hungarian and who wrote a series of articles along similar lines.¹⁴

Blackwell was sent by Palmerston to Pozsony (Pressburg/Bratislava) where in 1847 in the Royal Hungarian Chamber, he became the only foreign observer of the proceedings of the Hungarian Reform Diet which set in train the Revolution of 1848. In reports sent back to Palmerston, Blackwell claimed, somewhat optimistically, that the Habsburg Empire was on the verge of collapse. Hungary, he wrote, was virtually established as an independent kingdom and thus could become a new lynchpin in the centre of Europe, possibly the nucleus of a vast Danubian Empire, stretching from the Carpathians to the Balkans, from the Black Sea to the Adriatic.¹⁵ This would serve to exclude the Germans from the Adriatic and form a bulwark against Russia, as the petty states in the southern part of the area would belong to it. Anxious to secure a post as Consul in Hungary, Blackwell

¹⁴ 'Acts of the Hungarian Diet 1832-6', *The Athenaeum* nos.4, 11, 18 (1837); 'Progress and Position of Russia in the East', *Metropolitan Magazine*, 2 (1837); É. Haraszti-Taylor (ed.), *J.A Blackwell Magyarországi küldetései 1843-51*. Budapest: 1989; T. Kabdebó (ed.), *Blackwell küldetése*. Budapest:1990; A.Sked, 'Living on One's Wits: the Career of J.A Blackwell' in L. Péter, M. Rady, P. Sherwood (eds) *British-Hungarian Relations since 1848*. London: S.S.E.E.S. 2004.

¹⁵ *South-East Affairs*, 1933, pp.103-5, Blackwell to Ponsonby.

came over to the Hungarian side. On the other hand, John Brabazon Ponsonby, the British Ambassador at Vienna (1846 - 1850) took a line critical of the Hungarians, especially of Kossuth, claiming that they had succumbed to the 'French disease'.

Nevertheless the situation appeared unthreatening as the Imperial government had accepted the new Hungarian constitution and independent institutions for Hungary. Palmerston wrote on April 25th 1848 that 'the British government has learnt with sincere pleasure -- the satisfactory state of mutual relations between Hungary and the imperial government'.¹⁶ Although Palmerston remained reticent, he did not at this stage appear opposed to demands for Hungarian independence and an Empire with its centre at Buda rather than Vienna, as described by Blackwell. At this point he was more concerned with the threat to Habsburg power in Italy and with political turbulence in France.

Hungarian success was however shortlived, as on July 25th an unexpected but significant Austrian victory over Piedmontese forces at Custoza, signalled an Austrian recovery. Austria then began to encourage the anti-Magyar Serbs and Croats and on September 11th 1848 Jellacic, appointed Ban of Croatia, crossed the Drava with a Croat army to invade Hungary. Palmerston merely commented that 'H Ms government consider it to be an object of paramount importance to Europe that the Austrian Empire should be kept together in a condition of strength'.¹⁷ This concept remained the cornerstone of British policy for the rest of the century.

The Hungarian revolutionaries were defeated when Russia came to the aid of Austria in the summer of 1849. In June-July 1848 there were revolutions in the Danubian Principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia, part of the European territories of the Ottoman

¹⁶ *Correspondence Relative to the Affairs of Hungary*, FO 425/17/19, Palmerston to Ponsonby, April 25th 1848.

¹⁷ *FO Turkey*, 195/315/4, Palmerston to Fonblanque (Belgrade), September 29th 1848.

Empire. These were followed by a Russian occupation, and subsequently by a Russian incursion into Transylvania, a Principality of the Habsburg Empire, from where the Russian invasion of Hungary was launched. This area of South Eastern Europe was an area of particular interest to Britain, as the Ottoman territories were regarded as the key to the British imperial system. British policy, directed by the Russophobe Stratford Canning, the British Ambassador at Constantinople, was to use British influence to prop up Turkey and keep out the Russians.¹⁸ Russian activities in the area were therefore of some considerable concern to the British government.

Yet, although Britain's strategic interests were perceived to clash with those of Russia, Palmerston's response to the Russian invasion was curiously muted and has led to accusations that he had even encouraged it. Not even a protest was forthcoming, despite warnings from Canning about Russian activities in the Principalities. Hungarian approaches to the Porte were also discouraged. Palmerston's domestic critics on this matter included the Whigs and the radicals, who saw Nicholas I. as a symbol of autocracy; Cobden of the Manchester School, who spoke out against British loans to Russia and advocated a British protest over the invasion and David Urquhart, the Turcophile M.P for Stafford who attempted to impeach Palmerston in 1848 over his foreign policy, in particular over alleged duplicitous connections with the Russian court. Urquhart's improbable claim that Palmerston had a 'Russian soul' may safely be dismissed, yet his sanguinity over the Russian invasion remains curious. One explanation, that he supported the Russian invasion because the Russians intended to free Austria of the Hungarian war in order that she might act more decisively in the affairs of Germany, does not stand up to scrutiny. For

¹⁸ R. Florescu, 'Stratford Canning, Palmerston and the Wallachian Revolution of 1848', *Journal of Modern History*, 25 (1963) 227-244.

in a despatch to the Earl of Westmorland, the British Minister at Berlin (1841-51), Palmerston expressed the opinion that whatever the outcome of the Hungarian War for Austria, too much of her Empire would be non-German for her to take the lead in the movement for German unity.¹⁹

Diplomatic correspondence from St. Petersburg casts more light on the British response, as it shows that Palmerston had been reassured by Lord Bloomfield, the British Ambassador at St.Petersburg that there was little appetite for the invasion in Russia and that Russian coffers were empty.²⁰ Palmerston therefore became convinced that Austrian gratitude to Russia would be short lived and that Russian activities in the Principalities were only of a temporary nature. Once convinced that these Russian activities were directed against Buda rather than Constantinople and would bring a speedier end to the Hungarian conflict, Palmerston was content to let things ride. For by now he analysed the Hungarian question as one which had ‘assumed the character and proportions of an important European transaction’.²¹ In Lord Aberdeen’s words, ‘the fate of Hungary will largely determine the future condition of Europe’.²²

A stable and intact Habsburg Empire in Palmerston’s view was an essential prerequisite of this future condition. Stability appeared further threatened by the Hungarian Declaration of Independence of April 1849 and the dethronement of the Habsburgs as hereditary Kings of Hungary, which Count Ferenc Pulszky, a leader of the Hungarian emigration in Britain, observed, ‘begat bad blood in England’²³. Lord John Russell remarked to Baron Brunnow, the Russian Ambassador to London that ‘It is extremely

¹⁹ *BDFA* Part 1, Series F, vol.18, Germany 1848-79, Palmerston to Westmorland, July 13th 1849.

²⁰ *Bloomfield Papers*, FO 356/14, nos. 2, 99, 226, 236.

²¹ *Correspondence*, FO 125/17/280, Palmerston to Ponsonby, August 1st 1849.

²² I. Roberts, *Nicholas I. and the Russian Invasion of Hungary*, London: Macmillan. 1991.

²³ D. Kosáry, *Hungary and International Politics* ---, pp.528-9.

fortunate that Kossuth has given an anarchic stamp to the movement. We would be in a very tight corner if he had held to constitutional principles and the principles of national liberty. His action has assumed the character of a social revolt, anarchy. They do not like that in England'.²⁴ Mihály Horváth in his history of Hungary's War of Independence claimed that Britain had been influenced by Ponsonby to the erroneous belief that the Hungarian movement had been of a communist, proletarian nature and that this explained Britain's connivance in its suppression.

Yet apart from lending a certain legitimacy to the Russian invasion to aid Austria in the restoration of Habsburg power, it cannot be said that the Declaration influenced British policy one way or the other, for the translated version was received only after the invasion had taken place. Pulszky had arrived in Britain in February 1849, at a moment convenient to exploit the anxiety aroused by the movement of Russian troops from the Principalities into Transylvania and asked for a British protest on the grounds that the invasion was an infraction of the law of nations. He was also given the task of translating into English the Declaration, a copy of which had been brought to England by Lieutenant Lajos Bikkessy. Pulszky wisely delayed his translation and only on July 19th 1849 secured an audience with Palmerston for himself and Bikkessy. He noted that Palmerston expressed sympathy for Hungary but told him that keeping Hungary within the Habsburg Empire and under the Habsburg monarch was a 'European necessity, which every British cabinet would always support'.²⁵

Nevertheless some unease over Palmerston's policy remained and accusations about his conduct in the Hungarian affair, did not go away. Bernal Osborne, liberal MP for

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ D. Kosáry, *Hungary and International Politics* ---, pp.525-526.

Middlesex, Secretary to the Admiralty and friend of Pulszky, asked questions in the House about the apparent British acquiescence in the Russian invasion, demanding to know whether the British government had been informed about the invasion beforehand, whether Russia was bound by treaty to assist Austria, whether Austria had asked for mediation and why Russell termed the Hungarian War an ‘uprising’. Palmerston rather duplicitously failed to mention the communiqué he had received from Brunnow the Russian Ambassador and said Austria had not asked for mediation.²⁶

By July 21st the Russian invasion had created enough unease for it to become the subject of one of the fairly infrequent Commons debates on foreign policy.²⁷ The case for Hungary was put by Bernal Osborne and Lord Dudley Stuart, champion of the resurrection of Poland.²⁸ Opinion was generally sympathetic to Hungary, Austrian absolutism was criticised, the Russian danger emphasized and parallels drawn between the Hungarian struggle and that of the English parliamentarians of the seventeenth century. British commercial interests, suffering because of the war, were also emphasized. No-one however, apart from John Roebuck, radical MP for Sheffield, actually advocated British intervention. Roebuck himself thought that the English people would ‘wish to see the great name of England used as means of stopping the advances of barbarian despotism, be it French or Russian.’²⁹ The Manchester School and the peace party, originally supporters of the Hungarians, were by now against intervention: John Bright warned Cobden that some

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ *Hansard Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd series, CVII, pp.786-818, Debate on Russian Invasion of Hungary.

²⁸ See T. Kabdebó, ‘Lord Dudley Stuart and the Hungarian Refugees of 1849’, *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research*, vol. XLIV, no.110 (1971)

²⁹ *Hansard*, 3rd Series CVII, pp.786-818.

radicals even wanted to *fight* for Hungary and deplored the idea of the British becoming ‘knight errants in the cause of freedom to other nations’.³⁰

Palmerston, who had done nothing to assist Hungary, except to criticize Austria, had somehow gained the reputation of being pro-Hungarian: Schwarzenberg, the Austrian Foreign Minister, called him the ‘devoted protector of the Emperor’s rebellious subjects’.³¹ Palmerston took the floor to give for the first time in public a masterly defence of his policy. His view was that, on the one hand, it was necessary to preserve the strength of the Habsburg Empire. On the other hand, if Hungary were crushed and her national feelings left unsatisfied, ‘a deep wound would be inflicted on the Empire and Hungary would become another Poland’.³² The conflict should therefore be brought to an amicable conclusion. Domokos Kosáry, in a recent book *Hungary and International Politics in 1848-9*, has pointed out that Palmerston was entirely consistent in his denunciations of Austria and in advocating humane treatment for the defeated Hungarians and attempted international mediation. He deems inconceivable the idea that Britain would have actively interfered in Habsburg affairs to support an independent Hungary.³³

Hungary’s defeat led to a frenzied, although short-lived, wave of sympathy for the Hungarians amongst the British public, always prone to wax indignant over the iniquities of the foreigner. A sonnet by W.S Landor contained the reproach, ‘If freedom’s sacred fire lies quenched, Oh England was it not be thee? Ere from such hands the sword was wrenched, Thine was the power to shield the free.’³⁴ Palmerston, who was besieged by pro-Hungarian memorials from cities all over the country, sent copies of them to Ponsonby,

³⁰ D. Read, *Cobden and Bright*. London: Camelot Press. 1967. p.120.

³¹ D. Kosáry, *Hungary and International Politics---*, p.535.

³² *Hansard*, 3rd Series, CVII, pp.786-818.

³³ D. Kosáry, *Hungary and International Politics ---*, p.535.

³⁴ É. Haraszti, *Kossuth –Hungarian Patriot in Britain*. London: Corvina Press. 1994.

whose term of office at Vienna was about to expire. Ponsonby was instructed to convey to the Austrian government Britain's hopes that they would be generous in victory and pay due regard to Hungary's constitutional rights as this would provide the best security, not only for Hungary but for Austria too.³⁵

As Ponsonby predicted however, these British displays of indignation had no effect whatsoever on Austria's brutal policy of reprisals. At Constantinople, Canning continued to warn of the continuing Russian presence in the Principalities and Transylvania. This resulted in the only active British intervention in the Hungarian affair when Palmerston allowed the despatch of the British Mediterranean fleet to the Dardanelles, to halt the proposed extradition by Russia and Austria of a group of refugees from the Hungarian war who were being held at Widdin in Turkey. After protracted negotiations which lasted into 1851, Austria and Russia backed down, the refugees were released and a group of them, led by Kossuth, landed at Southampton on October 23rd 1851. The event earned Palmerston the ire of the Royal family and the Austrian government but the praise of even his former opponents for having acted as the 'great champion of constitutional liberty' in what he had done for the Hungarians.³⁶ J.R Walker, formerly Secretary to the American Treasury, said in euphemistic speech at a banquet held for Kossuth at Southampton, that Kossuth's liberation was the first 'joint intervention of England and America in favour of freedom'.³⁷ The more cynical might have suggested, that even though Palmerston showed humanity towards the refugees, his actions on their behalf had more to do with at last making a stand against Russia, against whom Britain was to be at war by 1854.

³⁵ *Correspondence* FO 425/17/332, Palmerston to Ponsonby, August 28th 1849.

³⁶ J. Harney, *The Democratic Review*. New York: Barnes and Noble, 1851. (See 1968 edition p. 84.)

³⁷ D.Jánossy, *Great Britain and Kossuth*, Budapest 1937, p.92.

British honour satisfied, in the 1850s, despite the popularity of the Hungarian cause amongst the general public, the government continued to discourage activity connected to the Hungarian independence movement, such as Hungarian approaches to the Porte at the time of the Crimean War and to France at the time of the Italian War. Nor did British policy support other national movements: after the Crimean War the Principalities were occupied by Austria although they were then united in 1862 under Prince Cuza, despite the opposition of Turkey, Britain and Austria. The de facto independence of Serbia from Turkey was also recognised although largely as a result of French, rather than British, policy. In the case of Italian Unification, although the British cabinet tended to be Italophile, it was France who took the lead, whilst Britain adopted a position of conditional neutrality in the war of 1859.

By the early 1860s it came to the attention of the British government that there was increasing dissatisfaction in Hungary with the excesses of the Bach regime. Lord Augustus Loftus, who had become British Ambassador at Vienna in 1858, noted in his reminiscences that the loss of Lombardy and Venetia was of benefit to Austria but that ‘the question of Hungary presented difficulties of adjustment which appeared almost insurmountable’.³⁸ Questions about Hungary were again asked in parliament when a British diplomat, Mr. Graham Dunlop, perceived as friendly to the Hungarians, was recalled at the request of Count Rechberg, the Austrian Foreign Minister. Lord John Russell replied defensively to parliamentary critics, that the Hungarians demands for the Constitution of 1848 would lead to the dismemberment of the Austrian Empire. Then Palmerston, less critical than usual of the Austrians, in a well-known statement on British foreign policy of July 30th 1861

³⁸ Lord Augustus Loftus, *Diplomatic Reminiscences 1837-62*. vol.2. London: Cassell and Co. 1892. pp.149-154.

reaffirmed in the Commons that, 'We attach due importance to the maintenance of the Austrian Empire as a great power in the centre of Europe. We should consider it a great misfortune to Europe if that Empire were to be dissolved by any internal convulsion ---.It has not --- been deemed by the government right or fitting or their duty, to take part in any of the dissensions now unhappily prevailing between the Austrian government and the people of Hungary'.³⁹

Thus, by the 1860s 'Diplomats asked themselves what might replace the Habsburg monarchy and generally concluded that it was a question better not put'.⁴⁰ The exception to this was British support, albeit of a passive kind, for Italian Unification, to which Palmerston was a somewhat late convert. During his second premiership 1859-65, Palmerston's previously avowed policy of support for weak and struggling nations against the strong, was called into question: Britain snubbed Napoleon III's plans for a congress to discuss the pacification of Russian Poland and failed to support little Denmark against Prussia and Austria over the Schleswig-Holstein question in 1864. In fact by the time of Palmerston's death in 1865, Britain was moving towards an almost complete withdrawal from the affairs of Europe and Palmerston's 'balance of power' language had been challenged and discredited as an 'obsolete tradition'.⁴¹ Gladstone was able to refer to the British constitution, so strongly advocated to continental states in the Palmerstonian period, as 'a heap of absurdities' and an 'antiquated muddle'.⁴²

There was much debate about this withdrawal and perceived reduction in British influence in Europe, which may be traced as far back as Britain's poor performance in the

³⁹ *Hansard* 3rd Series, CLXIV, pp.1791-1793.

⁴⁰ K. Robbins, *Britain and Europe 1789-2005*. London: Hodder Arnold. 2005. p. 150.

⁴¹ T. Frank, *The British Image of Hungary*. Budapest: Loránd Eötvös University. 1976. p. 37.

⁴² *Ibid.*

Crimean War. The Queen regretted the possible reduction in British power, influence and prestige. W.R Greg, in an article in Fraser's Magazine, expressed the view that England's 'special work' was done and her fight for the 'protection of weaker nations against oppressive rulers had come to an end', now that 'nearly every nation had a parliament and a constitution'. England was no longer as 'unapproachably supreme' as she had once been, and was 'less feared than before' and should therefore 'retire from the post of supreme arbitress'.⁴³

Others expressed doubts as to what Britain's moral mission had, in reality, achieved. In an 1866 volume on British foreign policy, *Intervention and non-Intervention or the Foreign Policy of Great Britain from 1790-1865*, A.G Stapleton maintained, rather daringly, that Britain had lost her moral influence and was 'no longer trusted as she was'. One reason for this, according to Stapleton, was the official standpoint of the British government during the Hungarian Revolution and War of Independence of 1848-9, in which Britain had singularly failed to fulfil her mission to protect the weak against the strong.⁴⁴

Pragmatic considerations as ever, influenced British policy towards Europe. American affairs, Britain's growing colonial commitments as well as a preoccupation with such domestic matters as parliamentary reform, made intervention in Europe less likely. Lord Derby, a conservative, said of British cautiousness, which helped to thwart an attempted peace conference before the Franco-Prussian War that, 'though not wishing to adopt non-intervention in an absolute manner, we would yet abstain from armed

⁴³ K. Robbins, *Britain and Europe* ---, p.138.

⁴⁴ T. Frank, *The British Image of Hungary* ---, p.40; *Picturing Austria-Hungary* ---, p.6.

intervention'.⁴⁵ During this phase of withdrawal from European affairs Britain again perceived her interests best served in Central Europe by stability and the preservation of the status quo in the form of the Habsburg Empire. A settled Habsburg Empire became in British eyes even more desirable, so that Central Europe could be left safely in Austrian hands without any effort on the British part.

Given that goal, attention was once more directed on Hungary, recently engaged in resistance to constitutional changes proposed by the Imperial government. Clearly, a settlement between Austria and Hungary was desirable for British policy and a push in this direction was provided by the defeat of Austria at Sadowa in 1866. The Prussian victory destroyed the illusion of Austrian invulnerability. Although Britain had not been involved in and had not opposed German unification under Prussia, its realisation threatened a radical realignment in Central Europe. It led to further British fears of instability and to the view that the Habsburg Empire needed to be strengthened so as to maintain the 'balance'. In this respect Austria obviously would be more secure could she count upon the Hungarians. Another important consideration in British policy was the impending collapse of European Turkey: a strong Austrian Empire was favoured as its successor. Hungary's geographical position close to European Turkey further increased its significance for British interests.

The desire for a settled Habsburg Empire was especially strong in British financial quarters, 'economic links being notoriously the priority of the English'.⁴⁶ The point is illustrated by an article in the *Times* of October 25th 1864 which maintained, somewhat

⁴⁵ K. Robbins, *Britain and Europe ---*, p.36.

⁴⁶ R.J.W. Evans, 'Austria-Hungary and the Victorians', in R.J.W. Evans, D. Kovacs, E. Ivanikova (eds.), *Great Britain and Central Europe 1867-1914*. Bratislava: Veda. 2002.

optimistically, that the 'new era of diplomacy has fairly begun. The policy of the future is peace and the development of trade. The duties of the Foreign office are becoming more commercial'.⁴⁷ In the economic boom of the 1860s Britain became the most important destination for the Austrian Adriatic trade. John Roebuck, the radical parliamentarian, was for example, drawn into attempts to develop the Trieste trade, urging protectionist Austria to embrace free trade with Britain.⁴⁸

From a commercial point of view, Hungarian markets for British manufactures, such as rails for the new Hungarian railways, were of growing importance. Much of the commerce from the Danubian Principalities passed through Pest and Hungarian exports of grain, wool, wine and flour to Britain were growing.⁴⁹ Anglo-Austrian trade talks had begun between 1861-4 and it was pressure from British Chambers of Commerce that galvanised both governments into action. The leader of the British delegation was William Hutt, Vice-President of the Board of Trade, later replaced by Louis Mallet. The delegation also included Robert Morier, Secretary to the British Embassy in Berlin. Mallet and Morier were free traders, disciples of Cobden and had little sympathy for Austrian protectionism: they found the Hungarian Chambers of Commerce eager to co-operate.

Morier, who played an important part in the trade negotiations, was an experienced diplomat, with special expertise in German affairs. Whilst in Vienna for the trade talks in 1865, he was sent to Pest to compile reports on Hungarian politics for Lord Bloomfield, the British Ambassador at Vienna. His numerous and detailed despatches, reports and memoranda help to inform British policy more fully on the Hungarian question at this

⁴⁷ Frank T., *Picturing Austria-Hungary ---*, p.54.

⁴⁸ R.J.W. Evans, 'Austria Hungary and the Victorians', pp.13-14.

⁴⁹ K. Tüzes, 'Hungary and the Dual Monarchy as Reflected in British Diplomatic Materials' in *Great Britain and Central Europe ---*, p.135.

junction.⁵⁰ Morier found much in common with the Hungarian liberals and enjoyed good relations with Hungarian politicians, especially with those, who like himself, were critical of Bismarck. He was not, however, a supporter of Hungarian independence and was anxious to dispel memories of British sympathies for the Hungarians in 1848: at a meeting with Franz Joseph in Buda in 1866, he told the Emperor that his (Morier's) presence there 'would have very thoroughly convinced the Hungarians ---that not all Englishmen saw Hungarian affairs through the eyes of Kossuth'.⁵¹ He thought that the Hungarian Diet should remember that there was more at stake than the 'Magyar Utopias of the heroes of 1848'.⁵² In another despatch of January 15 to Lord Bloomfield he criticised the policies of the Hungarian national government of 1848-9 for their attitudes towards the nationalities as 'asserting on the one hand the extremest (sic) principles of democratic equality' and on the other as 'insisting upon the most absolute domination of the few over the many and which in the name of equality fought desperately for the supremacy of the national caste'.⁵³

It has been suggested that Morier's criticisms of Hungarian nationality policies make him the forerunner of R.W Seton-Watson, who made similar remarks in the early twentieth century.⁵⁴ These issues of national independence do not however appear to have been a major consideration in British policy. Indeed, the despatches of Lord Bloomfield from Vienna, in which he inserted his personal opinions, also reveal that in connection with the nationality question, in so far as Britain considered it at all, she was more likely to sympathise with the Dualist establishment than with Russian-tinged Slav nationalism. In the 400 reports Bloomfield sent from Vienna in 1867, he tended to support Austro-

⁵⁰ FO 7/703/70 Reports of Morier to Bloomfield; see also T. Frank, *Picturing Austria-Hungary* ---pp.185-291.

⁵¹ FO 7/703/7, Morier to Bloomfield, February 4th 1866.

⁵² FO 7/703/6, Morier to Bloomfield, February 2nd. 1866.

⁵³ FO 7/703/1, Morier to Bloomfield, January 15th 1866.

⁵⁴ T. Frank, *Picturing Austria-Hungary* ---, p.167.

Hungarian hegemony within the Empire, observing in May 1867 that constitutionalism required the ‘merger of some of the smaller nationalities in the stronger’.⁵⁵ In the British view Hungary was also likely to ‘react in a sensitive manner to the Eastern Question and Russian affairs’ and to display a ‘watchful hostility to the machinations of Tsarist Russia’.⁵⁶ A strong monarchy incorporating Hungary was viewed as a kind of cordon-sanitaire, protecting Western Europe against the Russian Empire: ‘let Hungary be mighty as a natural defender of the Balkans against both the Turks and their cunning Russian liberator’, wrote Professor Freeman of Oxford.⁵⁷ Even the *Times*, an old opponent of Hungarian independence, noted on June 17th 1867, that ‘an old-new great power’ had been born and was now ready to step into the political arena with a role to play in curbing pan-Slavism and the ambitions of Russia.

There was much support in the British press and in government circles for the *Ausgleich* of 1867, which the British convinced themselves represented a ‘Compromise’ and which in the British view granted the Hungarians what they had wanted in 1848, whilst at the same time securing the great power status of the Habsburg Empire. The ‘Compromise’ thus became in British eyes the ‘realisation of the Hungarian ideals of 1848, the ‘consummation of the great and long fight for independence’, a ‘return to the national state sanctioned by history’, as well as a ‘triumph for British political and tactical thinking’.⁵⁸ The Hungarian statesman Deák, one of the architects of the ‘Compromise,’ was described in the *Spectator* as a ‘Hungarian Whig of the very best type’.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ R. Okey, ‘British Impressions of the Serbo-Croat Speaking Lands of the Habsburg Monarchy’, in R.J.W. Evans, D. Kovacs, E. Ivanikova (eds.), *Britain and Central Europe* ---, p. 61.

⁵⁶ K. Tüzes, ‘Hungary and the Dual Monarchy’ ---, p.138.

⁵⁷ T. Frank, *Picturing Austria-Hungary*---, p. 167.

⁵⁸ K. Tüzes, ‘Hungary and the Dual Monarchy---’, p.225.

⁵⁹ T. Frank, *The British Image of Hungary* ---, p.225.

British liberals, as well as Hungarian ones, convinced themselves that the ‘Compromise’ represented a movement towards liberal representative government and that it followed in the pattern of the supposed parallel between the constitutional development of Britain (in 1688) and Hungary. Even the Hungarophile Englishman, Arthur J. Patterson, so entranced in his youth by the events of 1848-9, urged the Hungarians to move on: ‘Remember we do not live in the days of Rákóczy (sic) – nay we do not live in the days of Széchenyi and Kossuth. Remember if the Hungarians do not move on, they will be trodden underfoot’.⁶⁰ W.J.W Wyatt’s book *Hungarian Celebrities* (1871) significantly contained chapters on Franz Joseph and the Empress Elizabeth but not on Kossuth.

Thus British liberal opinion in the period 1848-1867 was always sympathetic to the Hungarian national cause and anxious for justice for the Hungarians. Yet the considerations of expediency and the tendency to support stability and the existing order by which László Péter has characterised British foreign policy in this period, meant that Britain never supported Hungarian independence (or indeed most other national independence movements). British support for the *Ausgleich* of 1867, through which the British convinced themselves justice had been done to the Hungarians, embodied both these tendencies and had the additional advantage of being underpinned by growing commercial interests in the area. A favourable Foreign Office view of Hungary survived into the early twentieth century until British liberal opinion under changed circumstances underwent another reversal.

⁶⁰ T. Frank, *Picturing Austria-Hungary* --- , p.116, Letter from Arthur J. Patterson to Imre Révész, October 11th 1869.

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