

R. W. Seton-Watson's Changing Views on the National Question of the Habsburg Monarchy and the European Balance of Power

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Europe is a delicate organism, in which, if one member suffers, all the other members suffer with it.

R. W. Seton-Watson, *The Scottish Review*, 18 January 1906

ROBERT WILLIAM SETON-WATSON, historian, writer on current affairs, founder of the School of Slavonic and East European Studies, has been widely recognized as a champion of the rights of Central and Eastern Europe's small nations. His vigorous protests in the British press against Russian policy in Finland in 1904 were, as he recalled in his memoirs,¹ 'my first serious letters to the press'.² Two years later he took up the cause of the Habsburg Monarchy's nationalities, particularly those of Hungary. He felt a strong affinity towards the Slovak and later the Czech nations. During the First World War he steered a vigorous campaign for the replacement of Austria-Hungary, which he had come to regard as an unreformable oppressive state, by independent democratic nation-states. *The Making of a New Europe*, the title of Hugh and Christopher Seton-Watson's panoramic biography, testifies to the spirit of a Gladstonian liberal intellectual and, imbued with a strong sense of justice, speaks up for the underdog.

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¹ The memoirs, on the first twenty-seven years of his life, written in the 1940s, well over thirty years after the events, were inevitably coloured by his memories of the two wars. Extracts from them were published in *The Making of a New Europe, R. W. Seton-Watson and the Last Years of Austria-Hungary*, by Hugh and Christopher Seton-Watson, London, 1981 (hereafter, *MNE*). This work provides a basic reference that has replaced much of the earlier works. On Seton-Watson's relations with Slovak leaders see his account written in 1942 and published in *R. W. Seton-Watson and His Relations with the Czechs and Slovaks*, ed. Jan Rychlik et al. [Bratislava], 1995, pp. 109–15.

² *MNE*, p. 16. The letter which *The Spectator* published on 13 February 1904 was, for instance, a detailed factual account of the 'reign of terror' inflicted on Finland by Russia — not a civilized but a 'barbarian state'. Finland was not, however, the subject of Seton-Watson's first political letter to the press. *The Spectator* published in June 1902 his letter, sent from New College, Oxford, where he was an undergraduate, in which Seton-Watson protested against the view that Germany had become 'our new foe' (*MNE*, p. 13). See further below.

The sources of this moral revulsion are not hard to find. An earnest Presbyterian Scot, raised in a family of 'bonnet lairds', yeomen farmers, Seton-Watson was deeply influenced by religious literature. Contemporary church affairs also engaged his interest:

I wrote several letters to *The Scotsman* and *The Scottish Review*, under the pseudonym of Laicus Juvenis, on 'Presbyterian Reunion — a Pressing Need'. The scandalous sectarianism of the Highlands had appalled me.³

Above all, Seton-Watson was impressed with a strong sense of Scottish national identity. As R. R. Betts observed, he was

the heir on his father's side to the commercial and on his mother's to the romantic genius of his Scots ancestry. His great interest in his Seton forebears kept alive his Scottish feeling, and perhaps made him the more sympathetic to the rights and sentiments of small nations.⁴

As he explained in his memoirs, his first publication, *Scotland Forever! and Other Poems* (1898), had been 'written in the high Byronic style'.⁵ Yet Seton-Watson did not become a narrow Scottish nationalist: he was anglicized by education at Winchester and New College, Oxford. His tutor, H. A. L. Fisher, set him off on a road to acquire an unusual breadth of historical knowledge, and also a taste for high literature, French, German, Italian, as well as strong liberal political attitudes. His liberalism, however, had more to do with the communitarian Hippolyte Taine, whom he greatly admired,⁶ than with the dry utilitarian individualism of, for example, John Stuart Mill. Thus religion, nationality, and liberal education, reinforcing each other, all predisposed Seton-Watson towards the defence of the underdog in national conflicts.

Should we, therefore, regard him, as has commonly been the case, pre-eminently as a communitarian liberal, pleading the cause of the weak? In doing so we would not do justice to the man, for this view ignores the wider context of his thoughts and his perception of Europe as a whole as 'a delicate organism', without which we cannot explain his repeatedly and radically changing attitudes towards particular national groups.⁷ Obviously his background and education cannot, by themselves, explain why he became permanently interested in the national conflicts of the Danubian region rather than those of East Prussia, for example, or Russia or Scandinavia.

³ The letters were sent between August 1904 and December 1906. See *MNE*, p. 12.

⁴ Obituary by R. R. Betts in *Slavonic and East European Review*, 30, 1951–52, p. 252.

⁵ *MNE*, p. 9.

⁶ See his memoirs, *MNE*, p. 17. He wrote in the Preface of *Munich and the Dictators*, London, 1939: 'I have not written from the angle of any party. Brought up as a Conservative, I was a Liberal for thirty years, and then from 1931 till September 1938 a supporter of the National Government', p. viii.

⁷ That he radically changed his views is generally recognized. See, for example, G. H. Bolsover's obituary in *The Proceedings of the British Academy*, vol. 37, London, 1951, p. 345.

Germanophile

At every point in his long career, Seton-Watson's views and concerns on particular national conflicts tied in with and were shaped by general perceptions of the European political scene. Around the turn of the nineteenth century, the years in which his interests matured, Europe was rife with national conflicts between and within states. Russia had conflicts with Austria-Hungary over the Balkans and with Great Britain in the Middle East. Germany and France were permanent adversaries. Britain had conflicts with France over interests in Africa. But the central feature of international relations was the growing power of Germany and its rivalry with Britain, exacerbated by the naval race.⁸ An increasing section of British society perceived Germany as a challenge and a threat.

For a liberal like Seton-Watson the central question was how, notwithstanding the strained relationship nourished on both sides by the Jingoist press, stability and international peace could be preserved. The answer was, more or less, the conventional one: through the maintenance of the *existing* balance of power in Europe. The growing strength of Germany, if one examined the issue impartially, argued Seton-Watson, constituted a threat neither to Britain nor to the international order. Clearly, it was his attitude to Germany and the need for a balance of power in Europe that explain Seton-Watson's entrée into European politics. They provide the key to understanding his shifting interests and shed light on the views he was to acquire on small nations — a point that has been largely missed by the literature on our subject. The fact itself has always been recognized that he was, and remained for some time, an admirer of Germany — 'a Germanophile', to use his own epithet — and a strong supporter of British-German friendship at a time when conflicts flared up between the two countries. The explanatory value of Seton-Watson's attitude to Germany has not, however, been explored.

A further point is that Seton-Watson's Germanophile stance, far from putting him politically beyond the pale, was not even considered outlandish at the time. Certainly, the press, public, and many diplomats could be labelled Germanophobe. Nevertheless, academia in Britain,

⁸ See the chapter 'The Flowering of the Antagonism 1902–1906', by Paul Kennedy, in his *The Rise of the Anglo-German Antagonism 1860–1914*, London, 1982 (hereafter, *The Rise*), pp. 251–88. British imperial self-confidence began to ebb with Lord Salisbury's departure from office in the summer of 1902. Some Foreign Office diplomats were alarmed at Britain's isolation: see Zara S. Steiner, *The Foreign Office and Foreign Policy 1898–1914*, Cambridge, 1969 (hereafter, *Foreign Office*), pp. 47 and 69. It was at this time that Seton-Watson sent his first letter to *The Spectator* on Germany (see below). Antagonism to Germany did not become general even after the *entente* with France. Lord Lansdowne, the Foreign Secretary, 'continued to believe in the vanishing possibility of an Anglo-German understanding', *Foreign Office*, p. 48.

not much concerned with politics, held German culture and science (well beyond the circles of neo-Hegelian intellectuals) in very high regard.⁹ A happy graphomaniac and a compulsive writer of letters to the London and the Edinburgh press,¹⁰ Seton-Watson changed his views very gradually. We shall have no difficulty in retracing the steps of his political progression.

From 1902, the independent, financially secure young scholar travelled extensively in Europe, studying history and politics, learnt fluently the major West European languages (French, German and Italian, although he never acquired any East European language), but was particularly interested in Germany where, from 1898, he had stayed for long periods. He admired German culture and wrote a prize-winning essay *Maximilian I, Holy Roman Emperor*.¹¹ In the aftermath of the Boer War he was deeply concerned about the widening rift between German and British public opinion. In a *Spectator* letter he took issue with another correspondent who had referred to Germany as 'our new foe' and argued that 'the time has come when we should leave off talking cant about the blood-relationship of the two nations'.¹² Seton-Watson took him on:

So far from agreeing that to talk of the blood-relationship is to talk cant, I believe that now more than ever is the time to foster good feeling between the two nations. The obstacle to this lies not in the German people but in the German Press.

In spite of 'outrageous lies in their papers', when staying in Germany he met with 'the kindest possible treatment' from every German he came across.¹³

Britain settled her differences with France in the Entente Cordiale of 1904 after which the naval rivalry between Britain and Germany became bitter. Yet Seton-Watson did not modify his views. After Kaiser William II's visit to Tangier, Seton-Watson set out in a long letter to *The Spectator* his ideas on Anglo-German relations.¹⁴ He blamed the Emperor rather than the *Reichskanzler* for the visit, the aim of which was possibly 'to test the solidity of the entente cordiale, if not to sow distrust between France and Great Britain'. He argued, however, that such an attempt was only natural on the part of an isolated Germany and did not necessarily involve hostility towards England. Seton-Watson

⁹ See the introductory chapter of Stuart Wallace, *War and the Image of Germany, British Academics 1914-1918*, Edinburgh, 1988 (hereafter, *War*), pp. 1-28, and on the attitudes of James Bryce, for instance, pp. 174-75.

¹⁰ Seton-Watson until 1908, rather fortuitously, used either his own name or the *nom de plume* 'Scotus Viator'.

¹¹ Published in London in 1902.

¹² *The Spectator*, 14 June 1902.

¹³ *The Spectator*, 21 June 1902. See also *MNE*, pp. 13-14.

¹⁴ *The Spectator*, 27 May 1905.

explained that ‘expansion is inevitable for a country which is already over-populated, and is growing at an alarming rate every year’. This expansion might, moreover, be purely commercial, ‘in which case she could not be a menace politically to any of her neighbours’, or:

She may place before herself the ideal of expansion in Europe at the expense of the Austrian Empire, Holland, and Switzerland. But such a policy bristles with so many dangers and difficulties that only the wildest Pan-German enthusiasts can be said to take it seriously.

Or — again — they might decide upon colonial expansion. Germanophobes assumed, Seton-Watson went on, that the Kaiser’s naval policy was directed towards this goal and then drew the hasty and unjust conclusion that this goal entailed an anti-British course. This was not the case:

There are but two obvious outlets for German colonial ambitions, — Brazil and Asia Minor; and in neither case would she be running counter to British interests [. . .] there is not a single German of sense or position who desires a policy of aggrandisement against Great Britain [. . .] we should learn to credit the German Government with [. . .] honesty of purpose and to dismiss from our minds the almost childish suspicion which has recently characterised the Press in its comments on our German neighbours [. . .] The future has far less to fear from German expansion than from our adoption of a selfish and unreasoning policy of ‘Hands off!’ We already have far more than we can digest [. . .] grudging opposition is unworthy of us [. . .] will create resentment against us [. . .] and will supply the strongest arguments in favour of a huge fleet and an aggressive *Weltpolitik*.

There could be no greater disaster for Germany, for Britain and for world peace than a struggle between the two countries. Seton-Watson listed the obstacles to a friendship only to dismiss them as imaginary or transient. Then he went on:

A more real danger seems to lie in the Pan-German League and its virulent propaganda. Should its programme ever be officially adopted, no other course would be left to us save war to the knife. But such a society can never carry weight with men of sense or feeling, and the notoriety which it enjoys is quite out of proportion to its influence in Germany. Indeed, I have met many Germans who had scarcely heard of its existence, and none who did not regard it with equal contempt and disapproval.

These obstacles are imaginary or passing. Our common interests, our ties of kinship and religion, which it is the fashion of today to ignore, are intimate and enduring. The three great Teutonic nations — Britain, America, and Germany — are the natural allies of the future; and such an alliance, once realised (not on paper, but in fact), would be almost as great a gain to the peace of the world as a European Federation. But Great Britain has a further rôle to play, if she is true to her possibilities. The days of the predominance of a single Power are past, probably forever, and this is one of the most hopeful signs of the future. The old dream of Cardinal

Wolsey — England holding the balance of power in Europe — is less fanciful today than it was four centuries ago; for England is the natural mediator between France and Germany. A *rapprochement* with Germany, so far from causing injury to the *entente cordiale*, would only enhance its value, by laying stress on its essentially peaceful aims.¹⁵

In the same issue the editor of *The Spectator*, St Loe Strachey welcomed, in a massive editorial, the 'very able plea' of Seton-Watson for a better understanding between Germany and Britain as well as 'the excellent spirit in which it was written' but, alas, could not agree. The ordinary Germans? Yes, they were sound, perhaps among the soundest in the world, but they were not free, and they did not count for much in a country which was only nominally constitutional. It was the rulers of Germany who counted and whose aspirations had to be watched with vigilance.¹⁶

Some time had yet to pass before Seton-Watson came round to this view. 'No one is more delighted than the present writer at our new friendship with France', he wrote in September in another *Spectator* letter. But 'have we merely exchanged one enemy for another, and is Germany now to be the *bête noire* instead of France?'. He blamed the Germanophobia of the British press and went on to argue again for 'supplementing our friendship with France by a *rapprochement* with Germany'. The obstacles to friendship should be removed by recognizing the German need for colonies:

If we admit frankly and loyally the German need for colonies, and make it clear that we shall not oppose its realisation, we shall not only prick the Pan-German bubble (so far as Britain is concerned), but shall remove the temptation to build ships which the Jingo section of our Press is instilling into German minds.¹⁷

Strachey again disagreed. He argued that the Pan-German press had begun its campaign against Britain during the South Africa War and had not been restrained by the German government. The German people as a whole deserved sympathy but the autocratic and military forces that controlled their government 'must be watched with anxious vigilance by all who care for peace, freedom and popular government'.

¹⁵ Ibid. In part quoted in *MNE*, p. 19.

¹⁶ *The Spectator* consistently held this line until the outbreak of war. See Kennedy, *The Rise*, particularly p. 399. Also, *The Spectator* took the threat of the Pan-German movement to peace in Europe seriously from the 1890s (see, for example, issues of 18 June 1898, 13 August 1898, 19 January 1901, 16 March 1901, 20 April 1901, 27 April 1901, 22 February 1902). On 19 April 1902 *The Spectator* wrote that 'The Magyars are greatly irritated and alarmed by the spread of Pan-Germanism, which they say will alienate the two millions of Germans now living in Hungary, who hitherto have been steady allies of the dominant race'. In January 1905 *The Spectator* watched the outcome of the Hungarian elections from the point of view of its effect on Pan-German plans, 28 January 1905.

¹⁷ *The Spectator*, 9 September 1905.

Seton-Watson's next *Spectator* letter was sent from Vienna where he had arrived for the first time on 4 November 1905. His complaints about the vicious circle of misunderstanding between Britain and Germany acquired new dimensions: namely the Eastern question and Austria-Hungary.

The Japanese Alliance and the *entente cordiale*, brilliant achievements as they are, are not enough; they must be supplemented by an understanding with Germany. Last September I ventured to urge that this was a necessary sequel to the *entente* with France [. . .] Now that Russia is weakened by internal troubles, Anglo-German relations form the pivot of the European situation. Morocco alone presents dangers enough; but at a time when the whole Turkish question may be raised at any moment in an acute form, and when the political outlook in Austria-Hungary is still so uncertain, it is more essential than ever that Great Britain and Germany should go hand-in-hand.¹⁸

Seton-Watson developed these ideas in an article for *The Scottish Review*.¹⁹ The independent existence of a reformed Austria-Hungary was now, in his view, an essential safeguard in a *rapprochement* with Germany, but he was also concerned by 'the shadow of revolution' which hung over Europe:

The paralysis of Russia affords many causes for alarm by disturbing the balance of power, which alone has rendered peace in Europe possible.

'Staggering under the effects of internal troubles', the Russian colossus would probably soon be regenerated, and then 'European Turkey will be thrown into the melting pot'. That situation might obtain 'in half a dozen other simple ways — by a better aimed bomb at Yildiz, by a fresh rising in Macedonia, by an outbreak of Moslem fanaticism'. He questioned whether the British had a policy for such a contingency.

Without Germany no solution is possible; and with Britain and Germany ranged on opposite sides, general war is sooner or later inevitable.

However, in the Middle East Britain had a 'clear opportunity of satisfying the German yearning for "a place in the sun" [. . .] and thus of removing the restless element in Continental politics'. Russia, for its part, could be bought off by allowing her to take a large share. He went on:

Britain's opposition to such a scheme would be natural enough, if the extravagant dream of the Pan-Germans were ever to be realised, and

¹⁸ *The Spectator*, 30 December 1905. Strachey again disagreed: alluding to the first Moroccan crisis he asked, 'how we are to obtain a guarantee that Germany will not once more endanger the peace of the whole world [. . .] Germany will be less, not more, amenable to control if we fling ourselves at her head and vow eternal friendship'.

¹⁹ 'The European Outlook', dated 30 December 1905, which appeared on 18 January 1906. On Seton-Watson's first experiences in Vienna and in Hungary, see the comprehensive account in *MNE*, pp. 28–56.

Austria-Hungary and the Balkan States could be absorbed in a revived Teutonic Empire. But the Habsburg Monarchy is the pivot of the balance of power, and its disappearance would be a European calamity [. . .] So long then as Austria-Hungary exists we can view German expansion on the Euphrates with equanimity.

Thus, the European balance of power, Anglo-German understanding, and the internal stability of Austria all appeared to be tied together.

To sum up, from at least 1902 Seton-Watson thought that European peace could be preserved only through *rapprochement* between Britain and Germany which was possible because German aims were legitimate and peaceful. A condition of *rapprochement* was the recognition of Germany's need to acquire 'a place in the sun' outside Europe which would not hurt British interests. The Middle East offered an obvious possibility. The ultra-nationalistic, Anglophobe association, the Pan-German League (*Alldeutscher Verband*, established under a different name in 1891) seemed to be an obstacle to friendship. The League pressed for naval, colonial, and territorial expansion in Europe to turn Germany into a world power. The Pan-German 'movement' was the bugbear of the British, and even more the French press. The works of André Chéradame²⁰ and others scared the public with the possibility of a Europe dominated by Germany. For Seton-Watson the Pan-German movement served as a litmus paper on his attitude to Germany. As we have seen, before he went to Vienna, he did not take the influence of the movement very seriously. Once in Vienna, however, he began to see the problem as more complex and as affecting the internal organization of Austria. He was now concerned with the Pan-German designs on the European countries, notably the Austrian half of the Habsburg domains where, after the turn of the century, nearly a third of the Germans supported the League. Seton-Watson had earlier dismissed the *Alldeutsch* ambitions as a 'boundless field for vague and flighty speculation' which 'only the wildest Pan-German enthusiast' could take seriously. It would 'never carry weight with men of sense or feeling' (27 May 1905), and was only a 'bubble to be pricked' (September 1905). The British would not allow Germany to acquire a presence in the Middle East unless they were assured that there was no serious danger of Austria being absorbed into Germany as a country lying on the route to the Middle East. If that situation ever obtained, the domination of the Continent by Germany would follow, disrupting the balance of power, and the world would be heading towards war. Peace in Europe could be maintained only if the Pan-German

²⁰ André Chéradame, *L'Europe et la question d'Autriche au seuil du XXe siècle*, Paris, 1901. This book had an immediate impact in London. Louis Leger and Ernest Denis, both academics, were the leading authorities on the subject in France.

movement was demonstrably without a future in Austria-Hungary. This presupposed that Austria-Hungary was internally strong. But was it? Seton-Watson was determined to find out.

Hungarian Independentist

When he arrived in Vienna in early November 1905 the Empire was going through its most serious internal crisis since the 1860s. The crown and the Hungarian parliament were at loggerheads. The crisis was precipitated by a unique event. In January 1905 István Tisza's Liberal government went to the country with a solid majority in parliament and returned after the elections with a minority. (Apart from 1905, no other government ever lost a general election in Hungary before 1990). The new parliament, the Coalition, led by Apponyi and Kossuth's 48-er Independentists, had a vision to transform the 1867 constitutional Settlement between Franz Joseph and the Hungarian parliament into a 'personal union' with the rest of the Empire. Notably, they demanded army reforms, primarily the replacement of German by Hungarian as the language of service and command in the regiments of Hungary. Their demands threatened to split the army into 'Austrian' and 'Hungarian' parts and trespassed upon the monarch's prerogatives. Accordingly, Franz Joseph prorogued parliament and, as the Coalition was unwilling to take office on his terms, he appointed the Fejérváry cabinet, which had no parliamentary support. Franz Joseph insisted that the law was on his side, for the 1867 constitutional Settlement had left army organization entirely in his hands and a united army was a vital guarantee of the Empire's own unity.

The reputation of Hungarian politicians was so firmly established that, at the beginning of the crisis, public opinion and the press in Western Europe were on the side of the Hungarian parliament rather than on Franz Joseph's. Before the crisis Hungary was seen in London by politicians and the press as stable, progressive, liberal and anticlerical; it was even partly Protestant. The impressive centralized state of the 'Magyar caste' was understood as a bulwark against Pan-Slav and Pan-German aspirations.²¹ Social and national inequalities were

²¹ On this see Géza Jeszenszky, *Az elveszett presztizs*, 2nd edn., Budapest, 1994 (hereafter, *Az elveszett*), ch. 3. The views of *The Times* were generally shared in London. 'Austria has been sinking into political chaos, while Hungary, in spite of many drawbacks, has made wonderful progress in industry and commerce and, at the same time, has exhibited stability of her institutions and the common sense of her people. She is now coming to be recognised as the predominant partner. The racial jealousies and the party feuds of the Austrian provinces have been steadily working in favour of the transference of the centre of political power in the Dual Monarchy from Vienna to Budapest', *The Times*, 27 September 1899. *The Spectator* emphasized Hungary's political homogeneity (in sharp contrast to perceptions after the crisis!), that it had become 'the unquestioned master power of the Empire' and that Hungarian expansion through Salonica might reach Asia Minor where it would clash with German interests, 30 September 1899.

merely accepted facts, for democracy and national equality were not yet perceived as political desiderata. Austria, by contrast, was increasingly perceived in London as the soft underbelly of the Empire: the Badeni crisis of 1897 left it in chaos, suffering from a disorderly parliament where sometimes, instead of arguments, inkpots were thrown about. Moreover, within the western half of the Monarchy Slavonic federalist trends were linked in the public mind with Russian ambitions, and nationalist trends with Pan-German orientations. As the Hungarian crisis unfolded, however, these assumptions were tested and, although it took time for the puerile Hungarian parliament to fritter away its (partly undeserved) reputation, ultimately reversed.²²

Bjørnson, the Norwegian writer, who was to attack the Hungarian government over the oppression of nationalities at the Hague Peace Congress later in 1907 had, earlier in 1905, been very sympathetic to Hungarian aspirations for enlarged Home Rule which he saw as paralleling Norway's own aspiration to attain independence from Sweden.²³ *The Times*, the paper which, in those days, presented hard information about the politics of other countries, was giving a blow-by-blow account of the crisis of the Habsburg Monarchy. Henry Wickham Steed, the Vienna correspondent of the paper, and a man who later acquired a solidly 'anti-Hungarian' reputation, was not at all anti-Hungarian before the constitutional crisis. He reproved the 48-ers and Apponyi in particular but was a firm supporter of the Liberals and an admirer of Tisza. Steed regretted Tisza's defeat but in his reports even he was for burying the 1867 Settlement. Steed agreed that Franz Joseph should make concessions to the Coalition and engineer a new system through compromise.²⁴ Only after the appointment of the Fejérváry government in June 1905 did Steed turn the heat on the Coalition for having stood out for impracticable army reforms, instead of discharging its constitutional duty to take office. Then from July onwards the Coalition received the full thunder of *The Times* for plunging the

²² *The Saturday Review* warned on 4 March 1905: 'Hungary can have no future as a great power when standing alone [. . .] One half of Hungary is not Magyar in origin but the dominant race is by far the most cohesive element in the Austrian Empire.' And later: 'If Hungary gives the signal for Austrian disintegration, she will do as grave a disservice to the balance of power as to herself.'

²³ Letter to *The Times*, 14 April 1905, about the dissolution of the union between Sweden and Norway.

²⁴ From Our Own Correspondent (hereafter, FOOC) 1, 5 and 14 February 1905, *The Times*. For Steed's account of the crisis see his memoirs: H. W. Steed, *Through Thirty Years 1892-1922*, 2 vols, London, 1924 (hereafter, *Thirty Years*), 1, pp. 219-25. In late 1903 Steed reported to Moberly Bell at Printing House Square (PHS) that he was learning Hungarian and hoped 'to break the neck of the language in six months', *The History of 'The Times' 1884-1912*, London, 1947 (hereafter, *The History of 'The Times'*), p. 402. The editors of the volume opined that 'British observers, including some at PHS, were still biased by a sentimental liking for the nation of Kossuth', *ibid.*, p. 478. However, Kossuth had precious little to do with the pro-Hungarian attitude in London.

Monarchy into a deep crisis by its refusal to negotiate a compromise over the Hungarian language of command — a tool by which it would magyarize the non-Magyar races.²⁵ Thus Steed turned against the Hungarian politicians only after the 67-ers had lost control and the 48-er ‘separatists’ had become the dominant force in an increasingly chauvinistic Budapest parliament. Once he made that turn the oppression of the non-Magyars of Hungary began to figure as a major theme in Steed’s dispatches. It was important too that he had been an implacable critic of Berlin even before he arrived in Vienna in late 1902 and, in contrast to Seton-Watson, had always taken Pan-German aspirations seriously.²⁶

Knowing his attitude to Germany and his assessment of the Pan-German movement which, as we have seen, was very different from Steed’s, Seton-Watson was, not unexpectedly, won over to the side of the Coalition in its conflict with the crown.²⁷ To say, as British and Hungarian historians habitually do, that when Seton-Watson became interested in the Monarchy he was at first ‘pro-Hungarian’ is missing the point. Magyar rule in Hungary, before the crisis, was generally accepted in Britain as beneficial to the Habsburg monarchy and by extension to the balance in Europe. The salient point that begs for explanation is why Seton-Watson lent support for over a year to a political course that aimed to replace the 1867 Dualist system with full blown Home Rule, the system of so-called ‘pure personal union’ demanded by the Independentists. Did he hope that an independent Hungary would be an effective barrier against the spread of the Pan-German movement in the monarchy? That he did may be inferred from what we have already established about his politics although the

²⁵ See *The Times*, 5 July and after.

²⁶ The ambitious young journalist, H. W. Steed, always scheming, ‘had an interest in affairs that at times recalled the active politician rather than the detached observer’ (*The History of ‘The Times’*, p. 283). In vain he was warned by Printing House Square to remain impartial (*ibid.*, p. 284). Steed intimated to Moberly Bell, Managing Director at Printing House Square: ‘I don’t want to lose touch with Italy, because I think that half the schemes of the Pan-Germanists will be upset if a good understanding can be restored and preserved between Rome and Vienna. We have no interest, ditto Italians certainly have none, in seeing Prussia put her hand on Trieste.’ 29 September 1902, New Printing House Square (NPHS), Steed Papers, Box 1. On Trialism he wrote three years later: ‘I am not at all sure that the F[rantz] F[erdinand] policy is not the best antidote to Pan-Germanism, though the application of the antidote may involve the smashing of the Magyars unless they come to their senses.’ H. W. Steed to Valentine Chirol, 6 October 1905, NPHS Steed Papers, Box 2. Even after this he adumbrates that the Magyars, within two years, will have a *modus vivendi* with the non-Magyars and together they will provide ‘an effectual break’ on Pan-Germanism. Letter to Moberly Bell, 14 July 1908, NPHS, Steed Papers Box 2. For a comprehensive account of the collapse of Hungary’s liberal image in London, see Jeszenszky, *Az elveszett*, pp. 175–99.

²⁷ Before they became close associates, at their tense first meeting in December 1905, Seton-Watson and Steed did not see eye to eye on the political issues the Monarchy faced. Steed alluded to this in ‘Tributes to R. W. Seton-Watson: A Symposium’, *Slavonic and East European Review*, June 1952, pp. 331–32.

available evidence is only indirect. Hungary was widely regarded before the constitutional crisis in Western Europe and especially in London, including *The Spectator* (see note 16 above), as a serious obstacle to German expansion. Seton-Watson himself was of course keenly aware of the active anti-Magyar propaganda by the 'Pan-German League' and of the Hungarian reprisals against the movement in the Banat and Transylvania.²⁸ Further, in a *Spectator* letter,²⁹ Seton-Watson writes 'strange as it may sound' (!) Hungary would be the only conceivable ally of an expanded Germany.³⁰ It may also be relevant that one of the often repeated claims made by H. W. Steed was that the dependence of Hungary on Prussia was something that had to be 'discovered' (i.e. it was obscured by the generally assumed façade of an anti-German Hungarian attitude).³¹

Seton-Watson certainly expected improved political stability in the Monarchy through the meeting of Hungarian aspirations. For quite a while he was a fellow traveller of the Hungarian Independentist cause. Was it a sign of Seton-Watson's affinity with the Magyars that he compiled a genealogical table taking his Seton ancestry right back to a king of Scotland, to Philip III of France and thence to András II of Hungary and Árpád?³² Seton-Watson regarded the non-parliamentary Fejérváry government with contempt. In a *Spectator* letter signed 'Scotus Viator'³³ he compared the situation in Hungary to that of England in 1641. (The study of the English Civil War in his early years left, as he wrote, a 'permanent mark on me'.³⁴) If when parliament met it was again prorogued, Baron Fejérváry's continuance in office would finally become impossible.

One does not need to search far in English history for a similar situation; the incidents of the Grand Remonstrance or of the Five Members might be repeated with equally momentous results. The only alternative policy is Dissolution, and while this involves infinitely greater risks, it is the course most likely to be pursued.

But the Government did not dare to appeal to the country:

²⁸ 'Scotus Viator' [R. W. Seton-Watson], *Racial Problems in Hungary*, London, 1908 (hereafter, *Racial Problems*), p. 403.

²⁹ *The Spectator*, 24 February 1906.

³⁰ See below p. 669.

³¹ Dependence on Germany 'was the essence of the Dual system', wrote Steed, 'though few foreign statesmen perceived it then or afterwards. It was one, if not the chief, of the underlying realities in the Habsburg domains for which I had been seeking but which had again and again escaped me until the collapse of the Magyar resistance under the threat of universal suffrage, and the effects of that threat upon Austria, revealed it to me', that is, in the Spring of 1906. H. W. Steed, *Thirty Years*, 1, p. 225.

³² The author has received a copy from Hugh Seton-Watson.

³³ *The Spectator*, 27 January 1906.

³⁴ *MNE*, p. 8.

Dissolution must be an attempt to govern without Parliament, — that is *against* the Constitution; and what this might lead to no man living can foresee.

Were Deák's work in constructing the 1867 Settlement to be destroyed, Seton-Watson went on, the confidence of the Hungarian people in Franz Joseph would be frittered away:

Baron Fejérváry's calculation, that a Radical programme, with universal suffrage as its tit-bit, would win over the masses for the government, has proved signally false; and the Coalition leaders can count upon the almost unanimous support of the nation. But it is peculiarly unfortunate that the Hungarian crisis should reach its height at the very moment when the Constitution in Austria is to be placed on a democratic basis, and when the most far-reaching but as yet uncertain changes lie already in the near future.³⁵

In conclusion, Seton-Watson connected the monarchy's crisis to the balance of power and Pan-German aspirations:

The paralysis of the Dual Monarchy is one aspect of current European politics which has not perhaps received sufficient attention in England, and this is the more surprising since Vienna is the real pivot of the balance of power. Austrian weakness cuts both ways. It deprives Germany of her chief military ally in the event of a war, and, on the other hand, it offers a permanent temptation to the predatory instincts of the Pan-German League, whose 'dovecoats' (veritable sucking doves!) are more than usually stirred by Baron von Gautsch's project of electoral reform. The relations of Austria and Germany deserve careful study at the present juncture, and not least from those who, like myself, are strongly Germanophil in sympathy.

On 19 February the Hungarian parliament was dissolved with military assistance, an event that increased Seton-Watson's enthusiasm for the Coalition's cause at a time when other political observers threw up their hands in despair because of Hungarian foolishness. In a *Scottish Review* article on the crisis³⁶ he wrote: 'Hungary lies once more under an absolutist regime'. Parliament was subjected to an indignity comparable only to what happened under Charles I in England. The king had the right to dissolve but the manner in which it was done was 'glaringly illegal'. The proceedings 'savour far more of autocratic Russia than of a State whose constitution is as ancient as our own'. Then he produced arguments, which were better and indeed more radical than the ones advanced by the Coalition leaders.

The mere fact that such an incident is possible is an overwhelming proof that Hungary does *not* as yet enjoy the status of a sovereign constitutional

³⁵ This is a reference to the plan of the Gautsch government concerning the introduction of universal suffrage.

³⁶ Signed on 12 March 1906, and see also Jeszenszky, *Az elveszett*, p. 196.

State, and that the laws of 1790, 1848 and 1867 guaranteeing her independence, may once more be turned into idle mockery.

No impartial student of history could, so Seton-Watson went on to assert, deny the justice of the demand for an independent army. He thus excused the refusal of the Coalition to accept office because the emperor sought to impose conditions which were tantamount to renouncing the proposed army reforms.

The sovereign's right to withhold his assent from any given law is unquestioned; but his claim to veto *in advance* the legislation contemplated by the incoming Government is clearly at variance with the constitution.³⁷

For Seton-Watson, the crux of the whole situation lay in the question 'where does the sovereignty lie — in the crown or in the people?'. Francis Kossuth was right in proclaiming that the dissolution 'has dug the grave of the compromise of 1867'. Seton-Watson went on:

If we restrict our enquiry to the documents of 1867, we must admit the legality of the emperor's position. But nothing could be more unfair than to fix this arbitrary date as the limit beyond which discussion may not go [. . .] The *Ausgleich*, like other historical documents, can only be regarded as final so long as it meets the needs of the nations concerned. Hungary, in her natural development, has outgrown those needs, and a revision is now inevitable. That her great statesmen, Deák and the elder Andrassy, accepted the best terms which were then to be obtained, cannot bind the nation for ever to a denial of her ancient constitution, which knew no such limitations as those of the *Ausgleich* of 1867. The question, then, is one of fundamental principles [. . .]. Meanwhile, the stubborn fact remains that Hungary lies beneath an absolutist *regime* [. . .] Let us hope that this phoenix among the nations will once more rise triumphant over every obstacle.

In sum, Seton-Watson began with the admission that Hungary was not yet a sovereign state and then went on to argue that the world ought to treat her as such. No 48-er journalist could have defended better the Coalition's cause. In fact, while the Coalition leaders took for granted that the Hungarian system of government was parliamentary (which of course it was not) they did not distinguish between legality and constitutionality. The 1867 law on the disputed points of army organization was, however, clearly on the side of the monarch. The Coalition asserted 'state sovereignty' as the 'joint' will of king and nation by reading it into the existing laws. This was, in a revamped form, still the old *diaetalis tractatus* rather than the principle of the

³⁷ The 'preliminary sanction', or 'Vorsanktion', so-called, followed from the fundamental principle of the constitution that legislation was joint between king and parliament. Accordingly, governments had to acquire the consent of the monarch before introducing a bill in parliament. See László Péter, 'Die Verfassungsentwicklung in Ungarn', in Helmut Rumpel and Peter Urbanitsch (eds), *Die Habsburgermonarchie 1848–1918*, 7, Vienna, 2000, pp. 412–13.

supremacy of parliament. Seton-Watson did better. He did not merely assume that the Hungarian government was parliamentary; by clearly distinguishing constitutionality from legality, he laid claim to the principle that sovereignty rested with the people's representatives.

Meanwhile Seton-Watson expressed in a *Spectator* letter growing doubts about Germany's attitude to Austria:³⁸

The Austrian question, like that of the Near East, haunts the dreams of the modern statesman, and renders uncertain the whole political future of Europe. What, then, would be the results of the partition of the Hapsburg Empire, and who would derive advantage from it?

Up to this point Seton-Watson had been explaining the attitudes of the Germans to his British readers. Now he appeared to be reasoning with the Germans and was disturbed by what he had to say. He hoped

to prove that the Power which runs the most serious risks from a forward policy in Austria is no other than Germany herself . . . The propaganda of the Pan-German League, the ravings of such leaders as Schoenerer and Wolf, and the *Los von Rom* movement, which is engineered by this wildest of all political parties, — all these have thrown a somewhat lurid light upon the future of Austria, and have made us familiar with the possibility of German expansion at the expense of her Southern ally. Such a policy offers many attractions to the political dreamer.

After listing the attractions, Seton-Watson turns to the downside. The disadvantages for Germany would be immense:

It is hardly an exaggeration to say that Austria-Hungary, despite its domestic quarrels, forms the pivot of European politics, and that its disappearance would deal a fatal blow to the balance of power.

If the Pan-German dream was realized, a large European Coalition would be formed against a totally isolated Germany.

Strange as it may sound, — Seton-Watson remarks — the only conceivable ally for Germany is Hungary, and then only in return for such concessions as would ill suit the Pan-German mood.

At any rate the Hungarians would be tied down by the Romanians who would make a bid for Transylvania. The Czechs and the South Slavs would fiercely resist absorption into Germany. For the Austrian Germans it would mean the loss of dynasty, provincial status, and the replacement of 'easygoing *Gemütlichkeit* by the *stramme Disziplin* of the Prussian system'. Nor would the absorption of parts of Austria help unity inside Germany; Austria could not be assimilated. It would shift the balance between Protestants and Catholics, introduce 'a liberal element', and revive the rivalry between Prussia — 'the uncompromising foe of constitutional reform' — and Austria, where the government

³⁸ Published in *The Spectator* on 24 February 1906.

was pledged to the introduction of direct universal suffrage and where 'far-reaching changes are accepted in the very highest quarters'. Seton-Watson thought that 'William II's antipathy to popular government would probably outweigh the temptations of an expansive policy'.

The editor praised the author's 'remorseless logic' in discussing the unwisdom of the Pan-German movement, although nations, he added, do not invariably reject unwise projects. 'Happily, however, the Austrian Empire has not yet gone into the melting-pot'. It was first time that the editor, St Loe Strachey, did not disagree with Seton-Watson on the German question. All in all, early in 1906, Seton-Watson's German sympathies cooled off while his interest in Austria-Hungary, because of its importance to the balance of power, was growing. He saw the crisis of the Habsburg Monarchy as a prelude to 'internal reform' such as the Hungarian army reform, leading to 'personal union' and the extension of the franchise in both halves of the Monarchy. This would sweep away the remnants of autocracy and enable Austria-Hungary to play its providential role in the European balance, but he considered co-operation, even as a hypothetical notion, between a realized Pan-Germany and Hungary to be a 'strange' idea. He thought, plausibly, that 'the rise of the phoenix among the nations' (i.e. Hungary) might lend security against Pan-German designs.

The Coalition took office in early April and at the end of the month Seton-Watson went to Hungary for six weeks. As often happens with travellers, his first impression confirmed some of the views he had formed of the country.³⁹ In June he was back in Vienna whence in a *Spectator* letter sent on 26 June he defended the Hungarians against both Dr Lueger's outbursts and Franz Ferdinand.⁴⁰ Yet during the summer his views on Hungary gradually changed. It now appeared to him that the Coalition, instead of being part of the solution, was indeed part of the problem. First of all, it now dawned on him that the Hungarian parliament had lost the battle with the Crown: Kossuth and Apponyi would not accomplish any revision of the 1867 Settlement in Hungary's favour. Secondly, because the Coalition, in spite of its

³⁹ He wrote two years later: 'During my first tour in Hungary I was predisposed to accept every word that fell from the lips of a Kossuthist as gospel, and it was only very slowly that the truth began to penetrate through the armour of suspicion which I donned whenever I met a non-Magyar. Indeed I look back now with amusement at the feelings of intense dislike and incredulity with which I first listened to a Slovak nationalist. I only mention this to show that I first visited Hungary as a strong partisan of the Magyars, and that it was only their repeated recourse to evasion and sophistry that shook my faith in the justice of their cause.' 'In Self-Defence' in the introductory chapter of Seton-Watson's first book, see note 53 below: *Racial Problems*, pp. 16–17.

⁴⁰ Published in the 7 July issue of *The Spectator*. On Lueger Seton-Watson remarked: 'Indeed, his persistent appeals to the passions of the mob have created a veritable Lueger cult quite as fervid as, and a hundred times less excusable than the "Kossuth Cult" of Hungary.'

defeat, did not abandon its programme for personal union,⁴¹ its demands became disruptive to the Monarchy and European peace. Logically, as he wrote later, he was gradually ‘converted to dualism’.⁴² The country had to confront a problem: ‘the future of Hungary turns upon the franchise question’ — he wrote to *The Spectator*.⁴³ The Coalition displayed a fatal error of judgement by refusing to take office for more than a year and ‘by its incapacity for successful resistance’. This twofold mistake allowed the monarch’s minister, Kristóffy, to put forward his scheme of universal suffrage which the Coalition then had to accept in April as part of the terms on which it was allowed to take office. But this reform

the majority of Magyars regard with extreme suspicion. No man living can foresee the precise effects of the measure, or the extent to which it will redress the overwhelming supremacy of the Magyars over the rest of the population. In the circumstances, the Coalition’s refusal to recognise the existence of the new Nationalist Club (i.e. the Roumanian, Slovak and Serb Deputies) as a Parliamentary party must be regarded as another serious tactical blunder.

Later he noted ‘the uncompromising attitude of the Magyars towards their own fellow-citizens’. The tone of the article was still friendly towards the Coalition, but there was a warning towards the end. The logical outcome of introducing universal suffrage

is a modified policy towards the non-Magyar races, on whom it will bestow some share of political power, — for the first time since Hungary became a modern State. The Magyar dream of replacing the *Ausgleich* by a personal union can only be realised if the entire nation without distinction of race presents a united front to the outside world. Internal harmony is impossible so long as one half of the nation makes the absorption of the other half its main object in life, — so long as one race retains a monopoly of political and administrative power; and until this harmony is secured Hungary will never be strong enough to stand alone. The Magyars can use Vienna against the nationalities, or the nationalities against Vienna; they cannot resist them both together. Thus, the two problems of the franchise and the nationalities supply the key to the whole future of Hungary.

⁴¹ During his visit he was confronted by robust demands for separation from Austria. See *MNE*, esp. p. 34.

⁴² ‘I first visited Hungary’, he wrote, ‘as an enthusiastic admirer of the Independent Party. Two months of travel and conversation (chiefly with members of that party) cured me of my enthusiasm; and a winter spent quietly at home in the study of Hungarian history converted me to Dualism and convinced me of the danger with which the policy of the Coalition Government threatens Hungary and Europe alike.’ *The Spectator*, 20 July 1907. Note that Steed, a shrewd observer, from the autumn of 1905 assumed that the Coalition was only a paper-tiger.

⁴³ *The Spectator*, 29 September 1906.

Doubts about the viability of the Coalition's constitutional programme compelled Seton-Watson to shift his interest to electoral reform in order to end the domination of the other nations by the Magyars.

Defender of the Nationalities

'Hungary at the Parting of the Ways' was the title of *The Spectator* article of 20 October. It represents a new political outlook on the part of Seton-Watson.⁴⁴ The realization of personal union between Austria and Hungary which he had earlier seen as medicine against the danger of Pan-movements was finally perceived by Seton-Watson as only increasing those dangers. He now abandoned the programme, whose realization could but 'further disturb' the balance of power in Europe. Instead, he urged the Magyar leaders to carry out liberal reforms and avoid disorder in their country by being *primi inter pares* among the nations of Hungary rather than their masters.

The present situation in Hungary, quite apart from its intrinsic interest, compels our attention by reason of the international issues at stake. The internal state of Russia and the uncertainties of Balkan politics make it more essential than ever that the balance of European power should not be further disturbed. Should Austria and Hungary separate, one of the Great Powers would disappear and be replaced by two second class States, the Eastern question would enter upon an entirely new phase, and the Russian autocracy might find its last hope in the project of Pan-Slav expansion.

Instead of pursuing the independentist course, the Coalition ought to introduce general suffrage. But the Wekerle government was dragging its feet on the franchise reform.

The rooted dislike with which the Magyars regard any extension of the franchise will soon reveal itself to the outside world; and it will be seen that M. Kristóffy's scheme of universal suffrage was really an appeal from the *Magyar caste* to the *Hungarian nation*.

In this country Hungary is too often regarded as a national State like France or Germany. In reality it is one of the most polyglot States in existence [. . .] Out of a population of nineteen millions, only forty-five per cent are Magyars, and even that proportion includes a large Jewish element and the converts of all the other races [. . .] But while in numbers Magyar and non-Magyar are almost equally balanced, Magyar is, of course, the State language, the language of the Central Parliament and the county Assemblies, of justice and administration.

Even where the vast majority of the population was non-Magyar, state education is exclusively Magyar, though this is not in accordance with the Fundamental Laws of 1868, and even the subsidies granted to non-Magyar confessional schools have control and Magyarisation as their ulterior aims.

⁴⁴ He was now a correspondent for *The Spectator*. See *MNE*, pp. 40–41.

Thus the Magyars, ‘and those who profess themselves as Magyars’, have a complete monopoly over public life. Their language — he remarks here — is incapable of the all-important distinction between ‘Magyar’ and ‘Hungarian’. He then gave chapter and verse on national discrimination bringing together an impressive battery of facts about the country’s poor civil rights record. Then he returned to foreign policy: as ‘each of the non-Magyar races possesses a racial Hinterland beyond the frontier’, the racial question complicated foreign policy, ‘and this would be more than ever the case if Hungary were to separate from Austria’. Next he gave more arguments against separation — and finally Seton-Watson made a plea to the Magyars:

Will they at this crisis of their fate rise to a true conception of their duties towards their country as a whole? If they do, [. . .] they must abandon all thought of racial domination, and put themselves at the head of the Hungarians as leaders who are *primi inter pares*, not masters. They must base their action on liberal principles [and in that case they] [. . .] can secure a Hungary united by the amalgamation of the various races, the future safety of their country will be secured. If, on the other hand, they, the natural leaders of Hungary, refuse the necessary sacrifices, and attempt to maintain a sectional domination, nothing but evil and anarchy can be the ultimate result.

Seton-Watson’s about-turn on his assessment of Hungarian affairs followed, with over a year’s delay, the about-turn in the London press. The ‘Hungarian crisis’ shattered the serviceable mould into which Hungarian politics had earlier been cast.⁴⁵ And *pari passu* the perceived disorder and reprobation of Hungarian affairs, Austrian politics marked up improvements in London. Seton-Watson welcomed the Bill, passed by the *Reichsrat* in December 1906, introducing universal and direct manhood suffrage as a ‘great reform’. There was every hope, he wrote, that the Pan-German Party would collapse and that party conflicts would in future be based ‘on political and social rather than on racial grounds’.⁴⁶

It is frequently argued (chiefly by Hungarian historians) that the main reason why British opinion turned against Hungarian politics was the diplomatic line-up in the European system of the two rival alliances which had followed the Anglo-French Entente Cordiale of 1904.⁴⁷ This is mistaken, for the evidence does not bear out this inference. First of all, ‘the entente did not bring Britain into the European alliance

⁴⁵ From the summer of 1906 the entire London press became increasingly critical of Hungarian politics.

⁴⁶ *The Spectator*, 29 December 1906.

⁴⁷ This view originated in the contemporary press in Budapest: Hungary, because of the alliance with Germany, lost the sympathy of the British, wrote the *Budapesti Hírlap* on 28 September 1905.

system'.⁴⁸ Further, 'the rivalry with Germany had become the key factor in British diplomacy' already in 1904 — wrote Zara Steiner⁴⁹ — when, we can add, both the Foreign Office and the press remained pro-Hungarian. Indeed, the Germanophobe views of *The Times*, *The Spectator*, *The Saturday Review* and the *National Review* went (for, as we have seen, good reasons) hand in hand with pro-Hungarian attitudes. On the other hand, 1907, the year when the reputation of Hungarian politicians reached the point of nadir in the West European press, was a year of general improvement in international relations. Foreign Office criticism of the Hungarian oppression of the Slavs became 'increasingly severe' only after 1909.⁵⁰ Furthermore, criticism of Hungarian political conditions became stronger after 1910 when the opinion of Austria in the London press improved.⁵¹ Clearly, the British about-turn on the Hungarian course was the product of the Hungarian parliament's immature behaviour which threw the Monarchy into the 1905–06 constitutional crisis that enfeebled it as a great power and unmasked the policy of magyarization. The change of opinion had thus nothing to do with the system of alliances.

There was, however, one other factor, generally neglected, which affected British attitudes, including Seton-Watson's, to the Habsburg Monarchy which can only be briefly touched upon here. With the 'Liberal landslide' at the 1906 general elections the face of British politics changed. Radical liberals appealed to the people in the name of social reform and democracy became a political issue. Also mass politics established strongholds in many other West European countries after the turn of the century. Narrow franchise in a far away and predominantly Catholic agrarian country like Hungary had even a few years before been acceptable in London as compatible with a liberal outlook and expectations. This was no longer the case after the Liberal Party returned to power in London. And when the principle of democracy was applied to a multinational state like the Habsburg Empire, it had to involve, in some form, equitable arrangements on nationality. This was why Austrian politics in which the franchise was radically extended in 1906 scored points while the Hungarians failed to notice that in the twentieth century the political goal-posts had been moved.

⁴⁸ Steiner, *The Foreign Office*, p. 47.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 55. See also Kennedy, *The Rise*, pp. 287–88.

⁵⁰ F. R. Bridge, *Great Britain and Austria-Hungary 1906–1914: A Diplomatic History*, London, 1972, pp. 36–37. On the gradually deteriorating views in London on Hungarian politics, see pp. 25–26, 35–38.

⁵¹ *Ibid.* See also *The History of 'The Times'*, pp. 839–42, excerpts from the Austrian and British press.

Seton-Watson's ideas, developed in 1906, led to two influential publications that turned their author from a controversial polemicist to a recognized authority on the Habsburg Monarchy. *The Future of Austria-Hungary and the Attitude of the Great Powers*, partly based on *Spectator* articles, was an extended essay on the theme that 'Austria-Hungary, despite its domestic quarrels, forms the pivot of European politics, and that its disappearance would deal a fatal blow to the balance of power'.⁵² 'France and Great Britain must make every effort to preserve the Dual Monarchy (however modified internally).'⁵³ Each chapter deals with a disruptive national movement that threatened the integrity of the Monarchy. The essay begins with the Pan-German movement, then moves on to Russia and the Pan-Slav movement, 'Italian Irredentism', the Pan-Serb and Pan-Croat stirrings, and Romanian Irredenta. The last chapter considers the danger of Hungary's separation from Austria. An independent Hungary could not survive, Seton-Watson argued, because of the conflicts with the nationalities which the policy of magyarization had engendered.⁵⁴

The other work, soon to become a classic, was a substantial monograph which appeared in 1908 as *Racial Problems in Hungary*.⁵⁵ It was dedicated to a *Hungar nemzetnek* (Hungarian nation, as opposed to Magyar nation) which was to be created within the Dualist system of the Magyar as well as the non-Magyar nationalities or 'races' as he called them.⁵⁶ The message was that only an extension of the franchise and the creation of national harmony would enable Hungary to play the role required by a strong Monarchy — a European necessity. The political programme set out in the concluding chapter of the book⁵⁷ did not aim to do more than rough justice to all the races. Oppression and magyarization should cease through the introduction of liberal and

⁵² 'Scotus Viator', London, 1907, p. 4.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. vii.

⁵⁴ Interestingly, the leading organ of the Coalition, the *Budapesti Hírlap*, reviewed the book rather favourably, taking exception only to the points on forcible magyarization, 24 May 1907.

⁵⁵ R. W. Seton-Watson, *Racial Problems*. This volume included a statistical section on the distribution of nationalities, large numbers of translated documents given in the appendices and a comprehensive bibliography. 'In Self-Defence', an introductory (pp. xi–xx), the fiercely independent author, reflecting on the German and Hungarian responses to his *Spectator* articles, was particularly incensed by 'the unfair controversial methods of the Magyar Press' (p. 14). They questioned the probity of Scotus Viator. 'Magyar Psychology' was, he surmised, unable even to imagine that somebody might express independent and critical views without having been bribed to do so.

⁵⁶ Meeting Hungarian officials, Slovak, Romanian, and South Slav leaders, enabled him to describe the national conflicts in his book based on first-hand information. See *MNE*, pp. 43–55.

⁵⁷ *Racial Problems*, ch. 21.

democratic measures that would transform national and local government. But federalism he ruled out and even provincial autonomy, for that

would weaken not merely the Magyar race, but also the Hungarian nation; while the possible advantages which it might secure to the Nationalities could be attained far more effectively by less drastic measures.⁵⁸

The view that Europe needed a strong Monarchy, on the basis of dualism, was the vital consideration.

By the time the book appeared Seton-Watson had become more pessimistic about the prospects of internal political reform being carried out by the Hungarian government. His interest now turned to the South. In his next major work, *The Southern Slav Question*,⁵⁹ he considered the conflict and the possibilities of cooperation between the Croats and the Serbs. The Monarchy annexed Bosnia in 1908 — an act which Seton-Watson approved since it restored the Monarchy's place in Europe. He deplored only Aehrenthal's methods of carrying out the annexation, and he now came to the conclusion that dualism could not, in the long run, save the Monarchy and the balance of power in Europe; only trialism could.⁶⁰ The unity of all the South Slavs in one form or another would have to come about sooner or later. European stability required that this unity should be accomplished inside the Monarchy — rather than outside — by bringing a South Slav state into partnership with Austria and Hungary. This would improve the Monarchy's standing and would weaken its dependence on Berlin.

Epilogue and conclusions

It is here possible to continue with our subject only in the form of the briefest outline for the rest of Seton-Watson's long eventful career. As is well known, shortly after the outbreak of the First World War, he abandoned his belief in the Habsburg Monarchy as a European necessity, for Austria-Hungary had become dependent on Germany to such a great extent that it could no longer perform its providential role. His conclusion was that the Monarchy and historic Hungary had to be dissolved. The system based on national dominance and oppression was to be replaced by one based on national and social justice. Seton-Watson's conception of 'New Europe', made up of independent states, was based on the principle of national self-determination as a new source of legitimacy. It looked as though the idealism of the New Europe placed the preservation of the balance of power behind the

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 409.

⁵⁹ London, 1911.

⁶⁰ *MNE*, pp. 75–76. The book was dedicated to the Austrian statesman possessing 'the genius and the courage necessary to solve the Southern Slav Question'.

requirement of national justice. If the principle of nationality furnishes the legitimacy of the state system then state boundaries must follow, so far as possible, the boundaries of nationality. Where the population is mixed the principle of equity may call for leaving roughly the same number of people on the wrong side for each nation.⁶¹

This, of course, did not happen in the peace treaties that followed the First World War. Large chunks of territories on the losing side, containing millions of people of the 'wrong' nationality, were given over to the winning states in violation of the nationality principle (collateral damage of sorts). Seton-Watson had a hand in drawing up the new borders although the peacemakers disregarded many of his ideas that were to leave fewer co-nationals on the 'wrong' side. After the peace treaties had been signed, however, and throughout the interwar period, Seton-Watson defended the peace treaties in the name of justice and rejected plans for territorial revisions demanded by the aggrieved side. For instance, he rejected as unjust the Hungarian demand for revision to reattach Hungarians to Hungary on the grounds that the borders established after the War followed decades of forcible magyarization.⁶²

The reasons for these attitudes are not difficult to detect. The destruction of the Habsburg Monarchy had left a power vacuum between Germany and Soviet Russia. The states of New Europe had to be strong to provide stability and act as a necessary counterweight to two large, paramount neighbours. Geographic, economic and strategic arguments were used, all of which contravened the nationality principle, in order to bolster the position of the new states. The principle of nationality had to be subordinated to the requirements of the balance of power. In sum, the attitudes of the man who had championed the smaller nations altered radically, and it seems that, at every turn, Seton-Watson's adjustments in opinion were dependent upon his changing perception of what was required to maintain the European order.

The changes in R. W. Seton-Watson's attitude towards the nations of the Danube region provide a good example of how a West European liberal is likely to respond to small nation nationalism. We shall find him on the side of parliament rather than the crown in a constitutional conflict; he is likely to be on the side of a national minority rather than

⁶¹ The 1920 border between Austria and Hungary (two defeated nations) may be regarded as an example.

⁶² Although magyarization before 1918, either spontaneous or forced, did not, of course, affect the disputed and largely agricultural strips of lands with indigenous Hungarian populations from the Middle Ages as, for instance, the Grosse Schütt, the 'Partium' and parts of Voivodina. On this, see C. A. Macartney, *Hungary and Her Successors*, Oxford, 1937, pp. 73–79, 251–53, 380–81.

an oppressive government; he will be dismayed when he discovers a gap between a liberal façade and the underlying reality of intolerance; and he will offer plans to reform the institutions, bring about national harmony, and improve stability. Exceptionally, notably after a successful war, he may want to create new states in place of old ones. A West European liberal, however, does not really believe in national self-determination. His attitude to small nation nationalism is always part of a wider speculative view of international relations to which the aspirations of small nations are subordinated, although this is hardly ever made clear.

The roots of this ambivalence may lie in the failure of West European liberals to develop a satisfactory attitude to nationalism. Their position on national conflicts has been shaped by expediency as much as by their belief in justice. An important part of the problem is that the boundaries and perhaps even the very distinction between 'nation building' (which as it makes for stability the liberal would certainly approve) and restrictions imposed on national minorities or 'forceful cultural engineering'⁶³ (which he would have to condemn) is far from self-evident. Hence, the possibility that other considerations, particularly the effect of the policy on the state system, will shape his judgement. In liberal political writing there is nearly always a bias in any given situation of international relations towards the maintenance of the existing order. If a state is able to change the 'nationality' of its population by coalescing diverse cultural groups into a single community, while maintaining or enhancing the stability of the area, the liberal will, approvingly, call it 'nation-building'. When he thinks that the opposite is the case and the pursuance of a nationality policy reduces political stability in the area he will condemn it as 'national oppression'. There is nothing wrong with doing this. However, the basis of the liberal's judgement is not then 'the rights of nationalities' but his preference for political stability. Yet political writers are more reluctant to recognize this. They run the arguments about the rights of nationalities and the need for political stability together without distinguishing one from the other and without marking out the exact place each has in the argument.

The unresolved conflict between the principle of nationality and the requirement of international stability becomes acute in border disputes and especially when new states are created. As justice is indivisible, national self-determination requires equitable application of the principle towards all parties. However, state borders that follow some

⁶³ See K. R. Minogue, *Nationalism*, London, 1967, p. 133–38; G. H. N. Seton-Watson, *Nations and States*, London, 1977, pp. 429–33; Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, Oxford, 1983, p. 101; and E. J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780*, Cambridge, 1990, pp. 93–110.

ethnic-linguistic line may not be necessarily the ones that make a state viable. In case of conflict which principle should come first: nationality or international stability? The liberal will either fudge the question or throw up his hands in despair. As the twentieth century moved on, 'a plague on both your houses' became a fairly common liberal attitude towards local national conflicts. It could be argued (perhaps in defence of the liberals) as writers of international relations tend to, that the dilemma is intractable. For the principle of nationality, that is national self-determination, is a moral principle whose realization is demanded in the name of justice. In the state system, as Hedley Bull argued,⁶⁴ there is no general incompatibility between 'order in the abstract' and justice; yet they are, in practice, in endemic conflict. International order is prior to the principle of justice in the sense that justice is realizable only in the condition of order. From this, however, it does not follow that order in all cases should have precedence over justice. Yet,

the conflict between international law and international justice is endemic because the situations from which the law takes its point of departure are a series of *faits accomplis* brought about by force and the threat of force, legitimised by the principle that treaties concluded under duress are valid.⁶⁵

Today this all sounds plausible enough. Whether this perspective would have been acceptable to R. W. Seton-Watson and indeed to his generation of liberal activists is less than clear. They were preoccupied with order and they also believed in national justice, but how these two concerns may be connected can only be a matter of conjecture.

⁶⁴ Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society, A Study of Order in World Politics*, 2nd edn., London, 1995, pp. 83–89.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 88.