

# HUNGARIAN NONVIOLENT RESISTANCE AGAINST AUSTRIA AND ITS PLACE IN THE HISTORY OF NONVIOLENCE

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The Hungarian nonviolent resistance campaign against the Austrian absolutist rule in the 1850s and 1860s has been credited with being the “first mass or corporate form of non-violent resistance,” yet it has received little scholarly attention in the nonviolence literature. In its usual portrayal, the movement is epitomized as a forerunner of Gandhi’s later mass *satyagraha* campaigns, and its leader Ferenc Deák as a prototype Mahatma. In reality, the campaign was far more complex and less organized. However, it did demonstrate that even such campaigns can lead to the achievement of the aimed for goals when outside events and deeper internal economic and social drivers come together to unite the oppressed and weaken the position of the oppressor. As recent major studies of nonviolent struggle have shown, the Hungarian example illustrates what can be achieved when the oppressed withdraw their consent to be ruled and undermine state power by targeting areas of particular vulnerability of their oppressor.

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In the annals of nonviolence, there are many historical examples that are seen as precedents for later celebrated campaigns, such as those conducted by Mahatma Gandhi (which in turn are seen as models for more contemporary campaigns). One of them was the movement, ostensibly led by Ferenc (Francis) Deák, of nonviolent resistance by the Hungarians to despotic Austrian rule in the 1850s and 1860s. Although this movement is mentioned in the early classics of nonviolence literature, and even hailed as the “first mass or corporate form of non-violent resistance,”<sup>1</sup> the actual dynamics of the campaign that apparently justify its celebrated position have received far too little analytical scrutiny.

## GANDHI'S DEÁK AND HUNGARIAN NONVIOLENT RESISTANCE

When Gandhi was still at the beginning of his life as a political activist, having moved beyond mere lobbying and legal petitioning, he attempted to put the case for what would become known as *satyagraha* (his method of creed rather than policy-based nonviolent activism) before his constituents, the Transvaal Indians. In a 1907 article in his South African newspaper *Indian Opinion*, he wrote on “The Benefits of Passive Resistance,” pointing out some notable instances. He explained how the Irish Sinn Fein movement was organizing a peaceful campaign of self-suffering that would see Irish members withdrawing from the British parliament and a boycotting of British courts and goods. He believed that through such measures, “without any violent struggle taking place the British would ultimately be obliged, or might agree, to grant Home Rule to Ireland, or would quit Ireland, and the Irish people would have an absolutely independent government.”

The Irish struggle (as he saw it unfolding then) was a prototype of Gandhi’s later campaign to free India from the British yoke. The Irish movement, in turn, had its antecedents in Hungary:

This movement had its roots in Austria-Hungary in the south of Europe. Austria and Hungary were two separate countries. But Hungary was under the rule of Austria and was always exploited by it. To discomfit Austria, a Hungarian named Dick [*sic*]<sup>2</sup> taught the people that they should not pay any taxes to Austria, should not serve any Austrian officers, and even forget the very name of Austria. Though the Hungarians were very weak, this kind of spirit enabled them in the end to assert themselves against Austria. Now Hungary is not regarded as subject to Austria, but claims parity with it.<sup>3</sup>

During his visit to London in October and November of 1906, Gandhi was honing his political philosophy. He met with old friends from his student days, including vegetarians and theosophists, and studied the actions of the idealist rational Ethical Society and the suffragettes.<sup>4</sup> If he was not aware of it already, it may be a fair assumption that Gandhi came to know of Hungary’s nonviolent resistance campaign at this time through discussing the political situation in Ireland. Gandhi had not made a detailed study of Hungary of the 1850s and 1860s,

and while his knowledge of the movement attributed to Deák may have lacked depth of understanding, what he came to know of it may have been influential on his thinking at a crucial time.<sup>5</sup>

By the time of Gandhi's London visit, the Irish Sinn Fein party had been formed to wrest independence, or at least home rule, from Britain. In 1904, one of the founders of the party and leading Irish nationalist, Arthur Griffith had published an influential little book on the Hungarian "passive resistance movement"<sup>6</sup> and how it could serve as a model for the Irish struggle.<sup>7</sup> While there is no direct evidence that Gandhi had read Griffith's book, the tone of the above quote and the fact that it is coupled with his note on Sinn Fein tend to indicate that he at least knew of the arguments that it contained. Later, many of the early Gandhi-following writers on nonviolence were to make much of Griffith's book and the Hungarian example.

The Mahatma's American friend Richard B. Gregg, the first major popularizer of nonviolence, and in particular Gandhi's methods, placed strong emphasis on Deák's campaign in his account of this method of political activism. Gregg starts his classic 1934 book *The Power of Nonviolence* with a chapter on "Modern Examples of Nonviolent Resistance," and the very first section is titled "Hungary." Gregg explains that of the outstanding successful modern examples of nonviolence that took on a mass, rather than individual, form, "the first to be considered occurred in Hungary during the mid-nineteenth century."

According to Gregg, the Austrians were trying to subordinate Hungary to their power in a way that was contrary to the terms of the treaty of union of the two countries. While the moderates felt too weak to fight, Deák protested to them: "Your laws are violated, yet your mouths remain closed! Woe to the nation that raises no protest when its rights are outraged! It contributes to its own slavery by its silence. The nation that submits to injustice and oppression without protest is doomed."<sup>8</sup>

Gregg then notes how Deák organized a campaign to boycott Austrian goods and set up independent Hungarian institutions while refusing to recognize Austrian ones in a spirit of nonviolence and legality: "This is safe ground on which, unarmed ourselves, we can hold our own against armed force. If suffering must be necessary, suffer with dignity." Paraphrasing Griffith, Gregg summarizes a campaign that with a few minor changes could easily have characterized Gandhi's major Indian civil disobedience campaigns:

When the Austrian tax collector came, the people did not beat him or even hoot him – they merely declined to pay. The Austrian police then seized their goods, but no Hungarian auctioneer would sell them. When an Austrian auctioneer was brought, he found that he would have to bring bidders from Austria. The government soon discovered that it was costing more to distraint the property than the tax was worth.

The Austrians attempted to billet their soldiers upon the Hungarians. The Hungarians did not actively resist the order, but the Austrian soldiers, after trying to live in houses where everyone despised them, protested strongly against it. The Austrian government declared the boycott of Austrian goods illegal, but the Hungarians defied the decree. The jails were filled to overflowing.<sup>9</sup>

Although there may have been “some violence of inner attitude [the despising of the Austrians] on the part of the Hungarians,” the campaign eventually forced Emperor Franz Joseph to capitulate and grant the Hungarians their full constitutional rights and, thus, “provided a remarkable example of the power of nonviolent resistance.”

Deák also features in that other great early classic of nonviolence, Krishnalal Shridharani’s *War Without Violence*. In his discussion of “Satyagraha in Practice,” after listing several Gandhian examples, he continues by noting that “in the Western world as well, there have been a few instances when non-violent direct action, employed to solve a conflict involving two groups or a group and the government, have scored notable triumphs.”<sup>10</sup> Shridharani then provides a concise account of the story of Deák and Hungarian nonviolent action, followed by brief mentions of the resistance of the Finns against the Russian oppression in 1901–1905, Quaker conscientious objectors in England during the First World War, the Russian general strike of 1905, the resistance to the Kapp Putsch in 1920 Germany, and the German nonviolent resistance to the French occupation of the Ruhr in 1923.

An early anthology of writings on the “Theory and Practice of Non-violent Resistance,” Mulford Sibley’s *The Quiet Battle*,<sup>11</sup> contains a chapter on the Hungarian resistance, noting that while it was not the only factor in producing its successful outcome, “the story of Deák and his campaign of non-violence remains an impressive one.” The chapter is an excerpt from Griffith’s book.

Gene Sharp, the leading modern theorist of nonviolent activism (or nonviolent struggle as he now terms it), in his monumental tome

*The Politics of Nonviolent Action*, talks about the nonviolent technique that forces the opponents' repression to rebound in a way as to undermine their power. He notes that the understanding of the workings of this mechanism is not new, after all Deák understood it in 1861.<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, he downplays the achievements of the resistance more than Sibley. Sharp notes that "at times conflict situations ... may be so complex that it is difficult to disentangle the relative roles of nonviolent action and other factors in producing the change, as for example the conclusion of the Hungarian struggle against the Austrian rule."<sup>13</sup>

Senior Gandhian R. R. Diwakar in his the *Saga of Satyagraha*<sup>14</sup> repeats the Deák noncooperation story in his chapter on "History as Witness." However, it is little more than a repetition of Gregg's case study without the reservations of Sibley or Sharp. Why this so frequently uncritical repetition? While Gandhi and Gregg's accounts of Deák's campaign sound very much like perfect models for Gandhi's own large-scale *satyagraha* campaigns, are they in fact so clearly prototypes, or is there some massaging of historical fact to fit this example seamlessly into the nonviolence narrative?

#### GRIFFITH'S DEÁK AND HUNGARIAN "PASSIVE RESISTANCE"

*The Resurrection of Hungary* was a propaganda piece rather than a scholarly historical work.<sup>15</sup> It was written to inspire Irish nonviolent resistance to the British, but it became equally useful for those wanting to popularize Gandhian-style nonviolent resistance generally. It provided a lineage, an incorruptible and humble hero, many quotable quotes, and most importantly a story of success.

In Griffith's account Deák, who had retired from overt political activity following the revolt against Austria in 1848–1849 and who from the mid-1850s was living in the Angol Királynő (Queen of England) hotel in Pest, was an annoyance to the Austrians simply by his presence and his continual statements that he was loyal to the Hungarian constitution that had not legally been abolished. His mere presence seemed to give the populace hope and fanned their nationalist feelings. He was the spokesman of the country who kept hotter heads in check, conducted negotiations with the emperor, and authored the declarations by the Hungarian parliament (when it was able to sit), and to whom the Hungarian people turned for advice. When Austria was threatened by wars for which it needed Hungarian support, it made concessionary moves. When the threat of war receded, repression resumed. Throughout,

Deák's message was the same: the lawful Hungarian constitution of 1848 was still in force, and as soon as the Austrians recognized this and allowed Hungarians to run their own affairs in line with the constitution, they would receive Hungarian friendship and loyalty. In this account, Deák, while smoking his pipe and talking with friends in his hotel room, not only makes proclamations very similar to those Gandhi would make fifty years in the future, but seems to be almost a prototype Mahatma.

When the boycotting Hungarians refuse to take their place in the "Imperial Parliament," according to Griffith, the parliament becomes "a topic for laughter throughout Europe," and Austria is forced "into the humiliating position of a butt for Europe's jests."<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, the *Times* notes that "Passive Resistance can be so organized as to become more troublesome than armed rebellion."<sup>17</sup> In 1866, when Austria faced defeat at the hands of the Prussians, a "pale and haggard" emperor Franz Joseph sent for Deák in another attempt to ensure the loyalty of his rebellious Hungarian subjects:

"What am I to do now, Deák?" the monarch asked of his opponent. Deák's laconic reply is celebrated in Austrian history, "Make peace, and restore Hungary her rights." "If I restore Hungary her Constitution now, will Hungary help me to carry on the war?" the Emperor inquired. The reply of Deák exhibits the fearless and uncompromising character of the great Magyar. It was in one word, "No." He would not make the restoration of his country's rights a matter of barter.<sup>18</sup>

By the following February, the Austrians had to capitulate. In the Compromise of 1867 (the *Ausgleich*), Hungary became an equal partner in the Austro-Hungarian Dual Monarchy. Eighteen years after the uprising to defend the constitution, eighteen years of oppression and appeasement, nonviolent resistance and Deák had triumphed, and the Habsburg emperor came to Pest to be crowned monarch of Hungary, restore the constitution of 1848, "and pledge himself as King of Hungary to defend it with his life."<sup>19</sup> Deák refused public office but consented to stay on in parliament as a simple member.

#### DEÁK AND HUNGARIAN NONVIOLENT RESISTANCE

Surprisingly, English language academic histories of Hungary, while of course discussing the constitutional crisis and Austrian oppression

following the failed Hungarian independence struggle of 1848–1849 and Deák's role in the political resistance to Austrian overlordship, say little about Deák in terms of nonviolent resistance of the type that seemed to so impress Griffith, Gandhi, and some of the Mahatma's popularizers.<sup>20</sup> The same can be said for English language histories of the Habsburg Empire.

Where histories of Hungary tend to portray the struggle in terms of political maneuvering by leading politicians with the immediate cause of Austria's capitulation stemming from military defeats in international wars, histories of the Habsburgs stress the political and economic circumstances within the empire and important regional considerations.<sup>21</sup> Miller notes that the passive resistance inspired by Deák "alone did not bring the desired result, but it formed a crucial element among other factors, and was the only one over which the Hungarians had complete control."<sup>22</sup> Case adds that, "It may be questioned whether the passive resistance ... was responsible solely for Hungary's success, but it was doubtless a large factor."<sup>23</sup> In short, a reading of the non-Hungarian sources can lead to the conclusion that perhaps more has been made of Deák, his role in the Hungarian nonviolent resistance movement, and the movement itself, than is warranted by the evidence simply because nonviolence *needed* a history and inspiring examples.

In Hungary, Deák is a national hero, and the 200th anniversary of his birth was widely commemorated across the country in 2003. Scores of publications, both popular and scholarly, appeared for the bicentenary.<sup>24</sup> His choice of "passive resistance" has been hailed as part of Hungary's "national character," and he has been immortalized by famous Hungarian authors. However, the Hungarian language histories do not greatly clarify the matter of his actual role in the resistance. While opinions about what actions of his time should be classified as "passive resistance,"<sup>25</sup> who should be classed as "passive resisters," and even which periods of the 1850s and 1860s should be classified as ones of "passive resistance" vary, broadly they can be divided into two schools of thought when it comes to Deák himself. The first seems to attribute the entire movement to Deák. Despite Deák's political stature and his prominence in the movement,<sup>26</sup> this unduly narrows the scope of the Hungarian movement. The second main school equates "passive resistance" with broader movements of an era that commenced after the crushing of the 1848–1849 revolution with Deák being marginal as a real driver of events that centered on popular spontaneous unrest.<sup>27</sup>

Historical examples, whether accurately reported or not, can do more than help bolster national or other forms of group cohesion; they can also prove that certain courses of action and outcomes are feasible. A romanticized version of Hungarian nonviolence shows what can be done if people are united and can influence others to experiment with or even emulate these “historical” precedents. In short, history is often constructed for fairly pragmatic reasons,<sup>28</sup> and perhaps the Hungarian case, while no myth, is more problematic as a precursor of mass nonviolent activism than a simplistic reading would have it.

Although under Austrian rule since 1526, with a series of anti-Habsburg uprisings in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, in the nineteenth century, Hungarian reformers were again asserting their cultural heritage and expressing their political aspirations. During the heady days of revolutionary 1848 Europe,<sup>29</sup> the radicals achieved ascendancy in parliament, gained concessions from Austria, and passed what came to be known as the April Laws, in a large part framed by Deák the Hungarian Minister for Justice, which set the agenda for internal reform and laid the foundations for national autonomy. The Emperor Ferdinand’s coronation oath bound him to observe laws made by the Hungarian parliament, and he sanctioned these measures on April 11, 1848. In December, Ferdinand, who was seen as having made too many concessions to the revolutionaries, was forced to abdicate in favor of his young nephew Franz Joseph. When the old guard reestablished control in revolutionary Vienna, what had turned into armed revolt in Hungary was crushed in August 1849, and absolutist rule was imposed and the April Laws abrogated.<sup>30</sup>

General Haynau, notorious for his brutal methods, was given a free hand by the regime as the vehicle of Austrian retribution. In the city of Arad, thirteen Hungarian military revolutionaries, and in Pest, Lajos Batthyány, the first Hungarian head of state, were executed on October 6. Military courts sentenced some 500 to death, executed 114, and jailed 1,763. Around 50,000 ex-infantrymen were shanghaied into special “retribution” units and sent to fight in Austria’s Italian war.<sup>31</sup> A new gendarme force was formed and a pervasive network of informants established.

In the almost twenty years of oppression and forced Germanization following the uprising, “passive resistance” as a new form of opposition to authority did arise in the country, in fact “its citizens had no choice but to respond for the sake of their survival.”<sup>32</sup> Molnár, without referring specifically to Deák, notes that resistance “became a way of life and an ethical code.”<sup>33</sup> Taxes were avoided,<sup>34</sup> as was military service. Public



celebrations, such as those for the emperor's birthday resulted in "no-shows." Public office was eschewed, courts were boycotted, and people refused to speak German. Hungarian authors and plays were read and seen in preference to Austrian ones. Symbolic clothing, hairstyles, and jewellery in the national colors were worn.<sup>35</sup> Significant dates, such as the birthdays of Kossuth and Batthyány, and dates that marked events of the revolution or commemorated the execution of its leaders became the focus of political protest, as did official celebrations. A new and often invisible, no holds barred, secret war evolved "for the survival of the nation."<sup>36</sup> And it was not always nonviolent:<sup>37</sup> "It was fought with arms, with the spoken and printed word, via agricultural exhibitions, pilgrimage, paintings" and "in theatres, markets, churches, at the stock exchange and in the columns of newspapers and journals in Paris, London and Hamburg."<sup>38</sup>

During the uprising, the constitutionalist Deák went into retirement at his country estate, Kehida, to live in the manner befitting his status as a landowner and member of the rural gentry. After the independence war, Deák was still brooding in the countryside, Kossuth, the leader of the rebellion, was in exile overseas, many others had been executed, and the profoundly depressed Count István Széchenyi, the rouser of the nationalist spirit, was in a psychiatric institution. Following investigations into activities by the counterrevolutionary military tribunal, Deák was cleared because he had not advocated the dethronement of the monarchy. As the ex-Minister of Justice, in 1850, his Austrian counterpart Anton Schmerling invited him to Vienna to discuss ways of bringing Hungarian legal procedures into line with the Austrian system. Deák flatly refused, writing on April 25 that "after the regrettable events of the recent past and in the prevailing circumstances, it is not possible to cooperate actively in public affairs."<sup>39</sup> Somehow, Deák's reply to Schmerling was leaked to the *Ostdeutsche Post*, a Vienna newspaper, from where it spawned a myriad of handwritten copies across the land. As a result, Hungary was soon plastered with Deák's message of noncooperation. His refusal to engage in public life was much admired and the instinctive resistance in the country "drew courage from Deák's stand to become an ever more deliberate attitude."<sup>40</sup> The quoted key sentence in his letter was later to become the definitive and most frequently repeated political statement of Hungary's resistance.

At this stage, it does not appear that Deák was attempting to persuade anyone to follow him. However, his refusal to cooperate "became the programmatic statement of 'passive resistance,' that is non-cooperation

with the authorities” through refusal to billet soldiers, evading taxes, feigning ignorance of the German language, and “encumbering the life of the administrators in an environment foreign to them in all possible ways.”<sup>41</sup>

In 1854, Deák returned to Pest, his period of total passive resistance behind him. The motives behind his move are unclear; however, the most popular explanations variously attribute it to an easing of his financial situation in addition to a desire to reenter the political arena. Litigation that had tied up his estate had concluded, enabling him to sell it and live off the proceeds in Pest.<sup>42</sup> The move had strong political undertones that were duly noted in Austrian and Hungarian papers. The nationalist daily *Pesti Napló* (*Pest Journal*) ran a piece on Deák’s move in order to encourage others to follow his example,<sup>43</sup> and the secret police compiled weekly reports of his activities.<sup>44</sup> Ferenczi, Deák’s most-quoted Hungarian biographer, notes that in this period of Deák’s life he became a “leader of unmatched stature in Hungarian public opinion and thinking.”<sup>45</sup>

Although he did not present a political platform as such, Deák became the conscience and mentor of a resistance similar to the one that he practiced without preaching.<sup>46</sup> Nevertheless, his statements on the constitutional situation did provide a political program of sorts, one that was simple to understand and execute: the legal situation in Hungary was the one created by the April Laws. All other systems, until amended by the lawful Hungarian government, were unlawful and consequently did not have to be obeyed. Until there was a lawful Hungarian government in place, Austrian oppression should be resisted nonviolently. He actively promoted national pride and, more subtly, the resistance through his involvement with the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, various economic and cultural organizations, and in the course of meetings in his hotel quarters. Deák made regular visits to the National Theatre, to the National Casino (a hub of cultural activity), to the Kisfaludy Society (the national forum of the literati), to the Society of Economists, and to the races, which became a symbol of Hungarian national identity. He also supported eminent anti-Habsburg activists and, after their deaths, kept their memory alive. Perhaps the most important expression of his resistance to Austrian rule was his effort to nurture the national language by constantly speaking out against enforced official Germanization. Short of descending into a nationalism that was unacceptable to the authorities, he took every opportunity to use Hungarian as the language of communication in everyday life, literature, and science. His extensive correspondence is often used to

illustrate this commitment. For example, in a letter to an old family friend Szidónia Báthory, Deák writes: “In the midst of the great storm battering us” and “the constant attack by the powers-that-be,” the only way to save the Hungarian nation is for Hungarian to remain the language of social intercourse and for the preservation of culture within the circle of social life and in the course of amusements, and through the maintenance of our national costume, in every place “that is beyond the reaches of our oppressor.”<sup>47</sup> In a second letter to Báthory, he writes that “we, here in Pest, have absolutely no desire to become German, and the more they pressure us the more we shall resist denying our culture. It is a natural instinct in individual people, as it is in and the whole nation, that they do not want to die.”<sup>48</sup>

In 1858, he repeated his position in an address to a women’s meeting, informing his audience that their nationality is “under repeated attack by the regime and is being eased out of public affairs. All we can do is cultivate it and preserve it where the power of the regime does not penetrate—in the private circle of our social lives. If even there we neglect it, it will be doomed forever.”<sup>49</sup>

Publicity for Deák’s resistance was provided by the nationalist press. Although banned from explicit political discourse, Hungarian newspapers and periodicals ran pieces with unmistakably subversive undertones and, thus, became the forums of the nation’s spiritual and political rebirth. At the forefront of change was the vastly popular *Pesti Napló*, edited by Zsigmond Kemény, one of Deák’s best friends and coresident at the Angol Királynő. Although Deák rarely penned articles himself, through associations like this one, and through visiting journalists, writers, and friends, Deák’s message was relayed widely and his influence acutely felt.

Deák expected the nation to hold “the line in the struggle to defend its nationality, traditions, constitution and laws.”<sup>50</sup> The Austrian position shifted a number of times between absolutist oppression and state terrorism and at least partial appeasement of Hungarian sensitivities. Such a period of attempted reconciliation followed Austria’s military defeat in Italy in 1857. The Austrian court had suffered monetary and military losses at least partly as a result of the widespread nonpayment of taxes, resistance to recruitment, and desertion among its Hungarian subjects. And by this time both the Austrian and Hungarian sides were growing tired of the resistance. This prompted Austria to attempt a controlled reform of its absolutist administration. Franz Joseph issued his “October Diploma” in 1860 in an attempt to end the period of disharmony. In 1861, Hungarian county councils were restored and parliament convoked.

This, however, was not enough, and the councils quickly decided to stop collecting taxes not sanctioned by the Hungarian parliament and to stop paying for the support of Austrian troops. During the first postrevolutionary Hungarian parliamentary session, where Deák emerged as the preeminent national leader, a conciliatory petition, which foreshadowed the Compromise of 1867, was issued. Austria merely renewed its oppression. Deák countered with a second petition that recognized that the time for compromise was over and prepared the nation for a further round of oppression. The petition concluded:

The nation will endure the hardships if it has to, in order to preserve for future generations the freedom bequeathed to it by our ancestors. It will endure without despair, as our ancestors endured and suffered to protect the nation's rights, for what may be wrested away by main force may be won back with time and good fortune, but what the nation voluntarily surrenders for fear of suffering may not be regained, or only with great difficulty. The nation will endure in hope for a better future and in trust in the justice of its cause.<sup>51</sup>

Again Deák urged a policy of nonviolent resistance and under threat of arms parliament was prorogued. Deák's popularity had never been higher and he came to be seen as the main leader of the resistance to the regime. And now, "unlike the haphazard and uncoordinated resistance of the 1850's, the opposition also had an ideology in the form of the explicit and progressive petitions Deák had drafted."<sup>52</sup>

However, Deák's chief English language biographer notes that during the long period of opposition even he occasionally doubted whether national resistance would achieve anything: "Often despondent and pessimistic, he knew how weak Hungary was in comparison with the dynasty. This awareness did not raise his spirits. It was faith, not *Realpolitik*, which gave him the moral strength to persevere."<sup>53</sup> As it was, the success that his policy aimed at took almost two decades to achieve and to a considerable degree depended on pressures on the Habsburg empire that were outside Hungarian control. The degree to which Hungarian resistance troubled the Habsburgs still needs careful examination, but the outcome of that resistance, in turn, was largely outside Deák's control.

"Passive resistance" may have been a conscious political decision for Deák but he had failed to transform it into a cogent theory or practice. His resistance lacked a defined program; there was no clear leadership or a focused use of resources. We are left not only with a

vague impression of his motivational drivers, but also only a fuzzy sense of his strategic vision. In short, the overall picture of his version of resistance is far from clear,<sup>54</sup> and it explains why it was interpreted in so many different ways and appropriated to serve so many varied political agendas.<sup>55</sup> During the heyday of Deák's resistance, resistance generally was in the air and the social environment and public mood were ripe for its conscious or spontaneous adoption. It became one of the chief personal and national survival strategies after the quashed revolution and the ensuing atmosphere of terror. This is not to diminish Deák's stature or devalue what might be called his personal *satyagraha*; it merely places him in the context of a larger struggle he symbolized for many but did not actually lead.

#### HUNGARIAN NONVIOLENT RESISTANCE: THE BROADER CONTEXT

As already noted, in the 1850s, "passive resistance" became something of a way of life for a large section of the Hungarian population. Somogyi presents the platform of opposition as follows:

The rich magnates and the well-to-do nobles, the intellectuals and the citizens have decided that they will not pay their taxes until the executor knocks at their doors. Only those supplies that cannot be hidden will be handed over to the military. People will deny understanding German and will everywhere demand answers to verdicts in Hungarian. Nobody will truthfully report the status of his wealth and income. If anybody is asked a question, the answer has to be—I do not know; if information is sought about a person, the answer has to be—I do not know him; if events have to be verified, the answer has to be—I have seen nothing. The slogan is: detest absolutism and ignore its servants as if they were not living amongst us.<sup>56</sup>

But, of course, it was not quite as simple as this. All dictatorships polarize society. And no people's movements are monolithic in nature, where all the protesters act in unison, speak with one voice, and take their cues from one source. And it appears that this one certainly was not.

Questions can be raised as to the degree that the resistance was a spontaneous one by the Hungarian populace at large, and the degree to which it was inspired, or masterminded, by Deák. Perhaps Deák operated well among those who shared his assumptions, but only indirectly

with the masses. For those concerned more with the history of non-violence rather than Hungarian history, there is a further question as to the success of the nonviolent resistance in achieving the aims attributed to it by the likes of Griffith and Gregg. In short, as with most case studies, careful analysis leads to ambiguities that popularizers may not have concerned themselves with. In this case they focus on issues such as: was there a principled movement, like the one Griffith describes and Gandhi and later theorists write about, a mass movement of people who have a goal, who know what they are fighting for and why, who have cohesion and self-discipline based on strong morale? Or is the accepted account of the Hungarian nonviolence campaign an example of a proud independent nation's history casting its shadow backward, or, as it concerns us here, the construction of "necessary" information to provide an evolutionary history for nonviolence? Is it given too much credit by those wanting to promote nonviolence? And even if this is the case, might a several decade accumulation of evidence and folklore have allowed Griffith to construct Deák as a leader he may not actually have been? And finally, what are the lessons of the Hungarian example?

It is not enough to assess mass movements, especially when they are not confined to a particular class but have broad-based appeal (including support from peasants and workers), as political phenomena. They generally also have economic and social contexts from which they emerge. This case is no different. Class differences and economic hardships set tones of discontent and with a rapidly changing system, whether it was the result of many new laws or changes brought about through industrialization and modernization, they can blur the distinction between resistance against overwhelming change and resistance against the government in power at the time of change. It appears clear that the majority of Hungarians were opposed to the oppressive regime. Following the failed war of independence, the people lost their voice: parliament, local political autonomy, free expression, and the use of the Magyar language by bureaucrats had vanished to be replaced by foreign officials, an unfamiliar and unwelcome police system, and a very expensive military police state.<sup>57</sup> But, as suggested, this was far from being the whole story.

As the pressure of foreign defeats and the loss of the dynasty's leading imperial position among the German states were pushing the Habsburgs to the position of rapprochement with their Magyar subjects, Péter Hanák adds that, from the Hungarian side, by the mid-1860s the pressure for an agreement and normalization was growing with the capitalist boom of the time. This stemmed from a desire for stability on

the part of those who were benefiting from the boom, coupled with the desire to share in its proceeds by those who had not yet benefited as well as the “recurrent peasant movements and ... the persistent claims of the nationalists, which threatened the noble-national hegemony.”<sup>58</sup> Szabad goes so far as to claim that to some degree at least, the resistance movement may have had the reactionary outcome of alienating sections of the community from the rapidly changing world around them and “contributing to their falling behind” not only a rapidly developing Europe, but even a modernizing Vienna or Pest.<sup>59</sup>

Class conflicts, which were submerged during the revolution, also soon reasserted themselves. As always in such circumstances, there are collaborators.<sup>60</sup> Sections of the aristocracy supported the crown, and the gentry, too, was divided. However, the victorious Habsburgs managed to drive the majority of the gentry and even the Habsburg-supporting conservatives into at least passive resistance by ignoring their concerns.<sup>61</sup> The nobles withdrew from public life, eschewed public office, and “wherever they could, evaded the directives of absolutism and boycotted its representatives.”<sup>62</sup> They retreated to their estates, to bide their time and await a better future, perhaps only “unified and intransigent” in one respect: the determination to regain the independence of which they had been robbed.<sup>63</sup> Furthermore, the forces of industrialization were discomfiting the lesser nobility. As their estates dwindled and they experienced greater difficulty in meeting their tax burdens, they may have focused on a patriotic duty to dodge them. In the words of Ignotus, “He felt he was protesting against tyranny and reaction; but in fact what hurt him most was inevitable in the process of industrializing a society.”<sup>64</sup> Even the peasantry, who were struggling to obtain land and were engaged in lawsuits against former landlords, hated foreign rule. Hanák notes that most of them “understood that the 1848 revolution had given them their liberation and land” and that the fight for independence “was alloyed in their minds with a certain amount of peasant democracy” in the same way as the “struggles of the age of absolutism were linked with national motives.”<sup>65</sup>

Kontler concludes that “Evidence on all sorts of collaboration uncovered by recent research suggests that the dimensions of passive resistance have been greatly exaggerated by national legend, but it still seems to have been the dominant type of political attitude in Hungary during neo-absolutism.”<sup>66</sup> History is of course crucially important in constructing national self-image. To quote British-Indian novelist Salman Rushdie, “Sometimes legends make reality, and become more

useful than the facts.”<sup>67</sup> In this case, Deák and the saga of Hungarian passive resistance have become vitally important in both the story of Hungary and the story of nonviolent struggle.

### CONCLUSION

Contrary to what Griffith may have written or Gandhi and his followers may have believed, Deák’s English language biographer seemingly underplays his subject’s contribution: “Deák did not originate ideas or bring mass movements to life.” Nevertheless, he adds that Deák “was able to recognize political, social, and economic forces and the power balance in the Habsburg lands, and above all, to sense the moment he could harness these forces and use them to realize his goal.”<sup>68</sup> Whatever influence Deák may have had on the Hungarian nonviolent resistance movement, and whatever influence the story of the movement against Habsburg oppression may have had on Gandhi and the popularizers of nonviolent action, even though it was not as unidimensional as the Griffith narrative would have it, it should be better known as an important and early chapter in the creation of a chronological narrative of nonviolent resistance and better analyzed to tease out the lessons it provides for plotting the course of successful nonviolent struggle.

One hundred and fifty years ago, Hungarian nonviolent resistance demonstrated that state terrorism can be resisted when the oppressed are sufficiently united and have an easily understandable, and simple to follow, course of action open to them. While a deeper analysis of the campaign seems to show that the Hungarian nonviolent resistance of the 1850s and 1860s was not quite as straightforward as its popularizers have claimed, such campaigns can be conducive to achieving the aimed for goals when outside events and deeper internal economic and social drivers come together to unite the oppressed and weaken the position of the oppressor. As the Hungarian example and recent major studies of nonviolent struggle have shown, this can be achieved when the oppressed withdraw their consent to be ruled and undermine state power by targeting areas of particular vulnerability of their oppressor.<sup>69</sup>

### NOTES

1. Bhattacharyya explicitly calls it the first action of its type; see Buddhadeva Bhattacharyya, *The Evolution of the Political Philosophy of Gandhi* (Calcutta, India: Calcutta Book House, 1969), 286.



2. The Hungarian pronunciation of the name is something like “Dey-ak.”
3. “Benefits of Passive Resistance—Notable Instances,” *Indian Opinion* (September 7, 1907).
4. See James D. Hunt, *Gandhi in London* (New Delhi, India: Promilla, 1978), 99–104.
5. See Thomas Weber, “Claiming Credit for Gandhi,” *Gandhi Marg* 27/2 (2005): 165–178.
6. The term “passive resistance” was the phrase used at the time, is the phrase used in the histories of the movement, and is the phrase still used in the Hungarian language. Probably most of those involved in the Hungarian campaign were peaceful while not opposed to explicit violence on principle the way Deák may have been. Nevertheless, the use of the term should not be read so as to give it the negative connotations of cowardice Gandhi came to feel that the term encompassed when he dropped it in favor of “satyagraha” and “civil disobedience.”
7. Arthur Griffith, *The Resurrection of Hungary: A Parallel for Ireland* (Dublin, Ireland: Whelan and Son, 1904). At the same time, the Hungarian example was being touted in Finland as a model for resisting Russian oppression.
8. Richard B. Gregg, *The Power of Nonviolence* (Philadelphia, PA: Lippincott, 1934), 1–2. This is taken directly from page xxiii of Griffith, *The Resurrection of Hungary*, 3rd edn., 1918 (the edition used here).
9. Gregg, *The Power of Nonviolence*, 2–3.
10. Krishnalal Shridharani, *War Without Violence: The Sociology of Gandhi's Satyagraha* (New York: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1939), 113.
11. See Mulford Q. Sibley, *The Quiet Battle: Writings on the Theory and Practice of Non-violent Resistance* (New York: Anchor, 1963).
12. Gene Sharp, *The Politics of Nonviolent Action* (Boston, MA: Porter Sargent, 1973), 594–595.
13. *Ibid.*, 766–767.
14. Ranganath R. Diwakar, *Saga of Satyagraha* (New Delhi, India: Gandhi Peace Foundation, 1969), 151–152.
15. On this, see Richard P. Davis, *Arthur Griffith and Non-violent Sinn Fein* (Dublin, Ireland: Anvil Books, 1974), generally, and 115 in particular, where Davis likens Griffith's account of Hungary to a “fairy tale.”
16. Griffith, *The Resurrection of Hungary*, 33.
17. *Ibid.*, 34.
18. *Ibid.*, 50.
19. *Ibid.*, 63.
20. Aldous Huxley notes that Lajos (Louis) Kossuth, the “ambitious, power-loving militarist” leader of the failed violent revolution of 1849 is far

better known than the humble pacifist Deák, who “without shedding blood compelled the Austrian government to restore the Hungarian constitution.” Huxley adds that, “Such is our partiality for ambition and militarism that we all remember Kossuth, in spite of the complete failure of his policy, while few of us have ever heard of Deák, in spite of the fact that he was completely successful.” Aldous Huxley, *Ends and Means: An Enquiry into the Nature of Ideals and into the Methods employed for their Realization* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1940), 147.

21. See, for example, Miklós Molnár, *A Concise History of Hungary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 206–207; and A. J. P. Taylor, *The Habsburg Monarchy 1809–1918* (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin, 1964).

22. William Robert Miller, *Nonviolence: A Christian Interpretation* (New York: Schocken, 1966), 242.

23. Clarence Marsh Case, *Non-violent Coercion: A Study in Methods of Social Pressure* (New York: Century, 1923), 328.

24. See Gábor Pajkossy, “Deák-émlékév” (“Deák Anniversary Year”), *BUKSZ*, 16 (2004): 144–157. Translations of Hungarian sources and titles are ours.

25. See Tamás Csapody, “Secondary Forms of Passive Resistance in Hungary Between 1848 and 1865,” *Central European Political Science Review* 5/15 (2004): 178–189.

26. See, for example, Ágnes Deák (ed.), *Deák Ferenc: Válogatott politikai írások és beszédek* [Ferenc Deák: Selected Political Writings and Speeches] (Budapest, Hungary: Osiris Kiadó, 2001).

27. It should be noted that even advocates of this latter approach disagree about the length of this era: some suggest that “passive resistance” started in 1849 or 1850 and ended in 1857 or 1860, while others claim that it lasted until 1861 or even 1867. Further uncertainties arise because some accounts note that various forms of “passive resistance” could be observed well before the revolution, during the so-called “reform era” of 1825–1848, or even earlier in the 1820s. See, for example, Kálmán Törs (ed.), *Deák Ferenc emlékezete* [The Memory of Ferenc Deák] (Budapest, Hungary: Deutsch Művészeti Intézet Kiadó, 1876), 23–25.

28. For example, Steven Huxley, in his analysis of Finnish “passive resistance,” notes that it has entered popular mythology in a way not necessarily supported by all the evidence. For how a romanticized view of a movement can effect later theoretical positions, see Steven Duncan Huxley, *Constitutionalist Insurgency in Finland: Finnish “Passive Resistance” against Russification as a Case of Nonmilitary Struggle in the European Resistance Tradition* (Helsinki, Finland: SHS, 1990), especially the first two chapters.

29. Rapid economic and social transformation, as a result of the disruptions of early industrialization and the rise of nationalism and liberal political

philosophies, led to violent revolutions in much of Europe, in particular in France, Prussia, and the Italian states, as well as in Hungary.

30. On the Hungarian revolution, see Istvan Deak, *The Lawful Revolution: Louis Kossuth and the Hungarians 1848–1849* (London: Phoenix Press, 1979).

31. Péter Gunst and Géza Závodszy (eds.), *Magyar történelmi kronológia* [Chronology of Hungarian History] (Budapest, Hungary: Tankönyvkiadó, 1987), 325.

32. István Nemeskürty, *Parázs a hamú alatt* [Embers Under the Ashes] (Budapest, Hungary: Megvető Könyvkiadó, 1981), 19.

33. Molnár, *A Concise History of Hungary*, 202.

34. On this, at the beginning of his 1862 novel *Az új földesur* [The New Landlord], Hungary's great writer of the period, Mór Jókai, has a character who vows to give up smoking when the government introduces a tobacco monopoly, to give up drinking when a tax is imposed on wine, and to quit playing cards when stamp duty is imposed on card packs.

35. Ágnes Deák, *Társadalmi ellenállási stratégiák Magyarországon az abszolutista kormányzat ellen 1851–1852-ben* [Social Resistance Strategies in Hungary Against the Absolutist Government in 1851–1852], *AETAS* 4 (1995): 27–59.

36. *Ibid.*, 20.

37. Some forms of resistance remained violent. There were protagonists of a new uprising, organising infantry regiments opting for guerilla warfare and plotting to kidnap the emperor or make an attempt on his life. Most of them were caught and eventually executed or sentenced to lengthy terms of imprisonment. See Lajos Lukács, *Magyar függetlenségi és alkotmányos mozgalmak 1849–67* [Hungary's Independence and Constitutional Movements 1849–67] (Budapest, Hungary: Művelt Nép, 1955).

38. Deák, *Társadalmi ellenállási stratégiák Magyarországon*, 20.

39. Béla K. Király, *Ferenc Deák* (Boston, MA: Twayne, 1975), 139.

40. György Szabad, *Hungarian Political Trends Between the Revolution and the Compromise (1848–1867)* (Budapest, Hungary: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1977), 46.

41. László Kontler, *A History of Hungary* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave, 2002), 271.

42. Katalin Körmöczi, ... *A mi megmarad, fordítsa jó célokra* (Deák Ferenc Hagyatéka) [ ... What Is Left, Put to Good Use [Ferenc Deák's Legacy]] (Budapest, Hungary: Magyar Nemzeti Múzeum, 1992), 86–89.

43. *Pesti Napló*, November 14, 1854, and November 21, 1854.

44. For Deák's relationship with the secret police, see Sándor Takáts, *Emlékezzünk eleinkről* [Remember Our Ancestors] (Budapest, Hungary: Genis Kiadó, 1929), 523–554.

45. Zoltán Ferenczi, *Deák élete [Deák's Life]* (Budapest, Hungary: Magyar Tudományos Akadémia, 1904), vol. 2, 233.
46. Szabad, *Hungarian Political Trends*, 46.
47. Deák to Báthory Gézané, January 10, 1857, quoted in Deák, *Deák Ferenc: Válogatott politikai írások és beszédek*, vol. 2, 17–18.
48. *Ibid.*, 18.
49. Quoted in Király, *Ferenc Deák*, 143.
50. Király, *Ferenc Deák*, 143.
51. Quoted in Király, *Ferenc Deák*, 164.
52. Király, *Ferenc Deák*, 165.
53. *Ibid.*, 140.
54. See Péter Dávidházi, *Per passivam resistentiam (Változatok hatalom és írás témájára)* [Per Passivam Resistentiam (Variations on the Theme of Power and Writing)] (Budapest, Hungary: Argumentum Kiadó, 1998), 29–51.
55. József Pap, *Magyarország vármegyei tisztikara a reformkor végétől a kiegyezésig* [The Civil Servants of Hungary's Counties Between the End of the Age of Reform and the Compromise] (Szeged, Hungary: Belvedere Meridionale, 2003), 11–38.
56. Quoted in Éva Somogyi, "The Age of Neoabsolutism, 1849–1867," in Peter F. Sugar, Péter Hanák, and Tibor Frank, eds., *A History of Hungary* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1990), 235–251.
57. See Somogyi, "The Age of Neoabsolutism," 241.
58. Péter Hanák, "The Period of Neo-Absolutism 1849–1867", in Ervin Pamlényi, ed., *A History of Hungary* (London: Collet's, 1975), 285–320.
59. Szabad, *Hungarian Political Trends*, 47.
60. See *ibid.*, 35–39; Ágnes Deák, "Nemzeti egyenjogúsítás." *Kormányzati nemzetiségpolitika Magyarországon 1849–1860* ["National Equal Rights." The Government's Handling of Minorities in Hungary 1849–1860] (Budapest, Hungary: Osiris Kiadó, 2000), 166, 169–170; and Pap, *Magyarország vármegyei tisztikara*, 32.
61. See Szabad, *Hungarian Political Trends*, 39–42. Paradoxically, at times some who were seen as collaborators by Hungarians were seen as passive resisters by the Austrians. See Deák, "Nemzeti egyenjogúsítás," 166, 171–172.
62. Hanák, "The Period of Neo-Absolutism," 297.
63. *Ibid.*, 308.
64. Paul Ignotus, *Hungary* (London: Ernest Benn, 1972), 65.
65. Hanák, "The Period of Neo-Absolutism," 299.
66. Kontler, *A History of Hungary*, 271.
67. Salman Rushdie, *Midnight's Children* (New York: Avon, 1982), 90.

68. Béla K. Király, "Ferenc Deák," in Pál Bródy, ed., *Hungarian Statesmen of Destiny, 1860–1960* (Boulder, CO: Atlantic Research and Publications, 1989), 1–36.

69. See, for example, Kurt Schock, *Unarmed Insurrections: People Power Movements in Nondemocracies* (Minneapolis, MA: University of Minnesota Press, 2005).