

István Papp (Historical Archive of the Hungarian State Security)

The increased role of the peasantry and intellectuals
in Hungary after World War I

Hereditary serfdom was abolished in Hungary in 1848. As a result of this and especially after the Compromise with Austria in 1867, the process of embourgeoisement and industrialisation began to accelerate. The defeat of World War I and the subsequent Treaty of Trianon profoundly changed the framework of Hungarian political life. The serious trauma halted the pace of embourgeoisement, but, on the other hand, the role of the peasantry gained more importance. The country lost many of its major cities, excluding Budapest, as well as a large portion of its industrial areas and natural resources. On the shrunk territory of the country the ratio of agricultural population increased; moreover, most of them were ethnic Hungarians. After the 1920s this part of the society was more and more widely regarded as a source of national revival. Dezső Szabó was the first to elaborate on this axiom in his novel *The Eroded Village*. In Szabó's wake in the 1930s and 1940s the popular writers, including Péter Veres, Ferenc Erdei and Imre Kovács, discussed the vital issues of the peasantry. In my paper I try to show why it could happen this way, what questions arose in politics and how this influenced political thinking in Hungary. In fact, this was the time when the rural country as an independent factor appeared as a theme in political debates.