

# HSR

---

## **Hungarian Studies Review**

**Vol. XXII, Nos. 1-2 (Spring-Fall, 1995)**

---

**Special Volume:**

### **Hungary Fifty Years Ago**

**Edited by N.F. Dreisziger**

In this special volume, Krisztián Ungváry writes about the disastrous break-out attempt of the German and Hungarian forces from the encircled Buda during the final days of the battle of Budapest in February, 1945; Susan Glanz examines the platforms of the political parties that participated in Hungary's first post-war elections; Pál Pritz analyses the war-crimes trial of former Hungarian Prime Minister László Bárdossy; and N. F. Dreisziger provides commentary on Bárdossy's interrogation by American military intelligence officials in July, 1945. In Part 2 of the volume Pál Pilisi reviews French documents dealing with France's policy toward the Danubian Basin after World War I; Béla Bodó assesses a comparative work on the evolution of Budapest and New York; and S.B. Vardy writes about the recently published encyclopedia of medieval Hungarian history.

---

## ***Hungarian Studies Review***

### **EDITORS**

George Bisztray  
*University of Toronto*

N.F. Dreisziger  
*Royal Military College of  
Canada*

### **EDITORIAL ADVISERS**

Marianna D. Birnbaum  
*UCLA*

Géza Jeszenszky  
*Budapest University of  
Economics*

Ilona Kovács  
*National Széchényi Library*

Mária H. Krisztinkovich  
*Vancouver, British Columbia*

Barnabas A. Racz  
*Eastern Michigan U.*

Thomas Sakmyster  
*University of Cincinnati*

Thomas Spira  
*U. of Prince Edward Island*

S.B. Vardy  
*Duquesne University*

József Vekerdí  
*Budapest*

### **SUBSCRIPTIONS MANAGER**

Eva Tomory *Toronto*

The *Hungarian Studies Review* is a semi-annual interdisciplinary journal devoted to the publication of articles and book reviews relating to Hungary and Hungarians. Since its launching in 1974, the *Review* has been committed to the policy of providing a forum for the scholarly discussion and analysis of issues in Hungarian history, politics and cultural affairs. It is co-published by the Hungarian Studies Association of Canada and the National Széchényi Library (Budapest, Hungary).

Institutional subscriptions to the *HSR* are \$12.00 per annum. Individual subscriptions are \$12.00 for one year and \$20.00 for two years. Membership fees in the Hungarian Studies Association of Canada include a subscription to the journal.

Correspondence regarding the publication of manuscripts, book reviews, etc., as well as subscriptions, should be addressed to:

The Editors,  
*Hungarian Studies Review*,  
University of Toronto,  
21 Sussex Ave.,  
Toronto, Ont., Canada M5S 1A1

Statements and opinions expressed in the *HSR* are those of the individual authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the journal's editors.

Articles appearing in the *HSR* are indexed in:  
HISTORICAL ABSTRACTS and,  
AMERICA: HISTORY AND LIFE.

Copyright © (1995) by the *Hungarian Studies Review*  
All rights reserved.

ISSN 0713-8083 (replacing 0317-204X)

Typesetting by N.F. Dreisziger.

Printed and distributed by the National Széchényi Library of Hungary.

Part 1 (Spring, 1995)

**Special Issue:**

# **Hungary Fifty Years Ago**

Introduced and edited by N. F. Dreisziger

**ESSAYS BY:**

KRISZTIÁN UNGVÁRY,

SUSAN GLANZ,

PÁL PRITZ

and

N.F. DREISZIGER

The publication of this volume would not have been possible without the cooperation of the National Széchényi Library of Hungary and the moral and financial support of a few individuals.





## CONTENTS

### Part 1. Special Issue:

## Hungary Fifty Years Ago

Hungary in 1945: An Introduction N.F. DREISZIGER.....	5
The "Second Stalingrad": The Destruction of Axis Forces at Budapest (February, 1945) KRISZTIÁN UNGVÁRY.....	13
Economic Platforms of the Various Political Parties in the Hungarian Elections of 1945 SUSAN GLANZ.....	31
War-Crimes Trial Hungarian Style: László Bárdossy Before the People's Tribunal, 1945 PÁL PRITZ.....	47
A Dove? A Hawk? Perhaps a Sparrow: Bárdossy Defends his Wartime Record before the Americans, July 1945 N.F. DREISZIGER.....	71

### Part 2. Review Articles:

La France et le bassin des Carpathes après la Première Guerre mondiale PÁL PILISL.....	91
Budapest and New York Compared BÉLA BODO.....	111
An Encyclopedia of Medieval Hungarian History: The Achievement of the "Szeged School" of Medieval Hungarian Historical Studies. STEVEN BELA VARDY.....	121
Forthcoming in 1996.....	127

## OUR CONTRIBUTORS:

BÉLA BODO is a doctoral candidate in History at York University in Toronto, Canada. He specializes in German, Austrian and Hungarian history.

N.F. DREISZIGER is Professor of History at the Royal Military College of Canada. He has published widely on Hungarian and Canadian subjects. In 1995 he is the Vice-President of the American Association for the Study of Hungarian History (AASHH).

SUSAN GLANZ is Professor of Economics at New York's St. John's University. For more than a decade now, she has been the AASHH's Secretary-Treasurer and editor of the Association's *Newsletter*. She has produced numerous conference papers and has published several articles on Hungary's economy.

Educated in Budapest, Hungary, and at the Catholic University of Louvain in Belgium, PROFESSOR PÁL PILISI teaches Political Science at the Université du Québec in Chicoutimi. He first published in our journal in 1976 and, since the 1980s, has often presented papers at the annual meetings of the Hungarian Studies Association of Canada.

Historian PÁL PRITZ heads the Social Sciences division of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. His doctoral dissertation dealt with Gyula Gömbös (Prime Minister 1932-36) and was published in book form. Dr. Pritz has published many other publications as well, most of them dealing with the political and diplomatic history of interwar and wartime Hungary.

KRISZTIÁN UNGVÁRY is a doctoral candidate in history at Eötvös Loránd University in Budapest, Hungary. His thesis focuses on the Battle of Budapest, 1944-45. He has published papers on this subject as well as on others, is working on a history of modern Hungary's German minority, and has participated in the production of programs for radio and television.

PROFESSOR S. B. VARDY teaches at Duquesne University in Pittsburgh, PA, and has published extensively on Hungarian and other themes. He is a regular contributor of papers and review articles to our journal. During 1995 he is the President of the American Association for the Study of Hungarian History.

## **Hungary in 1945: An Introduction**

**N.F. Dreisziger**

1945 was a fateful year in the history of Hungary and in the lives of her people. It began with some of the bitterest, most destructive fighting ever to take place on Hungarian soil: a life-and-death struggle between what was left of Hitler's armies and the largest military machine of World War II, the Red Army. And the year ended with the beginning of the slow reconstruction of "liberated" Hungary in the shadow of the victorious and powerful Soviet Empire. From experiencing death and destruction in January, the country passed to a stage of its development where it could experiment with a small degree of democracy and political pluralism but only as a result of Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin's decision not to impose Soviet-style totalitarianism on Hungary for the time being.

Despite the existence of limited freedom and the fervent hope by Hungarians that more would come, the work of rebuilding war-torn Hungary progressed only slowly. Economic reconstruction, in particular, was impeded by the enormous damage that had been inflicted on the country during the war, especially in 1944 and 1945. The damage suffered by the capital Budapest is touched on by military historian Krisztián Ungváry in his study of the last days of the battle of Budapest. The overall damage is summed up in Professor Susan Glanz's paper:

...between 420-450 thousand Hungarians died [during the war] and between 850-900 thousand were taken prisoners of war. Before the war Hungary had been an agricultural and industrial nation. In 1938, the last peace year, 37% of the national income was generated by agriculture and 38% by industry. Due to the demands of war, in the period of 1943-44, the ratio changed to 43% of national income generated by industry and 28% by agriculture. But after the war the destruction of the industrial sector left the country paralyzed. The damage,... caused, amount[ed] to \$4.27 billion — which represented five times the national income of that year and 40% of the national wealth. The country's infrastructure was destroyed, and agricultural activity also almost came to a standstill as the armies moved through Hungary. Over 90% of all industrial plants suffered some damage and nearly all inventories disappeared. Coal mines ceased to function as nearly all were flooded because of the lack of electricity needed to pump water out. The

economic situation was made even worse by Hungary's foreign and domestic debt. By September 1945 the foreign debt had amounted to... \$578 million.... [and] domestic debt [had reached] 14.2 billion *pengő*s [already on the eve of 1945].<sup>1</sup>

Had Professor Glanz wished to give a detailed picture of Hungary's economic difficulties in 1945, she could have filled several pages of her paper. To begin with, Hungary's transportation infrastructure was destroyed during the war. From March 1944 on, when Hungary became occupied by the *Wehrmacht*, the country was no longer spared by Allied air forces. In the balance of that year and early during early 1945, Hungary's railways, bridges, roads, as well as rolling-stock and motor transport manufacturing establishments were the targets of repeated attacks by the British Royal Air Force, the American Air Force and by Soviet bombers. During the struggle for Hungary between the Axis forces and the Red Army, much additional damage was inflicted. As if this was not enough, further destruction was inflicted by retreating German and Hungarian forces. In their flight westward they blew up most of the country's river and railroad bridges. They ripped up railway tracks in many places and took most of the country's rolling stock to the Third *Reich*. Many merchant ships were sunk by the retreating forces, while the rest, including all barges and tugs, were taken upriver to Germany. The same fate befell most of the country's automobiles and motor transport vehicles.

In regards to the state of the Hungarian economy during 1945 it might be added to what has been said above that, during the last phase of the war, the German High Command ordered a policy of systematic industrial dismantling and removals with the aim of denying the Red Army the chance of drawing on Hungarian economic resources. The consequence of this policy has been aptly described by economic historian András Góllner:

about 500 important factories not severely damaged by Allied bombs were either wholly or partially dismantled, their equipment requisitioned or scattered around the countryside. Paralleling this action, a considerable quantity of immovable property was destroyed by Nazi demolition experts. The list of removals and destruction is very long indeed, consisting of vast amounts of industrial and agricultural goods. Even the country's entire gold and silver reserves were taken to Germany.<sup>2</sup>

It also has to be remembered that, in addition to the loss of infrastructure and equipment, Hungary lost people as well, beyond those who became victims of the conflict. In the first half of 1945 approximately half a million people fled Hungary. These refugees included members of the government, the bureaucracy, the military, and of the professions, as well as thousands of ordinary working people. From the point of view of economic reconstruction, most costly was the loss of a large numbers of technicians, engineers, plant managers and owners.

Hungarians, however, were leaving the country not only towards the West, but they were also leaving towards the East. As the Red Army moved through the country, it collected a wide variety of people for deportation to the Soviet Union. There were the POWs — Hungarian soldiers who surrendered to the Russians; there were also soldiers that had gone into hiding and were discovered, members of the police forces, of para-military organizations, and so on. Then there were ordinary civilians — in some cases ethnic Germans, but more often than not Magyars — who were swept up by the occupation authorities and were sent to collection points from where they were transported to Soviet labour camps. It has been estimated that from the end of November 1944, the Soviets have removed from Hungary well over half-a-million people and scattered them throughout the GULAG — the world of POW, labour and penal camps that dotted the map of the vast Soviet countryside. According to our source, about a third of all those removed were civilians.<sup>3</sup>

There were, however, further impediments to economic reconstruction, as has already been hinted at in the quotation from Professor Glanz's paper. In the armistice agreement Hungary's Provisional Government signed early in 1945, the country was compelled to pay a very stiff penalty for its involvement in the war. The terms of this agreement gave the U.S.S.R rights to war booty. Furthermore, all German or Italian-owned assets in the country had to be transferred to Soviet ownership. Moreover, Hungary was denied generous financial and material support from the UNRRA, while some other states in East Central Europe received much help from this agency.<sup>4</sup> And, Hungary was confronted by other burdens. It is worthwhile quoting Professor Göllner again:

After 1945 the difficulties stemming from the economic havoc wreaked by the war were accentuated unexpectedly by another obstacle: Soviet economic exploitation. It came to equal, if in a different way, the intensity of those pre-1945 constraints which had for so long denied decent socio-economic standards for Hungary's people.

As the Red Army advanced westward through Hungary, all enterprises falling within its territory — some vacated only a few hours earlier by Nazi demolition experts — were assigned Soviet military commanders. These saw to it that factories still in working order began producing immediately for the war effort against the retreating Germans. Soviet military personnel also supervised production in the coal mines, and deliveries to the [Red] [A]rmy began forthwith.<sup>5</sup>

In fact, documentary evidence published in Hungary in the early 1970s describes the overall impact of Soviet military management on Hungary between the early winter of 1944 and the late summer of 1945. In the words of Professor Göllner this "management" resulted in:

1. The complete depletion of economic stocks...
2. Wholesale removal of all liquid assets from Hungarian banks and enterprise safes...
3. Widespread dismantling and removal of equipment from factories;
4. Breakneck production under difficult working conditions, heedless of the need for maintaining equipment;
5. Soviet requisitioning of industrial products without remuneration;
6. The difficulty of ensuring labour supply because of arbitrary street arrests by Soviet patrols and deportation of large numbers of skilled workers to the Soviet Union; and
7. The non-payment of workers' wages by Soviet military managers.<sup>6</sup>

By the time Soviet military management had ended in Hungary during the summer, the country's economy was in worse shape than it had been six months earlier. To quote Professor Göllner again: "...the affected firms were in utter chaos. Thousands of valuable machines and tools were lost, stocks were used up, and machines left badly damaged. Most of the firms were also hopelessly in deficit...." In agriculture the situation was similar. The Red Army had requisitioned "vast quantities of agricultural goods without payment, and drove away tens of thousands of cattle, horses, and other livestock." From the summer on, the requisitioning was the responsibility of the Hungarian government which tried to compensate the peasants. "Consequently, Göllner remarks, "instead of the peasants bearing the brunt of the occupation cost, the load was shifted onto the Hungarian treasury." All-in-all, Göllner concludes, "Soviet military management accelerated the collapse of Hungary's private sector,... impoverished millions of Hungarian workers and peasants, and confounded the country's new and inexperienced public administrators." Under such conditions it became necessary to introduce "the most thorough and encompassing central planning." "In 1945," Göllner goes on, "the Communist Party captured a commanding position in economic reconstruction — the Supreme Economic Council (SEC). This important instrument enabled it to sever the jugular vein of private capital..."<sup>7</sup>

The situation was exacerbated by the regime of reparation payments which was imposed on Hungary. In compliance with the Reparations Agreement of June 15, 1945, the country was obliged to pay heavy compensation to the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia. The total sum of \$300,000,000 does not seem excessive at first glance; however, when we consider the price structure, the product mix, and the timing of the deliveries, we realize how onerous this regime was for Hungary's postwar economy. The agreement on retribution did not take into consideration the fact that in the summer of 1945 much of Hungary's manufacturing was in shambles. Furthermore, no credit was given for the deliveries Hungary had made to the Soviet Union prior to the signing of the agreement. As a result, "almost 90% of Hungary's heavy industrial production [became] tied down by reparations orders." According to figures

produced by the Hungarian General Creditbank — "[by] August 1946, 76,000 out of 95,000 employees in heavy industry were engaged in retribution work,..."<sup>8</sup> A further problem was the fact that the value of retribution goods delivered was calculated at the level of 1938 dollars which in effect meant that Hungary had to deliver three or four times as much goods as would have been the case if 1945 dollars were used to determine their value. Underpricing, however, "was not the only factor substantially raising the nominal costs of the reparations package." The reparation agreement also overvalued the Hungarian currency. The net result, in the words of Professor Nicholas Spulber, was that "to obtain credit for one dollar of reparations, Hungary had to deliver goods worth almost 4 dollars at the current exchange rate."<sup>9</sup> Professor Göllner concluded that "the combined effects of these factors pushed up the reparations bill's real value to about 1.5 billion 1946 U.S. dollars."<sup>10</sup> It is not surprising that in the immediate post-war era Hungary made little or no progress in economic reconstruction and her people experienced wide-spread privations and even, in some cases and in some regions, starvation.

The situation was similar in the realm of politics. Though — as Professor Glanz points out in the first lines of her paper — some people in the early 1990s still talked of the "freedom" that had existed in the country in 1945, this myth of post-war political liberty had arisen years later when there was no freedom in the country, and when what had existed before appeared in a much more favourable light than conditions at the time really warranted.

There was only limited political freedom in the immediate post-war Hungary, and whatever freedom there was, existed by the grace of the Soviet leadership which was not ready for the time being to try to impose complete control over Hungary. Nevertheless, it did want to create conditions which would facilitate the imposition of complete control later and did not hesitate to use any means in achieving this. Some of the better-known methods used were the domination of such bodies as the Allied Control Commission for Hungary, the country's Supreme Economic Council, as well as the Ministry of the Interior, and through it, the security police forces. At the same time, the media under Soviet control — as well as military transportation facilities — were placed at the disposal of the Communist Party of Hungary. On the political "agenda" of the Communists in 1945, it is worth quoting Professor Bennett Kovrig, the author of the most detailed and most authoritative history of the Communist Party of Hungary:

Stalin was intent on fostering compatible regimes in his newly acquired sphere of influence, but in the case of Hungary he proceeded more cautiously... Following his advice,... the [communist] party's... leaders developed an incremental strategy... Putting on a conciliatory mask, they called for national unity and set the pace for the implementation of the land reform... At the same time they sought to expand their power base by indiscriminate recruitment, by seizing a dominant



position in the Trade Union Council and the police, and by creating a political police to pursue their enemies....

[After their defeat in the elections] the disappointed communists intensified their struggle from above and from below. Control over the interior ministry helped them to purge their opponents from the state administration, to persecute their enemies at large, to disband non-communist youth organizations, and to harass workers into joining the party.... At the same time, while rejecting Western aid, they could not countenance criticism of Russian pillage, of the heavy burden of reparations, and of disadvantageous commercial deals with the Soviet Union....<sup>11</sup>

Though not too many people suspected at the time, in 1945 the communist transformation of Hungary was not a question of "if" but of "when."

\* \* \*

In this special issue three research papers deal with themes that were central to evolution of Hungary in that fateful year of 1945: the war, economic reconstruction, and political as well as psychological rehabilitation. Dealing with the theme of the war, Krisztián Ungváry, in a case study of the collapse of Axis forces in Hungary, examines the antecedents and the events of the most disastrous of their defeats, the destruction of the German and Hungarian units that became trapped in Budapest (more precisely, Buda) when Soviet forces surrounded the Hungarian capital. In the following paper Professor Susan Glanz looks at issues of economic and political reconstruction, focusing on the first post-war elections that Hungary experienced after being "liberated" by the Red Army. The third paper deals with the theme of the Hungarian nation's moral and psychological rehabilitation. An important element of this process was the business of finding out what had gone wrong in Hungary during the 1939-1945 period and who were responsible for the country's tragedy. As Dr. Pál Pritz explains in his paper on the post-war trial of Premier László Bárdossy, in Hungary — as in some other countries as well — this process did not stop at answering the above questions but imperceptibly transmuted into a search for scapegoats and the inflicting of retribution on those who were in power before 1945. In an appendix-like documentary paper, the editor of this volume tries to throw a little more light on the mentality of Bárdossy in the summer of 1945, at the time that he began to face the prospect of being accused of war-crimes and being brought before a war-crimes tribunal. He also argues that the former Hungarian Prime Minister was not the war-hawk that his critics have made him out to be, and suggests that some of the accusations that have been made against him should be qualified or, in at least one case, be dismissed.

## NOTES

This introduction is based in part on comments I made at a session titled "1945 Reassessed: The Case of Hungary," sponsored by the American Association for the Study of Hungarian History, at the annual meeting of the American Historical Association, in Chicago, Illinois, on 7 January 1995.

<sup>1</sup>See the introductory paragraphs of Professor Glanz's paper. The subject is also discussed, especially with reference to the American view of these events, in László Borhi, "Soviet Expansionism or American Imperialism? American Response to the Sovietization of Hungary," in *20th Century Hungary and the Great Powers* (Boulder, Colorado: Social Science Monographs, distr. by Columbia University Press, 1995) Ignác Romsics, ed., pp. 233-35.

<sup>2</sup>András B. Göllner, "Foundations of Soviet Domination and Communist Political Power in Hungary: 1945-1950," *The Hungarian Revolution Twenty Years After*, N.F. Dreisziger, ed. (Ottawa, Ont.: *Canadian-American Review of Hungarian Studies*, 1976), p. 76.

<sup>3</sup>Tamás Stark, "Magyarok szovjet fogságban" [Hungarians in Soviet Captivity], *História*, vol. XVII, no. 2 (1995).

<sup>4</sup>Göllner, pp. 76f.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 77.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 77f.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 78. For a Hungarian-language overview of the impact of Soviet military occupation on Hungary see Péter Sipos, "A szovjetek és Magyarország, 1945" [The Soviets and Hungary, 1945], *História*, vol. XVII, no. 2 (1995), pp. 3-5.

<sup>8</sup>Although agricultural goods comprised only 15 percent of total reparations, these were extremely difficult to deliver. Hungarian agriculture had been shattered during the last phases of the war and its immediate aftermath. Little had been sown in the spring of 1944, most peasants lacked draught animals as well as implements, and there was a severe drought in 1945. These problems were exacerbated by the initial dislocations caused by the post-war land reform. "Compulsory agricultural deliveries for retribution compounded the damage and hindered the development of the newly-formed farming system. The result was widespread starvation." See Göllner, pp. 79-80.

<sup>9</sup>Spulber quoted *ibid.*, p. 80.

<sup>10</sup>Göllner, p. 80. Cf. Sipos, pp. 4f.

<sup>11</sup>Bennett Kovrig, *Communism in Hungary: From Kun to Kádár* (Stanford, California: Hoover Institution Press, 1979), pp. 151f.



## **The "Second Stalingrad": The Destruction of Axis Forces at Budapest (February, 1945)**

**Krisztián Ungváry**

translated from the Hungarian by Sean Lambert

### **The Strategic Situation from late-Sept., 1944, to early Feb., 1945**

Hungary became the primary theater of operations on the eastern front after the withdrawal of Romania from the war on August 23, 1944. In Poland, the front stood firm at the Vistula until January of 1945, thus both sides sought to resolve the stalemate on Hungarian soil. The Germans consequently sent a steady flow of reinforcements there: in September of 1944 the number of divisions from the *Heeresgruppe Süd* operating in Hungary had already reached eleven (four of which were armored); by January of 1945 the number of German divisions operating in the country stood at twenty-two (seven armored) and by early March thirty-one (ten armored). During this same time the front was constantly shifting due to the huge amount of weaponry deployed there and the conflict turned into a war of attrition.

The goal of the Soviet command following the conclusion of the tank battle at Debrecen was to occupy Budapest on the march toward the Vienna region. In the autumn of 1944, Stalin was already thinking in terms of territorial partition with the allies and wanted to ensure his supremacy in Central Europe as soon as possible. With this in mind, on October 28, he ordered Marshall Malinovsky to take Budapest immediately.

The capture of Budapest was of considerable strategic importance because without taking the capital city, further advance toward Vienna would not have been possible. As a result of the rash order to attack, the Soviet advance bogged down on the approaches to Budapest after the Hungarian First Airborne Battalion and units of the German 503rd Heavy Tiger Division disabled approximately fifty Soviet tanks on the outskirts of Vecsés.<sup>1</sup> The front stiffened on the periphery of Pest and thus began the siege of the capital city whose duration of fourteen weeks was surpassed only in the sieges of Stalingrad and Leningrad.

A subsequent Soviet attack launched on December 6 from the vicinity of Hatvan succeeded in breaking through the German lines; on December 10, Soviet

troops reached the Danube and invested the city in a semicircle. On December 22 the Soviets broke through the front at Lake Velence. Exploiting the complete absence of German reinforcements behind the front, the Soviet forces advanced to the western fringes of Buda on the 24th, penetrating into the city that afternoon and to within five kilometers of the right bank of the Danube.

The Soviets, however, were not equipped to exploit this opportunity fully, which fact allowed Karl Pfeffer-Wildenbruch, the commanding general of the Ninth SS Mountain Corps, to organize a defensive base in Buda with the forces at his disposal. But this was only a temporary reprieve for the Germans. On December 27 the command of the Ninth SS Mountain Corps decided to evacuate Budapest and attempt a breakout toward the west.<sup>2</sup> Preparations for the evacuation had already started when, on December 28, Hitler forbade the attempt. The Fourth SS Panzer Corps was accordingly transferred from the Warsaw area to Transdanubia in order to reestablish contact with the forces under siege in Budapest. This operation, bearing the code name "Konrad," consisted of three successive actions which ultimately failed despite the fact that the Germans had employed all the military might at their disposal in order to force an end to the stalemate.<sup>3</sup>

### **Antecedents to the Breakthrough Attempt**

On several occasions during the siege, the command of the German army in Budapest made plans to abandon the city and attempt to break out of the Soviet encirclement. Such an action would have been possible either in early January or in concert with the later German relief operations. Hitler, however, continued to deny permission to launch such an action. In Hitler's mind, the defense of Budapest was primarily of political rather than military significance. In light of the fact that the Germans had transferred more reinforcements to Hungary than any other theater of operations, it became vitally important to Hitler that he be able to produce some positive results where the greatest number of his armored divisions had been deployed.

Karl Pfeffer-Wildenbruch acted in accordance with Hitler's orders until the very last moment. He engaged in no negotiations with Soviet military emissaries and directed the defense of Budapest for seven full weeks, until February 11. He only committed himself to a breakthrough attempt at the eleventh hour, after it had become evident that the remaining districts of Buda would soon fall to the Soviets. Throughout the entire war to that point, no German army had yet chosen to lay down its arms before the Soviets if a breakout operation remained a viable alternative.<sup>4</sup> Psychological factors played the primary role in this: commanding officers could not face the odium of surrender and everyone feared Siberia and the Soviets. On the eastern front, total *Weltanschauungskrieg* was being waged. This sometimes had fatal impli-

cations for prisoners of war. Thus it was not only an ethos of duty and loyalty which compelled the Germans to resist to the final bullet, but fear as well.

Between February 5 and 6 the Soviets captured Sas Hill, thus opening the western approaches to Castle Hill and the Citadel.<sup>5</sup> On February 8 combat centered around the Southern Railway Station, on the 9th around Lesser Gellért Hill (Kis Gellérthegy), and by the 10th Soviet forces were laying siege to the Citadel.

Pfeffer-Wildenbruch then decided to act. Since further resistance seemed futile, he decided to attempt a breakout. Because Hitler had prohibited any such action, it was only at the last minute, on February 11 at 5:50 p.m., that he made the following announcement on his radio:

1. We have exhausted our rations and loaded our final cartridges. We, the defenders of Budapest, may choose between capitulation and massacre. The remaining combat-ready fragments of the German army, the *honvéd* (Hungarian soldiers) and the Arrow Cross will together launch an offensive action in order to secure a new base of operations.
2. At sunset on two-eleven I'm breaking out. I request rendezvous in the vicinity of Szomor-Máriahalom.
3. Signal: twice green equals friendly forces.
4. Effective strength: 23,900 Germans of whom 9,600 are wounded; 20,000 Hungarians of whom 2,000 are wounded; and 80,000-100,000 civilians.<sup>6</sup>

Immediately after the announcement, personnel of the signal unit demolished the radio equipment, rendering the launching of the operation irreversible.

### **The German and Hungarian Forces Defending Budapest**

At this time Pfeffer-Wildenbruch had only very limited forces at his disposal. The German divisions were in a state of total battle weariness. The SS and police units consisted primarily of poorly trained ethnic-German — so-called *Volksdeutsche* — conscripts from Transylvania and Hungary,<sup>7</sup> whose *esprit de corps* often left much to be desired.<sup>8</sup> An unsteady supply of ammunition was also a source of great difficulties. Survivors recall that rations were very bland, consisting generally of horse meat and beans. There was certainly no lack of horse meat since two cavalry battalions had been trapped in the city and most Hungarian supply trains were horse-drawn.

Most of the remaining heavy weaponry had either been destroyed already or was tied down in battle and could not be utilized as part of the breakout

attempt owing to the fact that the majority of vehicles could not be redeployed undetected to the starting point of the operation.<sup>9</sup>

The state of the Hungarian troops was even more appalling. Of the 14,000 combat-ready soldiers which constituted the Tenth Infantry Division in early November, by January at best only 2,500 had remained. The great majority of these, 1,800 troops, defected to the Soviet side on February 1 when the front line shifted to Margit Boulevard.<sup>10</sup> The Twelfth Reserve Division by mid-December had dwindled to a force consisting merely of six, weak, 200-man battalions, and seven artillery batteries. During the seven-week siege, this number was further reduced by approximately one-half. The First Armoured Division, which in the middle of December still possessed ten serviceable tanks, presented an even more discouraging picture. By January all its armored vehicles had been destroyed and by the beginning of February the division's effective strength amounted to only about 200 men. The Fourth Hadik Hussar Regiment by this time had counted only sixty men. Around February 8, its commanding officer, Lieutenant Colonel Kókay, summoned his remaining men and issued furloughs to them, thereby dissolving his own unit.

The morale of the troops defending Budapest was generally not the best. Most Hungarian soldiers attempted to extricate themselves as quickly as possible from participation in the seemingly futile resistance and deserted, defected to the Soviet side or simply lingered behind the front lines. This explains why the number of troops receiving rations in Budapest outnumbered the standing personnel of all the combat units in the city approximately five-to-one! For this reason, Pfeffer-Wildenbruch had little regard for the combat effectiveness of the Hungarian troops and, during the final stages of the siege, did not even take them into consideration.

The German army was in somewhat better shape, if only for the reason that, being on foreign soil, made it more difficult for German soldiers to go into hiding. Also, the Germans were more frightened of the prospect of capture by the Soviets than were the Hungarians. It was known at the time that the Russians often did not spare the lives of SS personnel — who constituted half of the German forces in Budapest — when they fell into captivity. It should be mentioned that the SS units defending Budapest were not made up of crack SS troops from the *Reich*, but consisted in part of conscripted Swabians from the Bácska and Bánát regions of the southern part of the Carpathian Basin (primarily the Twenty-second SS Division), and of Transylvanian Saxons (the Eighth SS Division) from what is present-day Rumania. There were also French, Spanish, Walloon and Flemish conscripts in these units.

### **The Operational Plan of the Breakout**

On the morning of the 11th, Pfeffer-Wildenbruch convened a meeting of his staff at which, after heated debate, it was decided that the breakout would be con-



ducted through wooded terrain in smaller detachments and without the aid of heavy weaponry. According to the plan, the main forces were to commence the operation at 8:00 p.m. from Széll Kálmán (today better known as Moszkva) Square and Széna Square, with several smaller commando units moving out from along the entire length of Margit Boulevard. The first objective: Hűvösvölgyi Avenue to the Budakeszi junction, regrouping of the troops first on Remete Hill and then in the woods lying to the east of Tinnye. They planned to reach Tinnye by morning which they would capture through concentrated attack; from there they would execute a breakout to the south if circumstances permitted. According to their calculations, they would reach their own lines in the neighborhood of Szomor the next day at around noon. They also adopted the watchword for establishing contact with their own troops: "Hitler-Hindenburg." In order to preserve strict secrecy surrounding the operational plan, it was only revealed to the divisional commanders at 2 p.m., to the regiment commanders at 4 p.m. and to the troops at 6 p.m. It was only at this time that the Hungarian troops — along with their commanding officers — were informed of the plan because the Germans feared betrayal from them. Before the operation was finally launched, they destroyed their remaining serviceable vehicles and matériel.

It is revealing of the true degree of secrecy surrounding the plan that several of those who participated in the operation (including Hungarians) remember having suspected on the morning of the 11th, and even as early as the evening of the 10th, when the operation was to be launched.<sup>11</sup>

Wild notions regarding the breakout attempt spread among the troops. Many believed that they would reach their own lines after a short march. Some claimed that it would be a mere fifteen to twenty-kilometer march, that the Soviets had only service units poised against them and that the rescue forces were already waiting to meet them at Pilisszentkereszt. Shortly after 6 p.m. General Schmidhuber, the commanding officer of the German Thirteenth Armored Division "radiates a paternal air among his circle of intimate friends and declares, 'Well, we're not just going to stand here and let ourselves be captured are we? By the day after tomorrow we'll all be on the other side, sitting together comfortably and drinking a little wine.'"<sup>12</sup> The same sort of reasoning prompted an entire army of civilians to prepare for the breakout, often with strollers and stacks of furniture.

Sober observers suspected, however, that the operation might not be so successful. Pfeffer-Wildenbruch, accompanied by Lieutenant Colonel Dörner's 500 SS police and Iván Hindy, the commanding officer of the Hungarian First Corps, perhaps not by chance, chose another route: they planned to bypass the most critical phase of the operation — the penetration of Soviet lines — by taking the Ördögárok (literally: the Devil's ditch) underground sewerage canal as far as the Bolyai Academy.

The Soviets likely suspected that a breakout attempt was imminent. There was every reason to believe this since the Germans had always attempted

this if at all possible. Neither could the direction of the breakout attempt have remained a mystery because it was obvious that the Germans would choose the shortest wooded route where they would not have to engage their forces in open-field combat with the superior Soviet armor. In addition, there is evidence indicating that the German operational plan had been betrayed.<sup>13</sup>

Soviet expectations are revealed by the fact that they formed three lines of defense at the eventual point of the breakout attempt. The first at the height of Széll Kálmán Square, the second at the height of János Hospital with the third extending along the slope of the János Hill. People who lived in the vicinity at the time recall that most residents of Retek Street, Lövdház Street and the lower section of Fillér Street as well as Széll Kálmán Square were evacuated in the week preceding February 11. The Soviets planned to withdraw from the first to the second line of defense at the beginning of the attack from where they would contain the enemy assault in the correspondingly formed pockets. More forces were stationed between Budapest and the front, such as the Second Armored Guards and the Fifth Mounted Guard Corps. The Soviets also positioned an armored unit near Dorog in order to seal off the Tinnye-Perbál road in the event of a breakout attempt.

There is very little information available regarding the immediate military preparations preceding the breakout attempt. According to some sources, at 6 p.m. the Germans infiltrated Soviet-held sectors along Margit Boulevard and elsewhere with an advance unit dressed in civilian clothing whose mission it was to roll up the front line. The Soviets had earlier employed this strategy during the capture of the Southern Railway Station.<sup>14</sup> The Hungarian First Army Corps also maintained a plainclothes "diversionary unit" which likely participated in preliminary actions prior to the breakout attempt.<sup>15</sup>

According to other sources, a detachment of German commandos dressed in Soviet uniforms inaugurated the breakout action. Posing as Soviet guards escorting German prisoners, they succeeded in disarming the Soviet sentry post at Széll Kálmán Square.<sup>16</sup>

Interestingly, Pfeffer-Wildenbruch and the other German officers who survived the breakout attempt did not recall any such advance operations. They claim that the Kündiger Rangers were to open the front at Széll Kálmán Square. Works on the siege of Budapest repeat uniformly that "the Russians began to cover the castle in an incredibly dense barrage at precisely 8 p.m., just as troops began streaming out from the castle..."<sup>17</sup> This is cited above all to serve as proof that even the smallest strategic details of the breakout attempt had been betrayed.

This, however, was not actually the case. The artillery bombardment became increasingly heavy until 10 or 11 p.m., only then reaching its climax.<sup>18</sup> Although the Russians had predicted the site of the breakout attempt, they were probably not completely certain of its timing, if not for any other reason than the fact that, during the siege of Budapest, German-Hungarian forces had carried out more than twenty attacks which were never immediately distinguishable from the beginnings of a breakout attempt.

## The Beginning: "Der erste Akt der Verzweiflung"

The first units of storm troops began their attack at 8 p.m. According to the operational plan, the two primary assault units were to have been Haller's Eighth SS Mounted Division and Kündiger's 271st Völkisch Grenadiers, both of which were supplemented by other units.

We rush across the open square. There is crackling, rattling and whistling in front of us, beside us and behind us. Machine guns clattering, submachine guns sputtering, shots ringing out, hand grenades exploding — fire everywhere. No time to think. There is a burning armored vehicle in front of me. There must be Russian guns ahead which are firing nonstop into the swarm of attackers. Direct hit follows direct hit. Those who get hit stay down. Like lemmings rushing blindly down into the sea, the previously disciplined assault forces now raced headlong toward oblivion.<sup>19</sup>

At Ostrom Street the surviving members of Vannay's Rangers regrouped. Their gear and equipment consisted of a winter jacket made of bed sheets, a small bag containing chocolate, *pálinka* (Hungarian brandy) and lard, a helmet, grenades and submachine guns — many of which were of Soviet make, which were advantageous in that it was not difficult to obtain ammunition for them.

One former member of Vannay's Rangers present at Ostrom Street recalls that among those present

three spoke impeccable Russian, one ethnic German from Bessarabia..., [another man who] had been a prisoner of war for ten years and the [third]... a Ruthenian boy. They took ladders and slid them horizontally across the artillery trenches and crawled across into the darkness on all fours, speaking with the Russian sentries — and they made it over! Dispatch back: second squad may proceed. In the meantime all hell broke loose: powerful mine explosion, machine guns and other small arms. In spite of this, the majority of the second squad made it across to the postal building where they met up with several of Vannay's men who had been holding out inside.<sup>20</sup>

Several people recall that in the hours before the breakout attempt, the Soviets played the hit song "Hiába menekülsz, hiába futsz" ("No Sense in Running, no Sense in Flight") and blared the message "We know that you're going to try a breakout and we're waiting for you!" via loudspeaker.<sup>21</sup>

Soviet flares bathed Széll Kálmán Square in daylight and machine-gun fire swept down upon the troops spearheading the breakout. Soviet armored

vehicles and anti-tank guns dug in at János Hospital made any advance difficult. The attack stalled here for quite some time until a tank which had miraculously made it through unscathed was incredibly able to destroy them.

The attacking German and Hungarian troops used bazookas to destroy several of the Soviet armored vehicles which had taken up position along the Városmajor - János Hospital - Budagyöngye line. However, one must keep in mind that the attackers were only able to take six or seven kilos of arms and ammunition with them — some hand grenades, a rifle or submachine gun, a maximum of seven magazines while a few of them had bazookas. Very few carried machine guns because an extra man was required to carry their magazines and the entire apparatus was extremely heavy. Due to the intense combat, most soldiers had run out of ammunition after the first kilometer of the advance.

The command of the First Hungarian Armored Division reached the foot of Szilágyi Erzsébet Avenue between ten and eleven o'clock followed by a swell of humanity from Moszkva Square which included civilians and mothers pushing baby carriages.

Suddenly three Soviet armored vehicles rolled out from Pasaréti Street and from a distance of approximately 400 meters fired shells and tracers at the compact columns of people. What resulted was unimaginable. The shells blew away ten people next to me and when you tried to get out of there, you would step on some guy who started moaning.<sup>22</sup>

The initial wave of several thousand attackers — probably owing to sheer physical pressure exerted from behind by subsequent waves of troops — broke through the line of the Soviet 180th Division, trampling over mounds of corpses of those who had fallen before them, and proceeded up Szilágyi Erzsébet Avenue to Budagyöngye where they reached as far as the pharmacy located at the Budakeszi junction. This advance was won at an unbelievable human cost. The losses were so appalling that the vanguard of the second attack wave did not dare move forward. The narrow streets of the Castle District were jammed with troops from the rear who could not see the carnage and were trying to make their way to the front line. The blockage often lasted for hours.

The breakthrough did not entail a total mop-up of the occupied ground. Soviet soldiers hid in buildings and occasionally opened fire on those fleeing the city.

The second echelon reached the front line between approximately 9 p.m. and 11 p.m. General Schmidhuber, the commander of the Thirteenth Armored Division, was killed on Retek Street and Zehender, the commander of the Twenty-Second SS Mounted Division, had his right leg blown off and committed suicide. Major General Rumohr and three of his officers did likewise.

The Soviets had already evacuated the entire civilian population of the area between February 10 and 11. Soviet soldiers either withdrew or hid in the attics of nearby buildings. They were not immune to the shock of combat and

panic broke out in several places among the Soviet troops.<sup>23</sup> As a result of this, gaps emerged in the Soviet defenses through which it was possible to exit the city unimpeded.

Lieutenant-General Billnitzer reached Széna Square at only around 11 p.m.:

Here our unit was greeted by a horrible sight. It must have been around midnight. In the middle of the square there was a medium-sized armored vehicle whose German insignia was clearly visible. The flaming vehicle illuminated the entire square making it possible to see the aftermath of combat since it was from here that the first breakout attempt was launched in the direction of Olasz Avenue. We saw corpses and the wreckage of vehicles lying in every direction. We reached the foot of the street leading to Olasz Avenue where mostly German wounded lay moaning in the first floor windows of the buildings, asking for cigarettes to relieve their suffering. It was from them that I learned that the breakout attempt had been unsuccessful and that they had seen a huge number of dead. During this time there was relative calm. One could hear the sizzling sound of burning vehicles and snatches of conversation from the wounded resigned to their fate.<sup>24</sup>

At around midnight relative calm descended upon Széll Kálmán Square:

A few hours later, when we got back down to Széna Square... the newly forming crowd instinctively set off in the direction of Olasz Avenue because they thought this would be the way out. We joined up with bigger and smaller groups. There was no unified command. Movement wasn't uniform and various groups of people moved toward the city as well. In the calm of the night they were obstinately, stubbornly trying to get somewhere, apparently without any direction. I clearly remember reaching Bimbó Street... from where we wound our way uphill with the crowd. After we had made it up out of the valley we perceived combat sounds and the braking and squeaking of tracked vehicles was even audible.<sup>25</sup>

A few officers still maintained a measure of control over their troops. Helmut Wolff, the first lieutenant of the *Feldherrenhalle* Anti-tank Brigade, and later colonel in the *Bundeswehr*, saw that it would be impossible to advance any farther in the direction of Szilágyi Erzsébet (Olasz) Avenue and ordered his remaining intact battalion to attempt to break out across Vérmező-Kékgolyó Street. This was an unexpected success. They were able to pass through presumably abandoned Soviet positions with practically no resistance. By daybreak they were already on the steep heights above the Budakeszi junction. During the

course of that day another approximately 2000-strong detachment joined forces with them, increasing their total strength to nearly 3,200 men.<sup>26</sup>

Sources recall a dense fog extending down to the foot of the Buda Hills on the morning of February 12. Many groups took advantage of this weather, including many civilians who at this time were proceeding in several groups of various sizes (two to three thousand), some in the direction of Szabadság Hill and others to the north, in the direction of Remete Hill and Hármashatár Hill. Thus the breakout attempt was successful in so much as approximately 16,000 people reached as far as the hills surrounding the city.

### **The German Command's Passage through Ördögárok**

According to the operational plan, the staff of the German headquarters — Colonel Dörner's 500-man storm-trooper unit as well as the *Luftwaffe's* anti-aircraft personnel and marines (the hand-glider pilots trapped in Budapest) and a few other special units — were to get behind Soviet lines via the Ördögárok sewage canal. However, because the existence of the underground passage did not remain secret, various groups attempted to use it as an escape route without permission, especially after the collapse of the organized breakout attempt.<sup>27</sup>

It had already become light when the Germans reached the mouth of the Ördögárok. The emerging storm troopers were greeted by heavy artillery and machine-gun fire, making further advance impossible. Some of the Germans attempted to proceed via the narrower canal running beneath Budakeszi Avenue which branched off from the main canal beneath Hűvösvölgyi Avenue. Pfeffer-Wildenbruch was among those who tried this route. After exiting the sewage canal he and the ten to fifteen people next to him sought refuge in one of the villas on Budakeszi Avenue. However, the Russians discovered them later that morning. A Soviet officer recalls that

During the battle for the house we sent a Hungarian civilian who spoke German over to the enemy in order to offer them a chance to surrender. In order to lend more authority to our ultimatum, we positioned our 45-millimeter gun — which was manned by First Lieutenant M.U. Zagoryan — opposite the house. The answer from the enemy was that they would lay down their arms under the following conditions: (a) we ensure their lives and (b) a Soviet officer of at least the rank of major take them into custody. Major Skripkin, the commander of the division's chemical unit, was there and wrote on a piece of paper with a finger dipped in ink[!] that he, as a major in the Red Army, was prepared to take them prisoner.<sup>28</sup>

The planned breakout through the Ördögárok sewage canal ended in complete failure. As far as we know, of those who set forth on this route, not

one managed to make it over to their own lines and it is questionable whether anybody even made it beyond Pesthidegkút. After Iván Hindy and his escort turned back before Budagyöngye at around noon, he decided that he would try to sneak out undetected somewhere in the city and disappear. Since it was not possible to get out at the Ördögárok outlet or through the collapsed vault at Döbrönte Square, the detachment chose to take the original exit where they were immediately captured.<sup>29</sup>

### **The Fate of the Troops and the Events of February 11-13**

The withdrawal of the Soviet first line of defense opened several gaps through which a significant number of people were able to slip through the encirclement. Reaching wooded terrain was naturally the primary goal because there one would not be forced to contend with Soviet armor and progress was much quicker than in urban areas.

Troops attempting to break out managed to reach woodland at several places. One group of approximately two to three thousand men set off in the direction of Hármashatárhegy, Solymár and Csobánka. Another group of fleeing German soldiers chose the Hármashatárhegy - Szarvas Hill - Nagyszénás route from which they escaped into the woods between Tinnye and Derbál. A third group, to which Lieutenant Colonel Wolff belonged, moved south from Nagykovácsi. The air force even dropped supply canisters — whose remnants long lay rusting in the woods — down to them on the crest of the Vörös Pocsolyás. This group reached the woods in the vicinity of Budajenő and Telki.

The fleeing troops and civilians were able to travel through the woods relatively undisturbed if one overlooks the attacks by Russian airplanes. The risk factor always increased dramatically once one left the woods for the open field where one had to contend with Soviet cavalry and armored vehicles patrolling the roads. The Russians often fired mortars at groups appearing on the western slopes of the Buda Hills, forcing them back into the woods.

A significant number of people, including Lieutenant General Billnitzer and his troops, veered off toward the south in the direction of the Nagykopasz and the Game Preserve (Vadaspark). Many of the troops participating in the operation, such as First Lieutenant Litteráti and many Germans, attempted to break out along the cogwheel railway line. Some of them made it all the way to Szabadság Hill, but were massacred there by Russians waiting in ambush who spared only the Hungarians.<sup>30</sup> All semblance of discipline crumbled among the starved and half-mad troops who occasionally turned on one another over food.<sup>31</sup> Many of the fleeing soldiers discarded their weapons so that they could move faster in the deep snow.<sup>32</sup> By this time many had indeed given up the fight:

The Germans moving ahead of us stopped dead in their tracks, so we stopped too — but since we didn't know what was going on, we



continued forward with the captain. Up ahead the ranking German officer, Obersturmbannführer Flügel, was lying in the snow screaming that he had had enough of this madness, that it was all in vain and that he wasn't going to take another step forward etc. His men just stood there around him...<sup>33</sup>

According to those who participated in the operation, after two or three days everybody was on the verge of madness. Soldiers saw houses, kitchens and food before them in the fields of snow or imagined that they were at the Southern Railway Station. Many were driven insane by constant privation.<sup>34</sup>

Only somewhat more than 700 men managed to reach the German lines, a large number of whom belonged to the group led by Lieutenant Colonel Helmut Wolff. On February 13 they marched all the way to the western fringes of the woods above Nagykovácsi to the Budajenő heights. After dark they broke through the interior Russian line which lay before them and — engulfed in a continuous fire-fight — reached the lines of the German Third Mounted Division at dawn.<sup>35</sup> Reserve First Lieutenant László Szilasy led the first group to arrive. By the evening of the 13th they had already reached the Anyácsa-Pusztai heights between Szomor and Máriahalom. They crossed into German lines near the chapel in the cemetery of the Szomor Catholic Church with a total of four officers — three Germans and one Hungarian — and twenty-three privates. The Germans could attribute their successful crossing primarily to Szilasy's knowledge of the local terrain.<sup>36</sup>

Most of the 624 men who succeeded in reaching German lines did so on February 16. Only very few — at most eighty to one hundred men — arrived after this date.<sup>37</sup>

For some, the breakout operation ended only weeks or months later. Some German soldiers, fearful of being captured, hid out in the woods, and sometimes even the city itself, until spring and even summer.

### **Those who stayed behind: Events at the Castle and the Military Hospital**

People remained in the Castle for various reasons. The order calling for a breakout operation simply did not reach many troops while many stayed behind intentionally because they thought the undertaking to be hopeless. Hungarians constituted the majority of the former group and nearly all of the latter. The number of Hungarians who took part in the operation could not have exceeded five thousand.

Several thousand seriously wounded men remained in the Alagút (Tunnel), the Castle Hospital, the basement of the National Bank, and elsewhere. "Many of them were crying in fear of what tomorrow would bring" is how one of the survivors remembers the mood which prevailed in the Tunnel at the

beginning of the breakout. And to make matters worse, the head physician fled with his staff leaving his charges to their fate.

Staff physician Hübner, seeing that the breakout attempt had failed, turned back in order to remain with the wounded whom the other doctors had left to fend for themselves in the dressing stations in the cellars of the Royal Palace. Here approximately 2,000 wounded remained without any care or supervision.

The Russians decided to close the hospital and picked the doctors out from among the P.O.W.s in order to help with the wounded. Medical Sergeant Aladár Konkoly Thege remembers it this way:

I had to go to the second floor below ground. We were moving ahead slowly, only a few lamps and candles flickered. The air was dense and stuffy. The smell of blood, decay, pus, excrement, sweat, urine, tobacco smoke and gun powder mixed together to form a thick stench. It permeated the corridor, nauseating, unbearable. Flashlights plucked faces from the dark. Wounded lay in long lines along both walls of the corridor on wooden bunks — some of which were multilevel — although many received nothing more than bare concrete. Most of them were in uniform with bandoliers, maybe the side-arm holster wasn't empty, there might be hand grenades in their pockets. Bloody, festering, soggy bandages, open fracture wounds held together by loose wire splints.<sup>38</sup>

Fires broke out at the dressing stations several times, though they were put out immediately. The fires were probably started by cigarettes. Estimates as to the number of lives claimed by the blazes vary from 300 to 800. The wounded from the dressing stations were transferred to Honvéd Military Hospital Number Eleven (on the present site of the College of Physical Education), with the survivors returning home during the summer of 1945.

## Epilogue

The Budapest breakout attempt went down in history as one of the most desperate operations of the Second World War. It followed Central Europe's bloodiest urban siege. Out of the 43,900 German and Hungarian troops serving in Budapest on February 11, forty-six percent were killed during the course of the breakout attempt (see the appendix on page 30). Less than two percent of the soldiers who had been defending Budapest escaped, and of these, fewer than ten percent were Hungarian. Nearly half of the soldiers who participated in the breakout operation, 17,000 men, perished in the space of a few days. It is not by chance that Budapest is often referred to as a "second Stalingrad" in German memoirs.

Germans, especially those wearing SS uniforms, could not count on clemency. What happened fifty years later in Grozny and Sarajevo was a brutal reality in Budapest during the winter of 1944-45. In many cases, those giving themselves up were simply slaughtered, as occurred next to the János Hospital where German corpses with their hands raised in surrender lay strewn on the ground.<sup>39</sup> The wounded were also often shot, "accidentally," presumably because they were not fit for work and presented nothing but a burden to the Soviets.<sup>40</sup> Members of the SS were often forced to dig their own graves, such as at the Budakeszi community athletic field.<sup>41</sup> Russian and Ukrainian soldiers serving in the German armed forces were shown the least mercy of all: they were shot summarily.<sup>42</sup>

What prompted the the German command to undertake such a desperate, insane operation, as it did at Budapest on February 11?

The breakout operation is only comprehensible when considered as a manifestation of total war psychosis. Alas, the German command was not equal to the great challenge with which it was faced: its fear of the Russians — and, especially, being captured by them — impaired its judgment and, instead of surrender, it chose to drive its panic-stricken troops toward certain destruction.

The ultimate responsibility, however, for the carnage at Budapest — throughout the winter of 1944-45 but in particular in the final phase of the battle — rests with the supreme war leaders: Stalin and, especially, Hitler. For both of them the struggle for the Hungarian capital became less and less a military necessity; it gradually turned into a battle to gain political advantage or to score psychological victory. In the end, it became a contest of wills. By the fall of 1944 Stalin had definitely aimed at grabbing as much land in Central Europe as possible to strengthen his hands in the forthcoming negotiations at Yalta and, ultimately, at a post-war peace conference. Hitler, on the other hand, was desperate to prove that, once he had concentrated substantial forces in Hungary, he would not have to yield Budapest to the Russians. He could have offered a rescue to the city's defenders by allowing them to break out with a fair chance of success in December when the local command had deemed such operation still feasible. By the second or third week of January, when the IV SS Panzer Corps got close to the western outskirts of the city, the chances of a successful breakout had diminished greatly, but had not disappeared completely.<sup>43</sup> Hitler, however, cared not for his soldiers but only for the triumph of his will. Like the German panzer thrust toward Stalingrad in December of 1942 (*Operation Winter Storm*), the IV Panzer Corps' drive toward Budapest aimed not at rescuing the besieged forces but at re-establishing German control over the city. On both occasions a reasonable opportunity to rescue the trapped Axis forces was missed. By prohibiting a timely evacuation of Budapest by its defenders, Hitler showed the same callous disregard for human suffering and human lives that he had demonstrated at Stalingrad or, as a matter of fact, Stalin had shown toward the population of Leningrad during the siege of that city by the Germans.

The blame for the virtual annihilation of what was left of the forces defending Budapest by February of 1945, can be placed squarely on the *Führer's* shoulders. Contrary to the dictates of military necessity he, instead of trying to save the precious few military formations the *Reich* still had, allowed more of them to be trapped deep behind Russian lines. By the second week of February, the defenders of Budapest — diminished in numbers, broken in spirit, exhausted and starved — faced the choice between mistreatment (and possible death) through surrender and death through fighting to the last bullet. Their command chose the alternative that was no longer viable: a breakout attempt. Not surprisingly, it resulted in still another of the war's great slaughters.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>The diary of Ádám Podthradzky (at the time a major assigned to the Ministry of Defence), in possession of the author.

<sup>2</sup>Péter Gosztonyi, *Légiveszély Budapest* [Air-raid alert, Budapest] (Budapest: Népszava Kiadó, 1989), p. 158.

<sup>3</sup>Even had this operation succeeded it would not have resulted in the rescue of the troops in Budapest since its objective was, in fact, to fortify the defense of the city. Had the advance proved successful, the relief troops would have eventually been cut off from the main body of the German army and forced to take refuge in Budapest. It was in recognition of this probability that General Balck, the Commander of the 6th German Army, gave orders to halt the seemingly successful advance of the IVth SS Armoured Corps, under Obergruppenführer Gille, in the Pilis Hills.

<sup>4</sup>This still held true in the final days of April 1945 when Wenck's Twelfth Army broke through the Russian encirclement of Berlin in order to surrender to Anglo-Saxon forces. As late as May of 1945 the Germans still chose to fight rather than face capture at the hands of the Soviets.

<sup>5</sup>Records of the Hungarian Tenth Division, Budapest Military Archives.

<sup>6</sup>Bundesarchiv, Freiburg, Germany, RH 10 V/60. Also cited in Georg Maier's *Drama zwischen Budapest und Wien* (Munin Verlag, 1985), p. 518.

<sup>7</sup>For further information regarding the Eighth and Twenty-second SS Cavalry divisions see the following works: Hanns Bayer, *Kavallerie der Waffen SS* (Gailberg-Heidelberg Selbstverlag, 1980) and Hans Werner Neulen, *An deutscher Seite. Internationale Freiwillige von Wehrmacht und Waffen-SS* (Munich: Universitas Verlag, 1985).

<sup>8</sup>Hermann Balck, *Ordnung im Chaos, Erinnerung 1893-1948* (Osnabrück, 1980). The author also obtained information regarding the morale of the *Volksdeutsche* from interviews and correspondence with survivors.

<sup>9</sup>Information from letter written by Lieutenant-Colonel Karl Wolff, the last commander of the Feldherrenhalle Division. Letter in possession of the author.

<sup>10</sup>The mass defection transpired when a large portion of the division refused to cross over to the castle side of Margit Boulevard, staying on the opposite side which the Russians occupied by February 1.

<sup>11</sup>This information is contained in the diary of Róbert Garád (former first lieutenant of a Hungarian assault unit), and in the memoirs of Ludwig Mückl (officer with the 8th SS cavalry division) and Werner Hübner (a medical doctor with the Feldherrenhalle Division), all in possession of the author.

<sup>12</sup>Ernst Schweitzer, *Der Kessel von Budapest*, MSg 2/4631, Bundesarchiv, Freiburg, Germany. Schweitzer had served as a lieutenant with the 13th Panzer Division.

<sup>13</sup>Such as Péter Gosztanyi's account of the signal unit of the Ninth SS Mountain Corps whose headquarters was located in the bomb shelter of a Logodi Street apartment building right next to the shelter used by the building's residents. An attractive blonde, who claimed to be a refugee from Transylvania, mingled with the Germans to such an extent that the residents thought her to be a "whore." Following the collapse of the breakout operation, a Soviet jeep containing NKVD officers arrived to fetch the woman who, according to information provided by one of the building's occupants of that time, was suddenly able to speak Russian.

<sup>14</sup>Information provided by researcher László Hingyi.

<sup>15</sup>From an interview with Gyula Kokovay, former sergeant with the Hungarian University Assault Battalion.

<sup>16</sup>G. Chebotarjov, "A parlamenti halála" [The death of the bearer of a flag of truce], *Hadtörténelmi Közlemények*, 1967/4, p. 128.

<sup>17</sup>Péter Gosztanyi, *A magyar Honvédség a Második Világháborúban* [The Hungarian army in the Second World War] (Európa Könyvkiadó, 1992), p. 239. This information is contained in many other sources as well.

<sup>18</sup>Information kindly provided by Helmut Friedrich (captain, 13th Panzer Division), György Zsohár (volunteer with the 22nd SS Cavalry Division), and Ernst Schweitzer.

<sup>19</sup>Bayer, p. 371.

<sup>20</sup>Quoted from a letter by Ervin Galántay, former member of Vannay's Rangers.

<sup>21</sup>Interview with Béla Hernády, former captain in the Hungarian First Armoured Division.

<sup>22</sup>Interview with Frigyes Wáczek, former staff captain with the Hungarian First Armoured Division.

<sup>23</sup>Based on account by Judith von Lichtenstein who as a prisoner of the NKVD witnessed the panic and disorderly retreat of the Soviet troops at Budakeszi street. Manuscript in possession of the author.

<sup>24</sup>From the diary of Róbert Garád, *cit.* (see note 11).

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup>From letters written by Karl Wolff located in the private collections of Gosztanyi and Hingyi.

<sup>27</sup>Werner Hübner, *Geschichte der in Ungarn eingesetzten Panzereinheiten*, MSg 2/238, Bundesarchiv, Freiburg, Germany, p. 11. On Hübner, see my comment in note 11.

<sup>28</sup>Account provided by the political officer of the 297th Sharpshooters, as cited in György Máté, *Budapest szabad* [Budapest is Free] (Budapest: Móra könyvkiadó, 1980), p. 80.

<sup>29</sup>Interview with Ferenc Kovács, former staff captain with the Hungarian First Division.

<sup>30</sup>Litteráti recounted his experiences on Radio Free Europe. Script in possession of László Hingyi.

<sup>31</sup>Dávid, p. 12.

<sup>32</sup>Nachtmann, *Die letzten Tage im Ausbruch aus Budapest*, RH 39/524, Bundesarchiv, Freiburg, Germany, p. 4. Nachtmann's first name is not indicated on the manuscript.

<sup>33</sup>Gyula Kokovay, *Kitörés és átjutás* [Breakout and making it across], TYG 3369, Budapest Military Archives.

<sup>34</sup>Contained in accounts provided by Nachtmann and Schweitzer. Incidentally, during the course of the breakout attempt, First Lieutenant Schweitzer himself nearly committed suicide when he was forced to flee along an open hillside and the Soviets shot down his companions from beside him one after another.

<sup>35</sup>Contained in letters written by Karl Wolff in 1961 and 1980 located in Gosztonyi's private collection. Wolff's recollection of concrete geographical details was completely inaccurate, thus only information pertaining to the circumstances surrounding the flight of the troops can be considered valid.

<sup>36</sup>László Hingyi, *"Nyilas hungarista pártszolgálatosokból szervezett harccsoportok bevetései és harcai Budapesten"* [Combat units raised from the ranks of Arrow Cross Hungarista party storm troopers: Deployment and engagement in Budapest], (manuscript), p. 3.

<sup>37</sup>Gosztonyi makes mention of 785 men arriving before February 16. Though he does not cite his source, this number is likely based on information provided by Karl Wolff whose unreliable memory, as demonstrated by the inaccuracy of his letters, gives cause for doubt.

<sup>38</sup>Aladár Konkoly Thege, *Tépett lobogó* [Tattered flag], TGY 3273, Budapest Military Archives, pp. 152-153.

<sup>39</sup>Zsigmond Salamon, *Katonai szolgálatom a 202. fényszóró osztálynál* [My military service in the 202nd Anti-Aircraft Searchlight Battalion], no catalogue number, Budapest Military Archives, p. 3.

<sup>40</sup>From interviews with the following: Norbert Major, former sergeant in the Hungarian 101st Chemical Battalion; Zoltán Baló, former second lieutenant in the Hungarian First Armored Division; Aurél Salamon and Ágnes Tomcsányi.

<sup>41</sup>Helmut Friedrich, "Donau rufst du uns heim" (manuscript in the possession of the author), p. 140.

<sup>42</sup>Tamás Rhédy, *A Morlin Csoport története a Budapest ostrom idején* [The history of the Morlin Unit at the time of the siege of Budapest], Tgy 3271, Budapest Military Archives, p. 8; Bayer, p. 389; and interviews with Frigyes Wáczek and László Hingyi.

<sup>43</sup>The transfer of the IV SS Armoured Corps from the Polish front to Hungary had another calamitous consequence for the Germans: it further weakened their forces in the Vistula region just at a time when the Russians were preparing to launch their massive winter offensive.

## Appendix

Effective personnel of the Hungarian and German forces in Budapest as of February 11 <sup>1</sup>	43,900 (including 11,600 wounded)	100%
No. of prisoners taken between Feb. 11 and 15 <sup>2</sup>	ca. 22,350	50.9%
No. of prisoners taken after February 15	max. 1,000	2.3%
Identified in mass graves <sup>3</sup>	ca. 5,000	11.4%
No. of soldiers who reached German lines	max. 700	1.6%
No. of soldiers who went into hiding <sup>4</sup>	max. 700	1.6%
No. of soldiers killed and missing	ca. 14,250	32.5%
Total no. killed during the breakout attempt	ca. 19,250	43.9%

### Notes to the Appendix:

<sup>1</sup>By this time the effective strength of the original forces had already been reduced by one-half.

<sup>2</sup>This number was reported by the Soviet high command. After the occupation of Budapest, the Soviets declared all uniformed personnel including postmen, firemen and policemen to be prisoners of war and deported several tens-of-thousands of civilians as well. General Malinovsky purposely overestimated the number of German and Hungarian troops in Budapest to be 188,000 in order to account for the persisting siege and had to produce a commensurate number of prisoners.

<sup>3</sup>Based on research done by László Hingyi, György Pongrácz, Oszkár Toperczer and Pál Dobai.

<sup>4</sup>This applies primarily to Hungarian troops.



## **Economic Platforms of the Various Political Parties in the Hungarian Elections of 1945**

**Susan Glanz**

In the 1989-90 elections in Hungary, politicians reminisced of the good old days of 1945 and kept saying how "free" the elections of that year were. Were those elections as free as they would like us now to believe?

This paper will examine the economic platforms of the various parties that were allowed to participate in Hungary's first post-war elections. It will also suggest that the elections seemed free, because the Western Allies — the British and the Americans — had a "hands off policy" at that time toward Hungary. They were more preoccupied with problems elsewhere in the world and as a result, by default, they conceded Hungary as an area falling under the Russian sphere of influence. The Soviets on the other hand, were not that sure how much pressure they could apply in Hungary and, as a result, they intervened in the elections less than in those of the other East European countries.

In the 1944-45 period the exhausted nations of Europe began the task of rebuilding their destroyed economies. The dual tragedies of the Great Depression and the war had created an atmosphere where direct government involvement in the economy became accepted as the norm. A surge of idealism combined with a disillusionment with the old order resulted in radical leaders gaining strong moral and political influence. The desire for change in political life and the acceptance of government control in many areas of the economy was illustrated by the many parliamentary seats won by Social Democrats and Communists in most of the European countries.

Hungary's losses in the Second World War had been devastating. Estimates are that between 420-450 thousand Hungarians died (higher than British, Italian, French or American losses), and between 850-900 thousand were taken prisoners of war.<sup>1</sup> Before the war Hungary had been an agricultural and industrial nation. In 1938, the last peace year, 37% of the national income was generated by agriculture and 38% by industry. Due to the demands of war, in the period of 1943-44, the ratio changed to 43% of national income generated by industry and 28% by agriculture.<sup>2</sup> But after the war the destruction of the industrial sector left the country paralyzed. The damage, in 1938 prices, was 22 billion *pengő*s -- using the 1938 exchange rate of \$1=5.15 *pengő*s, the damage caused amounts to \$4.27 billion — which represented five times the national

income of that year and 40% of the national wealth.<sup>3</sup> The country's infrastructure was destroyed, and agricultural activity also almost came to a standstill as the armies moved through Hungary. Over 90% of all industrial plants suffered some damage and nearly all inventories disappeared. Coal mines ceased to function as nearly all were flooded because of the lack of electricity needed to pump water out. The economic situation was made even worse by Hungary's foreign and domestic debt. By September 1945 the foreign debt amounted to 890 million *pengős* plus \$578 million. In addition, to meet the reparation payments imposed after the First World War and to finance the increasing budget deficit, the Hungarian government sold more and more bonds beginning in 1931, rapidly increasing domestic debt. By the end of 1944 domestic debt was 14.2 billion *pengős*.<sup>4</sup>

Discussions to form a post-war Provisional Government began in Moscow, in November 1944, since Russian forces were already on Hungarian soil. Earlier, in mid-1943, the Hungarian Social Democrats formed an alliance with the Smallholders' Party, but the rapidly changing political situation rendered their program outdated by the end of the war. The Communist Party began formulating its social and economic policy for the post-war Hungary in September 1944 in Moscow. Its program was published in Debrecen on November 30<sup>th</sup>, 1944.

On December 3, 1944, the Hungarian National Independence Front was formed by the Social Democrats, Smallholders, Communists and National Peasants and Civic Democratic Party members; these were the largest legal and some illegal opposition parties. The Front accepted and republished the Communist Party's program as its own. The Front's plan for economic recovery can be grouped around four ideas:

1. Land reform; distribution of land to the peasants and the abolition of the production quota system introduced during the war.
2. Nationalization of mines and utilities, and state supervision of cartels and monopolies.
3. Balancing the state's budget and the introduction of a stable currency.
4. The extension of social welfare legislation to include health and old-age benefits to agricultural and domestic workers, payment of unemployment compensation to the unemployed and the indexation of wages to inflation rates.<sup>5</sup>

The Provisional Government, which took office on December 22, 1944, in Debrecen, responded to and formally declared the international agreement as specified by the Yalta "Declaration on Liberated Europe" as being "broadly representative of all democratic elements of the population." The government that was formed consisted of 2 Social Democratic Party members, 2 Smallholders' Party members, 2 Communists, 1 National Peasant Party member and 4 unaffiliated representatives.<sup>6</sup> These parties were the largest anti-fascist parties.

The Provisional Government was officially voted into office by the Provisional Assembly meeting in Debrecen 27, 1944. The 230 members of the Provisional Assembly were elected in areas liberated by the Soviet Army. Of the members 71 were Communists, 55 were Smallholders, 38 were Social Democrats, 16 represented the Peasant Party, 12 represented the Civic Democrats, 19 were union representatives and 19 were unaffiliated.<sup>7</sup> There is disagreement regarding the official and true affiliation of the assemblymen, but we will accept the official Hungarian data.<sup>8</sup>

In January 1945, the Provisional Government signed the armistice agreement with the Allies, in which it agreed to pay \$300 million in compensation within 6 years; \$200 million was to go to the Soviet Union, \$70 million to Yugoslavia and \$30 million to Czechoslovakia,<sup>9</sup> and all German and Austrian property was given to the Soviets. The armistice agreement also obligated the Hungarian government to preserve German property in the condition it was on January 15, 1945. As the government could only extend its jurisdiction slowly, it simply had to assume responsibility for the damages to these properties.

Between January and April, 1945, the bank note issue of the Hungarian National Bank ceased completely, as the gold reserves of the Bank had been confiscated by the Hungarian Nazis and removed from the country. In its place the Russian Army issued significant quantities of military money, also denominated in *pengő*s. State revenue collections were nonexistent, and production — both industrial and agricultural — was minimal, nevertheless the demands for food and other necessities were increasing. As a result, prices began to escalate rapidly. In addition the obligation of paying for the upkeep of the Russian Army was enormous, which also added to the inflationary pressure.<sup>10</sup>

Although the Provisional Government officially did not have an economic policy until the summer of 1945, we can safely assume, that for the first six months its policy was the same as that of the National Independence Front. This is suggested by the decrees issued by the Government.

The two decrees which affected the future history of Hungary were the ones on workers' committees and land reform. One of the first decrees passed by the government was regarding the workers' committees, which was issued on February 15, 1945. The committees were charged with restarting production in the factories and representing the interest of the workers to management. These committees were created to increase the influence of the Communist Party in the factories, as the unions were traditionally supporters of the Social Democrats.

On March 17, 1945, even before the fighting on Hungarian soil was over, the decree on land reform was passed. This decree provided for the compensation to landowners for expropriated land holdings of 142 to 1,420 acres (100 - 1,000 *hold*). None of the compensation was ever paid. For holdings of over 1,420 acres, no compensation was even promised. Over 35% of the country's territory was distributed to more than 642,000 families, creating a new land owning class.<sup>11</sup> To some this seemed radical, but even the US State Department Advisory Committee, charged with formulating US peace proposals after the

Second World War, suggested on May 1, 1944 that "electoral reform and land reform are requisites to the achievement of a democratic Hungary... a thorough-going land reform would open the way for peaceful development of social and political democracy and would eliminate the control of a reactionary minority which has in the past monopolized power..."<sup>12</sup>

The harvest in 1945 was a disaster, caused by bad weather, lack of seed and tools, and by the war conditions. As a result there was no surplus produce available to be delivered to the urban areas. The Russian head of the Allied Control Commission refused the food aid offered by the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration, and food rationing that was introduced during the war had to be continued and soup kitchens were also opened for the hungry.<sup>13</sup> Because of the decreasing value of the currency, the economy reverted to a barter system. The state intervened by creating a Barter Office of the Ministry of Public Supply to facilitate and regulate this burgeoning barter business. To make matters worse or, according to this Ministry, to improve the supply of agricultural commodities, peasants were forced to pay all kinds of taxes in commodities. This further reduced the market supply of goods.

In the nine month period from November, 1944 to July 1945 Hungarian companies were under military management and 75% of their output was requisitioned by the Russians for their military and reconstruction.<sup>14</sup> A typical example of the economic conditions was described by the manager of the Hungarian General Credit Bank (*Magyar Általános Hitelbank*) in a letter sent to both the Provisional Government and the Budapest National Committee on February 5, 1945. He wrote, that "on the 30<sup>th</sup> of the last month a committee of Russian officers came to our offices, forced open the steel cash registers and safes and took roughly 113 million *pengős* in cash, from larger safes they removed about 800 suitcases, and broke into about 1,400 safe-deposit boxes and took their contents.... These officers also seized stock certificates belonging to both our clients and the bank itself. These represent an additional several hundred million *pengős* in loss. The officers also confiscated typewriters, calculators and bookkeeping machines, which were essential for restarting our business."<sup>15</sup>

On the political front the situation was not much better. In this same time period the Provisional Government was reshuffled twice. In both cases the government took a decided turn to the left. The last resignations in July 1945 resulted in a Communist-Social Democratic majority in the cabinet.<sup>16</sup>

On August 27, 1945 the Hungarian government signed the Hungarian-Soviet Economic Pact. This agreement provided for the establishment of Soviet-Hungarian joint-stock companies in bauxite-mines, oil exploration, refineries, shipping and air-transport. The stocks of these firms were equally divided between Hungary and Russia. The general manager of these companies was nearly always a Soviet citizen, though their chairmen were Hungarian. These companies were exempted from paying taxes, and export and import duties.<sup>17</sup> The Hungarian contribution to these firms was the existing assets of the firm,

while Soviet contribution came from the assets acquired through reparation payments or requisitions. The US and British governments lodged mild complaints that this pact ignored the equal treatment of the Allies, as they were not informed of this pact. The complaint stated that the Soviets came to control 50% of the Hungarian industry. But this protest was ignored.<sup>18</sup>

Based on the perceived successes of the May Day rallies, the Communist Party raised the issue of elections. Towards the end of August the cabinet discussed the timing of the elections. Since the Communists and Social Democrats were now a majority in the cabinet, their timetable won. The motion was made and passed that the elections would be held in two rounds, first to be held would be the Budapest municipal elections on October 7<sup>th</sup>, and then the national elections on November 4<sup>th</sup>. The Communists and Social Democrats felt sure that they would win in the Budapest municipal elections. These two parties thought that they had a broad-base support in the capital city, 40% of the eligible voters belonged to either the Communist or the Social Democratic Parties.<sup>19</sup>

The Nationwide National (Election) Committee (*Országos Nemzeti Bizottság*) was formed on September 17, 1945 and charged with granting permission for participation in the elections. Of the ten parties requesting authorization to participate in the Budapest municipal elections and in the national elections, seven were granted permission. The participating seven were:

1. The Smallholders' Party,
2. The Social Democratic Party,
3. The Hungarian Communist Party,
4. The Civic Democratic Party,
5. The National Peasant Party,
6. The Hungarian Radical Party, and
7. The Democratic Popular Party (the one headed by István Barankovics)

The three parties that were denied permission were Count József Pálffy's party which was also called the Democratic Popular Party (*Demokrata Néppárt*), the Traditional Democratic Party of the Intellectuals (*Értelmiségi Osztály Ősi Demokrata Pártja*) and the National Democratic Party (*Nemzeti Demokrata Párt*).<sup>20</sup> [Other sources list the Christian Women's Camp (*Keresztény Női Tábor*) as the third party not permitted to run, instead of Pálffy's Democratic Popular Party.]<sup>21</sup> At the end of September Pálffy's Democratic Popular Party joined with the Civic Democratic Party.

## The Party Platforms

1. The Smallholders' Party (officially called the Party of the Independent Smallholders, Agricultural Day Workers and of the Middle Class (*Független Kisgazda, Földmunkás és Polgári Párt*) did not have a detailed platform for the fall

elections. Their platform was the previously published party program. According to the Party leaders the issues these elections will be decided on were not economic issues, but on the visions of Hungary's future. On the day of the Budapest municipal elections, the party paper summarized the Smallholders' position by saying "this election will not decide whether we need to fight against inflation, reactionary politics or the black market,... in these questions the Hungarian public has already spoken. The issues this election will determine are: what road and what ideology the Hungarian Government will take in the future."<sup>22</sup>

It is interesting to note that this party was originally formed to represent the interest of peasants and small property holders, but did not formulate a land reform program of its own. A proposal that was considered in early 1945, but which did not get published, showed some similarities to the program of the Social Democratic Party. The proposal expressed doubt that land reform could be accomplished in the planned time frame (March 17 and October 1, 1945), and it argued that land must be worked by those who own it, also suggesting that land should never be sold, but only be inherited.<sup>23</sup> By the time the elections were held, this issue was moot, as land reform had been accomplished.

The central theme of the party's program was the concept of maintenance of private property and the freedom of enterprise, both in industry and in agriculture. They also spoke out against agricultural cooperatives, and did not openly discuss the nationalization of industry as suggested by the Independence Front, and they argued for a non-partisan civil service. A unique suggestion by the party was the right to strike by peasants.<sup>24</sup>

The Smallholders' agenda also included the demand for a progressive income tax structure and argued against sales taxes. The party also spoke of the urgent need of establishing a socialized health care system and an old-age pension system for all.<sup>25</sup>

2. The Social Democratic Party's (*Szociáldemokrata Párt*) platform was accepted at its 34<sup>th</sup> congress held in August 1945. In agriculture the party called for the importation of livestock, sale of agricultural machinery at reduced rates, the provision of cheap credit to farmers, the establishment of sugar refineries and canning factories and the extension of health care and old age benefits to agricultural workers to the same level as those of industrial workers. In industry the party called for the nationalization of mines, electric utilities, and other key industries, with special attention to the light-metal fabrication industry and for the limitation of foreign trade rights exclusively to the state or to cooperatives. To help revive the economy the party suggested that trade agreements be signed with neighbouring countries, and that all trade agreements should have a barter provision. The platform also proposed a new progressive tax system. To prevent funds from leaving the country, the Social Democrats campaigned for strict foreign exchange controls, a balanced budget and state control of privately and publicly held banks. To "prevent" the spread of discontent, it advocated the

nationalization of the radio and movie industry and proposed to subsidize publishing houses and exhibition halls.<sup>26</sup>

3. The Hungarian Communist Party's (*Magyar Kommunista Párt*) official platform was published in September. The platform's cornerstone was a three year plan to develop industry, transportation and agriculture. One of the plan's point was to set maximums for — and eventually to fix — the prices of wheat and bread, as well as those of raw materials such as coal, iron ore, electricity and oil. The platform also spoke of the state being the supervisor of industrial production and of setting ceiling prices to 70% of consumer goods. The Communist Party promised low cost loans to new farmers, and the establishment of agricultural cooperatives in order to take advantage of economies of scale in production, purchasing and sales. They promised to stabilize the currency by balancing the budget and by forcing the wealthy to pay higher taxes and to give the government a one-time loan. The platform included a progressive tax system, the freezing of foreign bank accounts and wealth abroad, state monopoly of foreign trade, and the nationalization of utilities and mines. It also promised to establish a price parity between agricultural and industrial products, such as 1 pair of work boots would equal 1 metric ton of wheat.<sup>27</sup>

4. The Civic Democratic Party (*Polgári Demokrata Párt*) positioned itself as the party representing the middle and lower middle classes. It sought the termination of political appointees in public service and the running of the country by decrees. It proposed that issues of universal interest be decided by referendums. The platform included the introduction of a progressive tax system to eliminate income inequality, a higher tax rate on wealth than on earned income. It also called for government control of trusts and cartels and the reduction of the role that banks traditionally played in the Hungarian economy.<sup>28</sup> For the long-run, the party advocated the introduction of a single tax system such as the one that had been advocated by the American economist Henry George (1839-1897) who in 1879 had called for a single land tax to replace all other taxes. They also proposed subsidies to establish agricultural entities and the payment of unemployment compensation to the unemployed. The party further advocated an industrial policy that emphasized industrial development outside Budapest to provide employment to rural workers. The platform also included the promise of universal health coverage and pension system, a balanced budget, a stable currency and the introduction of liberal trade policies.<sup>29</sup> This party was at a disadvantage as it did not have a nationwide party network.

5. The National Peasant Party (*Nemzeti Parasztpárt*) saw itself as the representative of the poor peasants, those who received land in 1945. It saw the land reform only as the first step toward the creation of a nation of small farmers. It promised seeds, animals and machinery, as well as long-term interest free loans to start the new farms created by land reform. The party also promised to help

organize farmers into cooperatives in order to take advantage of large scale production and purchasing.<sup>30</sup>

6. The Hungarian Radical Party (*Magyar Radikális Párt*) only received permission to publish its position paper a week before the Budapest municipal elections. The party viewed itself as the party of the "working intellectuals." They announced that they did not want to "participate" in power, but only wanted to take part in the changes occurring in Hungary. They stated that they did not oppose "socialism, if socialism means a fairer social and economic system."<sup>31</sup>

To achieve a more equitable income distribution, the party demanded the divestiture of monopolies, elimination of tariffs, establishment of public work programs for the unemployed and seeking of foreign loans to reduce the rate of inflation. The program also spoke of the need to balance the state's budget by reducing expenditures. In order to make displaced government workers employable, the program suggested that the state pay for their retraining.<sup>32</sup>

7. The Democratic Popular Party (*Demokrata Néppárt*) was given permission to run, but choose not to participate independently due to the lack of campaigning time and the dearth of funds. The party saw itself as the Hungarian equivalent of the Christian Democratic parties in Western Europe. Its representatives ran on the same ticket as the Smallholders.<sup>33</sup> The chairman of the party in his September 25<sup>th</sup> speech defined the goals of the party. He stated that while the party supported the concept of private property, it proposed "the nationalization of those industries that are for the public good". To increase agricultural productivity and fair distribution, the creation of agricultural cooperatives must be encouraged. The party would maintain the network of religious schools, and support the charitable works of religious institutions; also, churches should be compensated for their expropriated lands.<sup>34</sup>

In summary, the six parties did not have significantly different platforms. They could not, as the Nationwide National (Election) Committee would not have given them permission to run, as it refused permission to other parties. The parties that were not members of the Independence Front were also disadvantaged by the short time between the announcement of the elections and the elections themselves. All parties talked of the importance of private property, privately owned means of production, the freedom of the enterprise, and private initiative, though the Communist platform subjugated these to the interests of the state. The Communists saw private firms playing a decreasing role in the economy. In addition, the largest four parties — the Social Democrats, the Communists, the Smallholders and the Civic Democrats — called for a socialized health care system and a revision of the pension system.

The Communists had the most detailed campaign platform. Also, their campaign was the best run as they were most liberally supplied with print media and means of transportation by the Russian occupation forces. Overt displays of



anti-communist agitation was restricted by both the Russian army and the Hungarian ÁVO (*Államvédelmi Osztály* — State Defense Department).<sup>35</sup>

None of the parties opposed the land reform, but the Smallholders opposed the concept of cooperatives. All parties kept the nationalization program of the Independence Front, that is the need to nationalize only utilities. All the parties also called for a more equitable, and progressive tax system. Only the Social Democrats talked of the type of government they envisioned, a People's Republic. This is interesting because in an internal document prepared a year earlier by the Central Committee of the Communist Party, they called for the same thing.<sup>36</sup> Of all the parties only the Communists offered a concrete solution to the rampant inflation. The emphasis placed on balancing the budget by all parties is interesting, since the accepted budget philosophy since the 1930s was "functional finance" which in fact suggests that the government aims at neither a surplus nor a deficit but at accomplishing its goals. It is obvious that in the post-war period Hungary could not balance its budget, so the call to increase the tax burden of the rich to balance the budget was empty political rhetoric.

Both the Social Democrats and the Communist Party platforms called for state control of foreign trade, the other parties talked of liberalizing foreign trade. This was one of the areas where the platform of the Social Democrats went further than the platform of the British Labour Party, as the BLP only called for state aid to revive foreign trade. The other area where the Hungarian Social Democrats' platform was much more detailed than the British is in its provisions concerning agriculture. Here the differences between the two programs are self-explanatory, since by the end of the Second World War in England's economy agriculture played only a small role.

The campaigns were marred by violence around the country, several people were injured and a few were killed. On September 26, a few weeks before the municipal elections, the Communists and the Smallholders agreed to reduce the violence of the campaign, both in the media and at rallies. The Smallholders terminated holding rallies and opted for door-to-door campaigning.<sup>37</sup>

In the Budapest municipal elections held on October 7<sup>th</sup>, 1945, the Social Democrats and the Communist Party ran on the same ticket, called the "United Workers' Front" (*Dolgozók Egységlistája*).<sup>38</sup> In spite of their expectations, they did not win. The Smallholders won by receiving 50.54% of the vote, the "United Workers' Front" received only 42.75% of the vote. The remaining votes were distributed among the Civic Democratic Party (3.83%), National Peasant Party (2.01%) and the Hungarian Radical Party (0.086%).<sup>39</sup> The Communist Party blamed its loss on the severe economic crisis, on the right-wing of the Socialist Democrats and, of course, on the anti-Soviet attitude of the middle class and the influence of the Catholic Church. The Social Democrats blamed their defeat on the United Workers' Front and on October 12<sup>th</sup> decided to run independent campaign in the national elections.<sup>40</sup>

The Western media applauded the results of this election, but they also talked about the fear that was already gripping the country, a fear caused by rampant inflation and increasing crime in the streets. On October 9<sup>th</sup> *The New York Times* reported that a state of siege was declared in Hungary as "political unrest leads to murder and robbery."<sup>41</sup>

On October 16, Klementi Y. Voroshilov, the chairman of the Allied Control Commission and a member of the Soviet Politburo, in order to avoid a similar "disappointing" outcome, suggested that in the nationwide elections the parties run together on one list (which, of course, means that they all would have won or they would all have lost at the same time!) His suggestion also stipulated that the distribution of seats in the post-election Parliament be predetermined.<sup>42</sup> The US and British members of the Allied Control Commission did not take a strong stand against this suggestion. Instead, they said that a joint list would not meet the "Yalta requirements". The Smallholders and the Social Democrats also held their ground by insisting on running independently and the Russians were forced to compromise. After several days of negotiations an agreement was reached. It was agreed that regardless of the outcome of the elections, the new government would still be a coalition government.<sup>43</sup>

On October 18, the newly appointed Roman Catholic Cardinal of Hungary, Cardinal József Mindszenty, published a pastoral letter urging Catholics to vote for the Smallholders. This letter was extremely critical of everything that had happened in the country.<sup>44</sup> As a countermeasure against Mindszenty's pastoral letter, the communist-controlled police arrested the vice-president of the Budapest stock exchange, as well as four brokers, a foreign exchange trader and several bankers. They were accused of "causing" inflation.<sup>45</sup>

On October 23, after the loss in the Budapest Municipal elections, the Social Democratic Party published the proposals it had made earlier to the Provisional Government to overcome the economic problems and to enhance the party's chances in the national elections. These proposals went further than the party's platform in the Budapest elections. It is the first time that the party spoke of the need to reduce the rate of inflation and the need to make work obligatory for all adults. To overcome the growing dissatisfaction among the populace, the party proposed food and clothing subsidies for those employed in industries directly involved in rebuilding the nation. Going beyond the proposals of their previous platform, the Social Democrats suggested the creation of agricultural supervisory committees. The task of these committees would be to see that those who work the land are the owners of the land. The tools the committee would have to achieve these goals would be the power to confiscate the land from those who did not work it, or from those who did not meet their production quota requirements. To achieve the goal of balancing the budget, the party proposed to index tax obligations to the inflation rate. The Social Democratic Party maintained that industry should remain in private ownership but with strict state supervision over production and distribution. This proposal also

spoke of limiting access to the media and suggested that only members of the Independence Front should be allowed to own newspapers.<sup>46</sup>

After their victory in the Budapest elections, the Smallholders expanded on the theme of free agricultural enterprise and promised to reevaluate the claims of those peasants who either did not receive any land or received too little land.<sup>47</sup>

In spite of the previous agreement, the Communist Party kept up its attacks on the Smallholders and the right-wing of the Social Democrats. The left-wing of the Social Democrats joined with the Communists in attacking Smallholders. These attacks intensified after the Budapest elections.<sup>48</sup>

To counterbalance the Russian influence, to show that the US saw the elections as free and fair, and to help the non-communist parties, the Truman government recognized the Provisional Government on November 2, 1945.

On November 4<sup>th</sup> the nationwide elections were held. The result of the election was a resounding victory for the Smallholders who received 57.03% of the vote. The Social Democrats came in second with 17.41%, the Communists third with 16.95%, the National Peasant Party with 6.87%, the Civic Democratic Party with 1.62% and the Hungarian Radical Party received 0.12% of the votes.<sup>49</sup>

It is interesting to note that the public mood at the time was in favour of nationalization, despite the fact that the party with the largest following, and the winner of the elections, the Smallholders' Party, did not endorse it. A public poll taken at the time showed the following results:<sup>50</sup>

People were asked whether or not they favoured the nationalization of factories and banks. The answer was:

	Factories	Banks
Support nationalization	67%	75%
Oppose nationalization	32%	23%
Don't know/no answer	1%	1%

On November 15, the Provisional Government resigned and the new cabinet was sworn in. Of the 18 cabinet posts 9 or 50% were given to Smallholders, 4 (22 %) to the Communists, 4 (22%) to the Social Democrats and 1 (6 %) to the Peasant Party. Due to the agreement before the elections, the Smallholders, the Social Democrats and the Peasant Party received fewer cabinet appointments and the Communists were given larger percentage of seats than the election results warranted. Of the 32 deputy ministry spots only 9 (28%) were assigned to the Smallholders.<sup>51</sup>

So, in spite of the electoral victory, the Smallholders did not form a government. The clever "salami tactics"<sup>52</sup> used by the Communist Party during the next three years, eventually lead to the exclusion of all other parties from power and to complete one-party rule in Hungary. The appeasement policies of the two other large parties, the Smallholders and the Social Democrats, slowed this process but could not stop it.

The elections seemed free, because six parties participated, although the playing field was far from level. Other individuals and groups that to form

political parties early in 1945, but were denied permission to organize. Authorization had to be granted by both the Independence Front and the Allied Control Commission. Some of the groups that were denied permission to organize were the Coalition of Hungarian Patriots for Freedom and Freedom Party (*Magyar Hazafiak Szabadság Szövetsége és Szabadság Párt*), the Independent Popular Socialist Party (*Független Szocialista Néppárt*) and the Nation-building Peace Party (*Nemzetépítő Békepárt*). Others, such as the Hungarian Party (*Magyar Párt*), the Party of Hungarian Agricultural and Industrial Workers (*Magyar Földműves és Munkáspárt*), the Hungarian Republic Party (*Magyar Köztársaság Párt*), and the Kossuth Party were given permission to organize, but joined with the Smallholders within two months of their founding.<sup>53</sup>

Not only did the Soviets aid the Communist Party directly, by providing it access to the media and transportation, they also helped the party indirectly: e.g. when the Communist Party stalwart Zoltán Vas became the Mayor of Budapest, the Russian Army gave food loans to the starving citizens of the capital — from previously requisitioned Hungarian stores. Soviet goals were made abundantly clear even before the election. When American Secretary of State James Byrnes informed Marshall of the USSR Army and Foreign Minister Vyacheslav M. Molotov, that the US “would join others in observing elections in Italy, Greece, Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria,” Stalin is reported to have responded that a “freely elected government in these countries would be anti-Soviet and that cannot be allowed.”<sup>54</sup> However it was the 50-50% agreement between Churchill and Stalin regarding Hungary, that made the Soviets push for less radical changes and allowed change to occur slower than in other countries.<sup>55</sup>

The British and American governments had a hands-off policy toward Hungary. They voiced complaints against egregious disregard of previous agreements through the Allied Control Commission, but this was not going to change Russian policy. As the chair of the Allied Control Commission was a Russian, the other members needed his permission to travel in Hungary and to communicate with the cabinet. The British were the first to admit that Hungary was not important to them, when in March 1945, Sir Orme Sargent, then under-secretary and later permanent under-secretary at the British Foreign Office, stated that British policy viewed Hungary as an “issue not vital.” He foresaw that the “governments in these countries would be modeled on totalitarian lines.”<sup>56</sup> Actually Stalin was truly candid when he told Milovan Djilas that “This war is not as in the past; whoever occupies a territory also imposes on it his own social system. Everyone imposes his own system as far as his army can reach. It cannot be otherwise.”<sup>57</sup>

In 1952 communist leader Mátyás Rákosi, in talking about the post-war years, bluntly summarized the aim of the Communist Party as having been the achievement of total domination in all spheres of life:

In stating our demands, we carefully weighed the probable effects of them, and whenever possible proceeded cautiously, step-by-step, so as to make it hard for the enemy to muster and mobilize all his strengths against us. We gradually increased our demands in every possible field, using provisional forms. In the banking line, for instance, we insisted at first only on state control over the banks, and only later, on nationalization of the three major banks. We proceeded in a similar way with industry, first demanding state control over the mines, then expanding our demands to the control of large machine manufacturing factories and smelting industry, and ending by their nationalization. Thus we achieved the nationalization of industry by dividing the process into four or five stages during the span of several years.<sup>58</sup>

And, indeed, the communist takeover proceeded rapidly as soon as it became clear that the US and Britain would not interfere. Some examples of the rapid transformation of the Hungarian economy to a command economy began when in 1946 coal and bauxite mines and aluminum producers, and the five largest industrial holding companies were nationalized, while the Hungarian National Bank was placed under state supervision. The following year all banks were first placed under state supervision and then were nationalized. Political witch-hunts, arrests and incessant media campaigns left the opposition parties decimated. The 1947 elections reflected this: the once mighty Smallholders, for example, received only 15% of the vote.<sup>59</sup> In 1948 all companies having over 100 employees were nationalized and the stock exchange closed its doors. In the same year the Social Democratic Party and the Communist Party merged. In 1949 all companies employing over 10 workers were nationalized; and the rest is history.

The politicians who in the 1990 elections talked of their parties continuing the traditions of the parties of 1945, were actually representing parties with directly opposite economic platforms. All parties in the early '90s talked of reducing the role of the government in the economy, and of the importance of the market and of the need to privatize enterprises.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Iván Pető and Sándor Szakács, *A hazai gazdaság négy évtizedének története, 1945-1985* [The history of four decades of the domestic economy, 1945-1985] (Budapest: Közgazdasági & Jogi Könyvkiadó, 1985), p. 17.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 18-19.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 24.

<sup>5</sup>Sándor Rákosi, ed., *A magyar kommunista párt és a szociáldemokrata párt határozatai, 1944-1945* [The resolutions of the Hungarian Communist Party and Social-Democratic Party] (Budapest: Kossuth Könyvkiadó, 1986), p. 44.

<sup>6</sup>István Vida, *Koalíció és pártharcok 1944-1948* [The coalition and inter-party conflicts, 1944-1948] (Budapest: Magvető Könyvkiadó, 1986), p. 44.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 448.

<sup>8</sup>See Stephen Kertész, *Diplomacy in a Whirlpool* (Notre Dame: U. of Notre Dame Press, 1953), pp. 126-134 and Charles Gati, *Hungary and the Soviet Bloc* (Durham: Duke U. Press, 1986), pp. 39-41. Also in Bennett Kovrig, *Communism in Hungary, From Kun to Kádár* (Stanford: Hoover Inst. Press, 1979), pp. 160-163.

<sup>9</sup>Pető, p. 21.

<sup>10</sup>Richard Bányai, *The Legal and Monetary Aspects of the Hungarian Hyperinflation, 1945-1946* (Phoenix, 1971), p. 1.

<sup>11</sup>Iván T. Berend and György Ránki, *The Hungarian Economy in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century* (London: Croom Helm, 1995), p. 183.

<sup>12</sup>Ignác Romsics, ed., *Wartime Plans for a New Hungary; Documents from the US Department of State, 1942-1944* (Highland Lakes: Atlantic Research and Publications Inc., 1992), p. 274.

<sup>13</sup>Kertész, p. 117

<sup>14</sup>Kovrig, p. 195.

<sup>15</sup>György Tallós, *A Magyar Általános Hitelbank 1867-1948* [The Hungarian General Credit Bank 1867-1948] (Budapest: Közgazdasági és Jogi Kiadó, 1995), pp. 363-364.

<sup>16</sup>Vida, *Koalíció*, pp. 116-120.

<sup>17</sup>Kertész, p. 162.

<sup>18</sup>"US and GB irked by USSR-Hungarian Pact," *The New York Times*, 23 Sept. 1945, p. 13, col. 1

<sup>19</sup>Sándor Balogh, *Parlamentti és pártharcok Magyarországon, 1945-47* [Conflicts in parliament and between parties in Hungary, 1945-47] (Budapest: Kossuth Könyvkiadó, 1975), p. 87.

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 64.

<sup>21</sup>Lajos Izsák, *Polgári pártok és programjaik Magyarországon 1944-1956* [Bourgeois parties and their programs in Hungary 1944-1956] (Pécs: Pannónia Könyvek, 1994), p. 63.

<sup>22</sup>István Vida, *A független kisgazdapárt politikája, 1944-1947* [Politics of the Independent Smallholders' Party, 1944-1947] (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1976), p. 89.

<sup>23</sup>István Vida, "A Független Kisgazda, Földmunkás és Polgári Párt 1945 eleji programtervezete" [Proposed platform of the Party of Independent Smallholders, Agricultural Day Workers and of the Middle Class] in *Párttörténeti Közlemények*, 1970. Vol.3. pp. 186-197.

<sup>24</sup>Balogh, pp. 69-72.

<sup>25</sup>Pető, p. 29.

<sup>26</sup>Rákosi, pp. 99-118. The Social Democratic Party's platform often refers to and in some cases shows similarities to the victorious British Labour Party's program. On July 25, 1945, the Labour Party defeated Sir Winston Churchill's coalition government. The Labour Party, in order to fulfill its campaign pledges, nationalized the Bank of England, the coal mines, inland transportation, communications, electric power utilities, and insurance firms. Steps were taken to nationalize steel and iron industries, heavy progressive taxes, and to introduce socialized health care and a social security system. In the meantime, rationing continued.

<sup>27</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 153-160.

<sup>28</sup>Balogh, pp. 73-74.

<sup>29</sup>Izsák, pp. 217-223.

<sup>30</sup>Balogh, pp. 67-68.

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 74-75.

<sup>32</sup>Izsák, pp. 239-243.

<sup>33</sup>Vida, *Koalíció*, p. 124.

<sup>34</sup>Izsák, pp. 232-238.

<sup>35</sup>Kovrig, p. 180.

<sup>36</sup>Rákosi, p. 24.

<sup>37</sup>See Vida, *A független*, p. 96, and Balogh, pp. 80-83.

<sup>38</sup>Kovrig, p. 179.

<sup>39</sup>Kertész, p. 140.

<sup>40</sup>Kovrig, p. 180.

<sup>41</sup>*The New York Times*, October 9, 1945.

<sup>42</sup>Balogh, pp. 91-94, and Kovrig, p. 180.

<sup>43</sup>Vida, *A független*, p. 109.

<sup>44</sup>Vida, *Koalíció*, p. 140.

<sup>45</sup>*Szabad Nép*, October 18 and 20, 1945.

<sup>46</sup>Rákosi, pp. 166-169.

<sup>47</sup>Vida, *A független*, p. 106.

<sup>48</sup>Balogh, p. 85.

<sup>49</sup>Vida, *Koalíció*, p. 140.

<sup>50</sup>Robert Blumstock, "Public Opinion in Hungary" in *Public Opinion in European Socialist Systems*, eds. Walter D. Conner and Zvi Gittelman, (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1977), pp. 136-137.

<sup>51</sup>Vida, *Koalíció*, p. 149.

<sup>52</sup>Salami tactics have been defined as the "progressive slicing up and debilitation of the organized majority." See Kovrig, p. 184. For the origin of the term see Charles Gati, *Hungary and the Soviet Bloc* (Durham, N.C.: Duke U. Press, 1986), p. 22.

<sup>53</sup>Izsák, pp. 59-63.

<sup>54</sup>Kovrig, p. 52.

<sup>55</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>56</sup>Stanley Max, *The United States, Great Britain and the Sovietization of Hungary, 1945-1948* (Boulder: East European Monographs, 1985), pp. 22-23.

<sup>57</sup>Milovan Djilas, *Conversations with Stalin* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1962), p. 114.

<sup>58</sup>Kertész, p. 222.

<sup>59</sup>Kovrig, p. 218.





**War-Crimes Trial Hungarian Style:  
Prime Minister László Bárdossy  
Before the People's Tribunal, 1945**

**Pál Pritz**

translated from the Hungarian by Dániel Székely

Like a snow-white rococo wig, so did the one-time Royal Hungarian Prime Minister László Bárdossy's hair gleam in the courtroom. His face was also pale. Frail as ever, his figure grew even more ethereal after the tribulations and privations he had undergone during the previous months. On the small table, by which he was seated, a heap of paper was towering along with a glass of water and some medicines to strengthen his sickly body if needed.

However his eyes — a mirror of his intellectual character — were bright, and keenly ranged over the courtroom. He intently listened to what was said in an effort to anticipate and fathom the dangers hidden in the questions put to him. Evidently, the stakes were very high. They were much higher than his mere earthly existence — since he had long realized that he would soon die a violent death. What was at stake was the very essence of his whole life. All of his efforts were aimed to demonstrate that — while he admitted to have been responsible for the tragedy of his fatherland — he had not committed a crime, still less a series of crimes, and that his responsibility was to be extenuated by the pressure of powerful external forces which had caused Hungary's tragedy at the end of World War II.

He could often feel his superiority over his opponents, including the presiding judge Ákos Major (who only a short time earlier had been a judge-advocate of the Royal Hungarian Military Court), as well as the public and the political prosecutors. He was more knowledgeable, more informed, and he could chose his words in a more refined and inventive fashion. He would often take advantage of his superior language proficiency by using foreign terms and expressions to confuse the court. True, he was not always successful in this effort: to his Latin-language citations the presiding judge immediately rejoined in kind. His English terminological explanations were responded to — to his great surprise — also in English by the political prosecutor Sándor Szalai.

Sometimes he thought to have found allies among the audience. Although he did not know and could not know that, often, the presiding judge would receive anonymous threatening telephone calls, but he could rightly reckon with the sympathy of the audience filling the rows of seats in the major Concert Hall of the Music Academy of Budapest which functioned as a make-shift courtroom. He believed that the audience would not unfavourably receive his references to Hungary's successes in recovering certain Hungarian-populated territories which had been detached from her under the Trianon Peace Treaty following World War I, and that the audience would look upon him as a gallant Hungarian champion of the idea of territorial revision.

Indeed, there were many among the audience who tended to feel and think in this manner, because the audience was composed, to a considerable extent, of the members of the middle class, and also of intellectuals who wanted to absorb the historical atmosphere of the trial. However, there were also many who did not and could not feel at home with the Hungarian society of a period hallmarked by Miklós Horthy's name: those to whom fatherland had allotted — instead of goods — nothing but hard work, or even a great deal of hardship and privation if unemployed. And there were also those in the audience who originally had lived the good life, but whose circumstances had increasingly been made difficult by the regime's anti-Semitic legislation, and who in the end hardly managed to save their lives.<sup>1</sup>

\* \* \*

The Bárdossy-trial as a process had several extraordinary features. It was extraordinary that justice was not administered by the regular judiciary, but by the so-called People's Tribunal, a body newly created by four prime ministerial decrees, which was later enacted by Parliament as Act VII of 1945. Another unusual feature of the trial, which opened on October 29 1945, was that it was for the first time since the People's Tribunal had been instituted that a widely known personality was brought to trial. It was extraordinary indeed because this person was the one-time prime minister of the country and in this capacity he ought to have been judged by a parliamentary jury especially set up for this purpose in pursuance of several laws — and mainly under Act III of 1848 — which were still in force at the time. On this account, throughout the trial, Bárdossy contested the competence of the People's Tribunal in his case. True, in the armistice agreement, signed in Moscow on 20 January 1945, enacted somewhat later and included in the National Body of Laws as Act V of 1945, Hungary undertook "to assist in arresting the persons accused of war crimes, in extraditing them to the governments concerned and in condemning [them]."<sup>2</sup> It logically followed that a newly created judiciary should pass sentence on such war criminals. Thus it was also quite natural that those responsible for such crimes should be sought primarily among persons who had held the highest

public offices during the war. Yet to those with a sense of justice, to those steeped in constitutional law, i.e. to the generation grown up in the spirit of the traditional Hungarian legal system, this procedure seemed to be unacceptable. In this context, it will suffice to refer to the conduct of Vince Nagy, minister of home affairs at the time of the bourgeois democratic revolution of 1918, who — out of similar considerations — refused to act as public prosecutor in this trial, though he naturally insisted on proceedings being brought against Bárdossy. Instead, he accepted the political prosecutor's role in the trial of Arrow-Cross leader Ferenc Szálasi.<sup>3</sup>

The circumstances themselves were extraordinary too. The courtroom was unheated, and the audience watched the events all wrapped in winter coats. Even the members of the tribunal had their hat on (except when they were photographed so that posteriority might see their uncovered heads). Although the guns had been silent for several months, the signs of destruction of the past months were clearly evident. The country and its capital lay in ruins and the wreckage of the bridges that used to link Buda and Pest slowed the flow of the Danube River. The everyday life of the population could only slowly get back to normal. Feeding and clothing the population, providing people with work, were all towering as virtually insurmountable difficulties. Still more serious than the losses of material life were the several wounds inflicted on the lives and souls of people. There was hardly any family that was not mourning someone, or searched desperately for a missing father, mother, wife or child. Grief gave rise to passions, and the throbbing mental pains prompted people to look for the underlying causes of the tragedies that befell them, and also for those who were responsible for these.

There was László Bárdossy sitting in the courtroom, first in the Music Academy, then (in late-December, 1945) in the hall of the appellant court, in one of the few undamaged parts of the Parliament Building. From time to time passions flared up around him and not without reason as it was clear even to the less informed people that it had been during Bárdossy's prime ministry that Hungary got involved in World War II. The Hungarian Army had crossed the country's southern borders in April 1941 to participate in the occupation of Yugoslavia. Two months later Hungarian troops penetrated into the territory of the country's giant neighbour, the Soviet Union. Moreover, in December 1941, Hungary followed the example of Nazi Germany and declared war on the United States.

It is always the business of a court of justice to put the facts onto the scales of justice and to weigh the pros and cons soberly and objectively. Under such unusual external pressures as existed in this particular trial, however, the court was unable to be free of emotions. The People's Tribunal viewed Bárdossy, and let him be seen, as an "evil" person who had committed such monstrous crimes as "were unprecedented in the whole history of the world."<sup>4</sup>

On the other hand, Bárdossy's pleading was strengthened not only by his superior intelligence, wide knowledge, and by his ability to formulate his

sentences in a brilliant, almost literary style — or by his abilities as a debater who did not refrain from some sophistry — but also by his argumentation built on emphasizing the necessity of revising Hungary's post-Trianon borders. This line of argument inflamed sentiments which remained unanswered because the court — under the country's international situation at the time — was not in the position to pay regard whatsoever to national feelings and sensitivity. Namely, at the end of World War II, Hungary had to accept a peace treaty, the territorial provisions of which were even more disadvantageous than those of the Trianon Peace Treaty, whose terms had appeared quite inconceivable to Hungarians at the time they were proclaimed. At the same time, Bárdossy built his defence on the undoubtedly advantageous territorial consequences of the First and Second Vienna Awards and of the subsequent Hungarian actions in Sub-Carpathia and in the South-Hungary (also known as Bácska or Voivodina).<sup>5</sup>

It was in this connection that the proceedings would often become heated on the pattern of Sophoclean dramas. At a certain moment of the proceedings, for example, the presiding judge got carried away to such an extent that he told Bárdossy to shut up, had him shackled and led out of the court-room. The provocation for this deed was an unfavourable remark by Bárdossy about Endre Bajcsy-Zsilinszky — who had been so infamously executed by the Arrow-Cross regime hardly a year earlier.<sup>6</sup>

Still in 1945, based on serialised reports of the Hungarian National Reporter and the Hungarian Telegraphic Agency, the proceedings of the Bárdossy trial were published in a thin volume,<sup>7</sup> in the same way as those of the other major war criminals. The value of this brochure as a historical record is not really significant, because this thin publication could not represent the main lines of the trial in their due proportions. However the little volume succeeded in stressing those elements of the proceedings which made it possible to place Bárdossy in the most unfavourable light. At the same time other components of the trial were either missing or were only very faintly represented on its pages. Nevertheless, since over the decades even historians virtually lacked access to the proceedings of the trial — which, or more precisely fragments of which, have been kept in the Archives of the Ministry of Internal Affairs — the brochure has come to mean much to historians interested in this subject. A similarly small volume, entitled *A nemzet védelmében* (In defence of the nation),<sup>8</sup> was published in Switzerland in 1976, containing nothing but two highly elaborate speeches of László Bárdossy. Namely, those which he had delivered as his last pleas before the courts of first and second instance, respectively. So one extreme was followed three decades later — and on foreign soil — by another, representing opposing points of view.

One-sided views, however, are never suited to give a true picture of the past. As early as 1945, it was envisaged that the proceedings of the trials conducted by People's Tribunals in the case of each major war-criminal should be published in full, as textbooks to help educators to shape the historical consciousness of future generations. As it clearly appears from proceedings of

the Bárdossy-trial — first of all from the reasons adduced to the sentence of the court of first instance — the real objective of the trial was not only to condemn László Bárdossy, the former Royal Hungarian Prime Minister, but to put the entire political system of the post-World War I Hungary on the pillory.

Therefore it seems to be justifiable on several counts that the contemporary reader — and anyone who wants to be well-informed of the stormy history of Hungary in the 20th century — should take a volume in his hand, which is not a tendentious selection but contains each important still existing page of the Bárdossy trial's proceedings.<sup>9</sup>

The trial scrutinized not only Bárdossy's activity as Prime Minister and his conduct in later years, but it also offered an all-inclusive picture of Hungarian society after 1918-1919. At the same time — as is so often the case — it also cast light upon the way of thinking and attitudes of those passing judgement on Bárdossy in 1945. Thus, half a century later, a historian can simultaneously weigh two things, namely the message of the proceedings concerning Bárdossy and the Horthy-era in general, and the extent to which the facts revealed — and the view of history formed during the trial — could survive in later historical works on this subject. This weighing can be sober and circumspect only if the investigator will not yield to the great temptation of projecting the immense socio-political changes of today on his subject, which is multi-layered anyway. It is the main task of a historian to reconstruct the events of the past to the best of his knowledge. Therefore, in order to complete the record conveyed by the published documents, these questions should be addressed briefly.

\* \* \*

László Bárdossy was born on December 10, 1890, in the city of Szombathely, into a gentry family whose members had traditionally served in the state administration. His father, Jenő Bárdossy, was a ministerial counsellor. His mother's maiden name was Gizella Zarka de Felsőőr. He attended secondary schools in Eperjes (now in Slovakia) and in Budapest. He studied law at universities in Budapest, Berlin and Paris, partly to enrich his knowledge of foreign languages — which included English as well — and to widen his intellectual horizons. He soon rose above the intellectual level of his classmates. The real underpinning of his early successes was, above all, his mental alertness. There is a story about him to the effect that at the time of examinations his fellow-students passed the news: "Laci Bárdossy is to sit for examination, let's go to listen to him!" He was characterized, for the most part, by idealism, high ethical standards, receptivity to and demand for beautiful forms, and a keen interest in aesthetic qualities. So it was not by chance that, having graduated from the university in 1913, he could start his career as an employee of the Ministry of Culture. His activity in the ministry provided him a good opportunity to get

acquainted with the contemporary Hungarian state administration, with its working methods, and its mentality.

Like most of his colleagues, Bárdossy could only slowly advance in rank. First he was junior clerk, and he was still a ministerial assistant secretary as late as 1918. Hungarian history had already reached the years of the counter-revolutionary period,<sup>10</sup> when he was appointed ministerial secretary in 1921, which was still rather a low civil service grade and pay category. Though in the meanwhile he also had a more pleasant and meaningful work, as he was acting for some time as the school-inspector of Pest County.

The only positive development of those years was Hungary's attainment of independence — though only so far as this independence could be to the advantage of a territorially mutilated and internationally isolated country, faced by the need for social progress of which had come to a halt. The country's new situation required the establishment of an independent Hungarian ministry of foreign affairs. In fact, this work had already been started at the time of the bourgeois democratic revolution in autumn 1918, but due to the tremendous political upheavals of the time, the bulk of the work remained unfinished. In the early 1920s, the work was resumed, especially in establishing Hungary's diplomatic service. As a possibility, the new foreign ministry could choose to take over the officials with Hungarian citizenship who had been active in the formerly common Austro-Hungarian foreign service. There were so many of these that they could have easily filled all the diplomatic posts needed by a small country such as Hungary. But the contemporary Hungarian public opinion mistrusted those officials who were imbued with the spirit of the *Ballhausplatz*. Accordingly, this professionally quite natural solution, was not accepted. Instead, the high officials of the new ministry chose to select and employ highly qualified persons — with a wide knowledge foreign languages — from the existing Hungarian public administration. Bárdossy belonged to this group. The fact that Bárdossy got to the Dísz Square — the place where Hungary's Foreign Ministry was located in the interwar period — was also helped by the fact that he had participated in the preparatory work for the peace treaty.

He assumed his post with the Ministry on February 18, 1922. He was assigned to the press department to be its deputy head. In 1926 he was promoted counsellor to the departmental head, and not much later he was appointed head of the press department. In 1930, he became counsellor to the Hungarian Envoy in London, i.e. he became the first among the subordinate officials of the Legation. He was to act for the envoy in case of his illness or absence.

It was anything but a cheering task to participate in the guidance of Hungarian press policy at the time. The country's international prestige was at its lowest, and the well-known circumstances under which the counter-revolution had come to power, were enough in themselves to give rise to great international aversion to Hungary, which was still further enhanced by the anti-Hungarian propaganda campaigns that were conducted by Hungary's enemies at the time. Efforts to counteract the effects of all this met with two major difficulties. The

first was that Hungarian propagandists of the times ignored the fact that support for the cause of Hungarian revision could not be won solely by an endless complaining about Hungary's injuries. During the whole period, Hungarian officialdom was unable to understand the real causes of historical Hungary's collapse, and not until the thirties was the impossibility of the re-establishment of historical Hungary realized — and even then only by a rather narrow circle. The other reason for Hungary's inability to counter hostile propaganda was the shortage of funds. Funds available for propaganda by Hungary represented only a fragment of what was spent by the Little Entente countries for similar purposes.

In these years, the formerly idealistic young Bárdossy increasingly turned into a cynical and disillusioned man. This behavioral pattern was not peculiar to him. A lot of cynicism may always be found among those in power, and adding to this was also the Hungarian reality of the twenties. Bárdossy's psyche was even more distorted by his weak physical condition. His permanent nervous tension made his stomach so sick that he had to undergo a serious operation in which half of his stomach had to be removed. His faculty of quick perception could but hardly tolerate the much slower grasp of his colleagues and subordinates, his constitution could not suffer any vagueness, not even the necessary circumspection or careful consideration of matters. Over-confident in his quick perception, Bárdossy not infrequently made over-hasty — and hence often wrong — decisions. In addition, his scathing remarks rarely failed to give offence to others. Exceptionally clever and intelligent though he was, Bárdossy failed to grow in prudence and sagacity. It seems necessary to dwell upon this topic, mainly because these personal traits were to play a significant role in developing all what was negative in his actions as Prime Minister.

Bárdossy had served until the summer of 1936 in London, when he was moved to Bucharest, now in the capacity of envoy. Later he rose to the foreign minister's post which he occupied in February 1941 after the unexpected death of the Count István Csáky. It is worthwhile noting, however, that the idea of his being appointed minister had already been brought up when Kálmán Kánya had to be replaced in late 1938. At that time, however, Bárdossy had refused the offer of promotion for fear that Csáky, a very ambitious man, would not tolerate being ignored and would try to sully Bárdossy's reputation. It was rumoured that at the time the two had frankly discussed this delicate situation.<sup>11</sup>

As regards his view of Hungarian society, Bárdossy agreed with those who maintained the necessity of reforming and modernizing the country's social system. He thought modernization could be achieved through right-wing radicalism, suggesting that his views resembled those of Gyula Gömbös. (Incidentally, he had a family connection to Gömbös: he had married a divorced woman who happened to be a sister of Gömbös's second wife.) Furthermore, when he was appointed Prime Minister after Count Pál Teleki's suicide on 3 April 1941, Bárdossy — in an address to Parliament — spoke highly of Gömbös's genius and of his political objectives. What he had had in mind,

however, was probably a greater degree of social justice, a moderate land reform, the modernization of public administration, the promotion of public health, and a more advanced social policy.<sup>12</sup> Unlike Gömbös, who was forced from power because he had aimed at the elimination of parliamentarism, Bárdossy did not take steps to limit further Parliament's authority, although his predecessor, the renowned Count Teleki — in an environment imbued by the spirit of the Nazi "New Europe" — felt it necessary to move from parliamentarism towards a corporative political system.

A phenomenon not rare among the members of Hungary's Christian middle-class, anti-semitism was not alien to Bárdossy either, though his attitude towards Jews was basically influenced by the country's actual political constellation, both at home and abroad. Presumably, he shared Gömbös's views in this respect, and the differences between their actions arose as a result of the different nature of the actual conditions existing at the time. In 1932 Gömbös reached a reconciliation with Hungary's Jewry, or at least with "the patriotic element" thereof — as he put it. Consequently, no measure detrimental to the Jews was taken while he was in office as Prime Minister. Bárdossy, in contrast, was responsible for the submission of the third anti-Jewish bill to Parliament and its being approved as Act XV of 1941. This legislation banned marriage between Jews and non-Jews, and declared sexual intercourse between such persons as "criminal miscegenation."

It was also during Bárdossy's prime ministership that some 18 thousand Jews were killed in the vicinity of Kamenev-Podolsk, in occupied Russia, in late August of 1941. Hidden in the background of this great tragedy was the Hungarian government's idea — in fact, the plan — that Jews who lacked Hungarian citizenship and those who had fled to Hungary from neighbouring countries, should be "repatriated" to the place from where they had originally come from, i.e. mostly to Galicia (in present-day Ukraine and Poland). The attack on the Soviet Union provided a good opportunity for the implementation of this plan. True, Hungary's political leaders — including Bárdossy — had not been fully aware of the fact that this deportation could end up in a massacre of the Jews in question. When a Jew who had escaped the slaughter and made his way to Budapest, told this terrible story to Ferenc Keresztes-Fischer, the Minister of Internal Affairs at the time, the deportations were immediately stopped, and Bárdossy did not overrule this decision.<sup>13</sup>

Bárdossy held his office as Prime Minister for slightly more than eleven months. This time-span represents hardly more than a split second in the life of a country. Yet, these short months brought changes which resulted in a great tragedy for the nation.

Having taken office as Prime Minister, Bárdossy's first days were already burdened with immense tensions. The suicide Pál Teleki had committed just a few hours earlier was a memento: Hungary shall not participate in alliance with the Germans in the elimination of the South-Slav state. The "escape to death" of the immediate past prime minister also demonstrated that not even Teleki had



the strength to keep his country from taking advantage of a good opportunity for further territorial revisions. Bárdossy was deliberately appointed to this post as one capable of ensuring the smoothest possible execution of that process. Initially, Regent Horthy had offered the post to Keresztes-Fischer, but he refused it. The point that certainly weighted with Keresztes-Fischer in his decision was that, while disapproving the whole action, he was not inclined to face the consequences of opposing the wishes of Horthy and his military advisers. Bárdossy, however, thought otherwise. In fact, he changed the position he had taken earlier in this matter. Namely, in late March and in early April, he had shared Teleki's view that Hungary should not unrestrainedly side with the Germans, and both of them sought to achieve what was virtually impossible: the Hungarian involvement in the war should not go beyond the point where it might come into conflict with the Anglo-Saxon Powers. Although the conditions formulated at the session of the Supreme Council of Defence, held on April 1 1941, formally made Hungary's participation possible in this fashion, but the wide gap created by these conflicting endeavours was unbridgeable even by the most brilliant of formal solutions.

The People's Tribunal found Bárdossy guilty mainly on four counts. One of them concerned the occupation, or rather, recapture of historic South-Hungary. It should be noted — as opposed to the prosecution's main argument at the trial — that the purported disagreement between the approach to this issue of Bárdossy and Teleki — at least until Teleki's suicide — was a contrived one. It is in fact, not accurate to state that Bárdossy hastily, irresponsibly and arbitrarily acted in this matter. As regards its final outcome, the action in South-Hungary undoubtedly had a negative effect on the country. Bárdossy's personal responsibility extended only so far, but no farther, as he had executed what the then official Hungary wanted. It must be clearly seen that Great Britain — while having threatened Hungary with the negative consequences of siding with the Germans — failed to do anything to shield the country from German pressure. Hitler may well have been able to solve the Yugoslav question without any Hungarian co-operation as German troops could have advanced easily into Yugoslavia through one-time Austria. Hungary's military cooperation in itself was not indispensable at all for Berlin. However, it must also be taken into consideration that German actions against Yugoslavia and Greece should not be separated from the *Fall Barbarossa*, i.e. the planned attack on the Soviet Union. The campaign against the Balkan states was also planned to be a lightning war (*Blitzkrieg*) to promote the successful execution of the Barbarossa Plan. Thus the Germans were interested to develop the widest possible front — preferably on open terrain so that they might solve all the tasks of this campaign "in one blow." Hungarian support was also indispensable from the point of view of politics. Germans were keen to demonstrate that it was not their own interests that counted, but that the campaign was aimed to remedy the unjust decisions of the Versailles peace treaties by creating a new Europe where the Croats would regain their independence from the Serbs, and half a million Hungarians would

also be liberated from the assimilationist policies of the multinational Yugoslav Kingdom.

It is hardly realistic to assume that the general public of Hungary, strongly nationalist as it was at the time, would have tolerated inaction by its government, namely, that it would let half a million of Hungarians be subjected to German rule after Serb dominance, when there was a possibility of regaining them for the fatherland. In contemporary Hungary, no one believed that the recovering of Northern Hungary, Sub-Carpathia, Northern Transylvania, and South-Hungary actually meant a territorial expansion of the country. As the poet Mihály Babits said: "Do not say that the fatherland is expanding — The fatherland, the fatherland has always been the same."<sup>14</sup>

Bárdossy abode by the Teleki-created formula — the very essence of which was that Hungary would not deploy its troops before the collapse of the South-Slav state — to such an extent that he was not inclined to let the Hungarian Army go over to the offensive in spite of repeated German requests to this effect.

The Bárdossy-trial placed a great deal of emphasis on the Soviet warning against any involvement by Hungary in Hitler's Yugoslav campaign. True, Hungary had been warned by the Soviets, and it was also a fact that the Soviet Union had concluded a friendship and non-aggression pact with Yugoslavia just one day before the start of the German attack. However, a much more important aspect than that is that — in the discussed period — the Soviet-German relations were regulated by a mutual non-aggression pact concluded on 23 August 1939. In the spirit of this pact, then, the Stalinist Soviet Union had its Embassy in Belgrade closed barely one month after the German attack on Yugoslavia.<sup>15</sup>

Relying on all these facts and looking at the events from the perspective of almost half a century, the historian cannot but conclude that, though the occupation of the historical South-Hungary in the end spelt disaster for the country, the circumstances surrounding the year 1941 hardly offered a better outcome for Hungary than that.

Quite different is the situation with the other main count of the indictment against Bárdossy, the one that concerned Hungary's attack on the Soviet Union.

The fact is that the events of April, 1941, did not enhance the country's capacity for manoeuvring. The re-occupation of South Hungary hitched the Hungarian wagon even more tightly to the German train. Great Britain continued to refrain from an open declaration of war against Hungary for the time being, restricting itself to breaking off diplomatic relations with Budapest. Furthermore, the occupation of much of the Balkans further strengthened Germany's position throughout Europe. Not surprisingly, Hungary's pro-Nazi Arrow-Cross Party gained further ground in domestic politics, and Arrow-Cross politicians with a not insignificant lung-power began demanding that Hungary show an unambiguously positive attitude towards the Germans and take sides with them openly. Though the military leadership was not so vocal, yet behind

the scenes it kept pushing the government in the same direction. As soon as reports on Hitler's plan to break the 1939 pact with the Soviets began arriving, Henrik Werth, the Chief of the General Staff, and some other generals of similar mentality, tried to force the government to join forces with the Germans in their planned military campaign against the Soviet Union. Strong pressure of the same kind was exerted on the Hungarian leadership by Döme Sztójay who, as Hungarian ambassador to Berlin, was occupying a key position in Hungary's hierarchy, and of whom it could not be known whether he represented Budapest in Berlin, or Berlin in Budapest.<sup>16</sup>

When the *Wehrmacht*, without any declaration of war, launched its assault on the surprised Red Army on 22 June 1941, Romania and Italy also declared war on the Soviet Union. What the Hungarian government did at this point was only to break off diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union. Hitler — in contrast with the attitude he had shown at the time of his offensive against Yugoslavia, when he had explicitly invited Horthy to participate in that campaign — now only requested that the Hungary's eastern borders be reinforced. This indicates that the Hungarian participation in this case was by far less important for Hitler than had been the case in the attack against the South-Slav state. Of course, it does not follow that he did not consider Hungarian participation to be important, he "only" wanted to avoid having to pay any price for it. He could undoubtedly reckon with Hungary's entry into the war before long; in the meantime, the lack of Hungarian military participation would not disturb his relations with Romanian Premier Marshal Antonescu and Slovak President Tiso.

The German Army advanced deep into the Soviet territory at an amazingly rapid rate. At the June 23 session of the ministerial council, Károly Bartha, Minister of Defence, expressed his "expert opinion," namely that the German army would overpower the Soviet Union in less than six weeks. Though, at the 1945 trial, Bartha's above-mentioned statement provoked a roar of laughter among the audience, it still remains a fact that this belief had been shared by the whole Hungarian military leadership at the time, and the same view had been held by many — either with fear or with hope — throughout Europe.

On June 26, Finland also entered into war on the side of the Germans. ("Independent" Slovakia and Croatia had already taken similar steps somewhat earlier.) Hungary was the only state among Germany's allies that had not got involved in the war — except for Bulgaria, whose participation was seen as impossible and had not been reckoned with by the Germans from the outset. And it was precisely on the following day that the Kassa air-raid took place — an event whose circumstances have never been clarified — which gave Bárdossy the final push to decide in favour of entering into the war.

At the time of the re-occupation of South-Hungary, the Yugoslav air-force had inflicted much heavier air-strikes on some southern cities of Hungary, but all that could not divert Bárdossy from his resolution to start actions only after the independence of Croatia had been declared. Now, however, a much

poorer pretext was enough for him to make his fatal decision.<sup>17</sup> Why? Certainly because the bombs released over Kassa gave only the final thrust to taking a step the preconditions of which had already been ripening ever since the birth of the "counter-revolutionary" system in 1919. Thus it is understandable that Molotov's so often cited message — i.e. a cipher telegram dispatched by József Kristóffy, Hungarian envoy to Moscow, and the related question of whether Bárdossy had made it known to the ministerial council and the head of the state — is not of so great importance as was attached to it by the tribunal, by the reasons adduced in the judgement, and later by historiography itself. What was really important at the moment for the Hungarian policy-makers was not so much the Soviet message as the seemingly victorious rush with which the German forces were advancing towards Moscow. On the other hand, there was marching the entire reorganized Little Entente now under the aegis of the Germans, as Endre Bajcsy-Zsilinszky so vividly depicted it in his letter of 19 January 1942 to Bárdossy.<sup>18</sup> What was really of decisive importance was that the foreign policy horizon of the whole Hungarian ruling élite was unable to fathom the situation's all-European dimensions, let alone world dimensions. It was also of great significance that the élite could not grasp at all the decisive importance of the potential might of the forces opposed to fascism, that is it could not comprehend the fact that the Soviet Union had found firm allies in the western democracies in this struggle for global domination.

It was often brought up during the trial that Hungary had declared war on the Soviet Union, and later this interpretation became so deeply rooted in Hungarian historiography that even the historical chronology, published in several editions by the Institute of History of Hungarian Academy of Sciences during the eighties, contained the entry "declaration of war." In reality, however, Hungary had never declared war on the Soviet Union. Bárdossy had much more sense than to commit such a blunder.

Besides, this approach includes something paradoxical. In case of the German attack the — justifiable — accusation was that it had been launched without any prior notice, i.e., without a formal declaration of war. In the case of the Hungarian attack, which was preceded by a formal notice, i.e. a statement about the "existence of a state of hostilities," always the term "declaration of war" is used.

Furthermore, during the trial it was often mentioned that Bárdossy had acted contrary to the constitution. In this instance too, the reality is that, while the political leadership had not completely adhered to certain prescriptions and provisions, it was not justifiable to state that Bárdossy had explicitly violated the "constitution" as it virtually had not existed. Act XVII of 1920, empowered the Regent of Hungary to order "the deployment of the army outside the borders of the country, provided all Hungarian ministries assume full responsibility and the Parliament's subsequent approval would be applied for immediately" and it would be obtained. Since, at its session of June 26, the ministerial council certainly voted for the country's entering into the war and as it was Horthy rather

than Bárdossy who actually made that decision, the only "violation of the constitution" Bárdossy committed was the fact that he applied to the Parliament for the subsequent approval of these actions rather late, i.e. only on July 24. The weight of this negligence (as a charge against Bárdossy) can be measured correctly only if we add to this the fact that the approval by the Parliament came as late as 23 October 1941. Not that Parliament had been pondering the issue for several months, its delay might be ascribed much more to the fact that it considered the practising of its mandate so much just a formality and so insignificant that it simply did not care for putting the issue on the agenda earlier than that. All this clearly shows that the country's entry into the war was not the over-hasty and ill-considered act of one single man, but the decision of the entire "official Hungary."

With these appropriate qualifications made, we can return to the question of Bárdossy's personal accountability. His tremendous personal responsibility for the ensuing tragedy lies in the simple fact that he entangled his country in a war in which Hungary had no interest. It is beyond doubt that avoiding involvement in the war would have required immense efforts. It would have required acts of extraordinary statesmanship. Under ordinary circumstances, highly educated and diligent government officials may often exercise a fairly good leadership over a country. But pity a country in the midst of a world crisis that lacks outstanding statesmen! Horthy had gradually grown into a widely popular personality, in fact, he had overcome the challenges that came his way during the 'twenties and 'thirties, mainly because he received wise advice, especially from Prime Ministers István Bethlen and Pál Teleki. He was never able, however, to rise to the level of a great statesman, even though he was inclined to believe so after having been flattered endlessly by members of his entourage. Bárdossy was an intelligent man and it must have been clear to him that he was constitutionally unable to act as an outstanding statesman. We do believe that he had no ulterior motives and that he was speaking quite frankly, when — during the trial — he declared to have been nothing but a government official.<sup>19</sup> And, of course, it was beyond the power of a government official to turn the decision of 26 June 1941 in a proper channel — largely because in this case he would have had to surpass himself.

In this context, it would be important to know exactly everything that was said at the June 26 session of the ministerial council, and so to clarify who among those present — and to what extent — tried to avert the country's entry into the war. The minutes of the session were signed by Bárdossy and suggest that only Ferenc Keresztes-Fischer spoke up against the war. However, according to a subsequent statement by István Bárcziházi Bárczy, who had kept the minutes, the record had been falsified. According to another version of the minutes — which were actually prepared by Bárczy much later, as late as 1945 or perhaps even later — the number of those voting against the war was higher. The documents of the trial cast serious doubt on the trustworthiness of Bárczy's statements. While Bárdossy's version certainly tended to soften, Bárczy's

statement intensified the voice of those opposing war. It is difficult, if not impossible to know which of the two versions approach reality.<sup>20</sup> Never-the-less, one thing can be taken for granted: even if Bárczy's version happens to reflect reality, it does not suggest that the ministerial council as a whole favoured neutrality in the war and, even if it had, it would have been very difficult to put such a conviction into effect.

All things considered, we still have to maintain that the country's prime minister should not have taken steps to embroil the country in war: the prime minister as a statesman ought to have realized that the ongoing war was a world-wide struggle from which Germany would never emerge victorious. Nor was it a decisive argument that the ruling layers of Hungarian society had long cherished the hope of attaining a possible peace-agreement in case the Germans were likely to lose the war against the Soviets. As a statesman, Bárdossy ought to have known that the war was a total one. Though Bárdossy could easily reject the judgement against him — which based some of its arguments on the Atlantic Charter, a document that had been drafted after his "crime" had been committed. But it was a serious error on his part that in 1941 he never confided — for reasons quite unknown, perhaps out of personal animosity — in the words of his envoy to London, György Barcza. Under the circumstances it is understandable that during the trial Bárdossy made every effort to discredit Barcza and question his expertise. But it is not so easy to understand why in 1941 he had failed to meditate over the reports Barcza had sent him. Probably he had failed to realize that Great Britain in 1941 was no longer the same isolationist country that he had come to know during his diplomatic service there between 1930 and 1936. In this new Great Britain, those appeasers who had sought to come to terms with Berlin in order that the fascist aggression might be turned against the Soviet Union, have long been discredited. This was the Great Britain of Churchill who in those days promised his people nothing but blood and tears, but, for the future, he held out the prospect of victory.

Although Teleki's conception of an "armed neutrality" met with failure when Hungary joined the German aggression against Yugoslavia, even at this point in time the country's involvement in the war was still not inevitable. There was still time to consider things over and over again, which Bárdossy did. He held the view that the Germans' demands should be met as soon as possible, so that — by a punctual fulfilment of their minimum demands — the fulfilment of their maximum demands might be warded off. History, however, refuted this manner of political thinking, because it was precisely this readiness to comply with the first German requests that enabled them to squeeze the maximum out of the country. The number of casualties was not possible to be reduced by this political line. What actually happened was just the opposite: compared to the size of the country's population, the number of Hungarian casualties ranked highest in the region; much higher than, for example, in the case of the Czech-Moravian Protectorate.

Bárdossy very self-consciously refuted the accusation that he had conducted a class policy. He very emphatically stressed his being a true Hungarian, emphasizing that both himself and his acts were always governed by the true interest of the Hungarian nation. But in the same way as the national unity, which he had a special penchant to refer to, had never existed, he had never been able to separate the national interest from class interests, i.e., from the interests of the given political establishment. This also means that promoting the real national interests always came up against serious obstacles, to such an extent that class viewpoints would finally always overpower the specific national interests. Thus it happened what Péter Gosztonyi, a well-known Hungarian-born historian working in Berne, described in the following words: "There have been but a few wars in which a country was so carelessly involved as Hungary was rushed into danger by its leaders in June 1941."<sup>21</sup>

The third main group of charges made by the People's Tribunal against Bárdossy centred around Hungary's entering into war — or as it was formulated: "declared war on" — with Great Britain and the United States. In this instance, the situation was very much the same as with the accusation of attacking the Soviet Union. Namely, while the country's room for manoeuvring had continued narrowing down, yet Bárdossy's responsibility was clearly evident.

That the country's room for manoeuvring had become restricted more than before was shown by the fact that while in the Soviet case official Germany had wrapped itself in silence, now it exerted an explicit pressure on Hungary to declare the state of war. Despite all this, at this point a statesman-prime minister ought to have put up resistance to the German pressure, or thwarted it by cleverly using his diplomatic skills. By that time it had become quite clear that any further widening of the war would doom the Third *Reich* to defeat. Consequently, the fatal nature of Hungary's close alliance with Germany should have also become clear — at least in the eyes of a politician who was able to see the future amidst the clamour of everyday propaganda. Bárdossy, however, instead of resisting the German-Italian demands, used his diplomatic inventiveness and skills to have a formula accepted by the ministerial council on 11 December 1941, which could be "further developed" at any given time, that is, which enabled him to break off diplomatic relations and to "further develop" this — without consulting the ministerial council anew — all the way to announcing the "onset" of a state of war. (Bárdossy's conduct could be seen as diplomatic only so far as he restricted himself to merely establishing, instead of declaring, the state of war. By this he wanted to express that this was not to mean an arbitrary Hungarian step, and it meant not more than Hungary had taken notice of the recent changes in the international situation and had drawn the consequences, involuntarily though.)

In addition to what has been discussed above, two more components of Bárdossy's motives should be taken into consideration. The first is a deep-seated resentment psychosis that strongly influenced him and his acts at both the national and the personal levels. At the national level: why should he have

avoided war with Great Britain, when Great Britain had acted so unjustly against Hungary. In his opinion, which he expressed both to the American Envoy in Budapest and then to Parliament, "Great Britain want[ed] to give assistance to the Soviets by terrorizing and... even sacrificing Hungary."<sup>22</sup> Bárdossy's fundamental position, then, was that it was Great Britain that had done serious injustices to Hungary, first when it had actively participated in the dismemberment of Hungary, and second, when it had given support to the Bolshevik Soviet Union by sacrificing Hungary instead of appreciating the country's eminent role in the anti-Bolshevik struggle. It was in this manner that the ex-prime minister explained away the fact that Britain, following the logic of a joint anti-fascist struggle against Germany, failed to spare Hungary, a country which — being at war with the Soviet Union — was causing damage to this anti-fascist coalition.

On the personal level: Bárdossy's resentment against the British had fed on the fact that during his service in London, his wife — who had been a divorced woman — was not acceptable in the highest circles of English society, a circumstance that deeply offended Bárdossy's gentlemanly pride.

The other component of Bárdossy's motives was his singular belief in the power of "destiny." In the life of the Bárdossy couple many human tragedies had taken place which had greatly affected them and which had produced an almost magical effect on their weak nerves. These human tragedies included the untimely and extremely painful death of Mrs. Bárdossy's sister, who — as has been mentioned — was Prime Minister Gömbös's wife. Gömbös had also suddenly died a few years later at the age of 50. Bárdossy's old colleague and immediate predecessor as foreign minister, the Count István Csáky fell victim, at age 47, to an incurable disease. Gömbös's successor as Prime Minister, Kálmán Darányi, died of an acquired disease at 53. When Bárdossy became heir to the Sándor Palace,<sup>23</sup> he could not but help seeing before his inner eye the shades of Teleki's tragic last night. It was probably due to this fact that Bárdossy and his wife, as if under a spell, were reluctant to move into the palace, on the walls of which there hung the portraits of several figures of Hungarian history who had met tragic deaths. It was not until malicious gossip in the capital city — namely that the new premier would not last long in his office — had come to the ears of the Bárdossys that they decided to move in, presumably with heavy hearts.<sup>24</sup>

The fourth main group of accusations against Bárdossy concerned the years following his activities as prime minister. In 1943 he had undertaken to act as the president of United Christian National League and in 1944 he was elected to Parliament as the representative of Szombathely, his native town. He delivered speeches arguing for the continuation of war, worked to promote the close collaboration of the extreme rightist parties, participated in the National Alliance which aimed to block any attempts to withdraw Hungary from the war. All this gave rise to displeasure and incredulity even among those who until then had sympathised with Bárdossy or at least received his actions with understanding. It was at this time that Bárdossy published the book: *Magyar politika a mohácsi vész után* (Hungarian Politics after the Mohács Defeat).<sup>25</sup> While



working on his book, he had consulted eminent Hungarian historians; Bárdossy, however, was not led by a strong desire to contribute to the advance of historiography. For him the historical material was to help him in justifying his actions. He projected his own person on the figure of the Cardinal Fráter György,<sup>26</sup> whose unsuccessful political line seemed to him to be a good excuse for the failure of his prime ministry and a good argument for his exoneration.

Bárdossy had involved the country in the war against the Soviets, and then accepted the state of war with Great Britain and the United States, in order that he might ward off the country's occupation by the Germans, potentially the greatest evil — as he believed it. In this belief he could write with deep insight about Fráter György: "...the thought underlying his policy was to keep the conflicting parties out of the country rather than to provide opportunities sometimes to one other times to the other... to exert influence and to play a role in the nation's life..."<sup>27</sup>

With the progress of World War II, people in increasing number began suggesting that Hungary had taken sides with the weaker party in this struggle. "Only the simpletons may delude themselves," Bárdossy retorted, "with the short-sighted 'wisdom' that what has to be done is nothing but simply to take sides with the stronger.... As if it could be foreseen who would turn out to be the stronger, and as if a cowardly defection to the other side,... would not bring about, sooner or later, a danger twice as great as the one they wanted to avoid."<sup>28</sup>

As the probability of an Axis defeat increased, efforts to explore the internal implications of the expected defeat came to the fore. Bárdossy tended to regard the lack of national unity, rather than his own fatal steps, as the source of danger: "What can an individual do, at whose efforts a fatigued generation is looking indifferently and without any understanding, and who is surrounded by mistrust, suspicion, in fact, by hatred, but whose soul is possessed by the objective he once set himself, but who is no longer able to reckon with the means and the circumstances... The petty-minded little men swaggering around the giant have not understood, perhaps have not even seen the objective."<sup>29</sup>

Having read Bárdossy's book, Endre Bajcsy-Zsilinszky became extremely agitated because in early 1942 he still considered Bárdossy a statesman. In one of his letters Bajcsy-Zsilinszky wrote: "This man, one of the main villains of the thousand-year-history of Hungary," has the audacity not only to excuse himself by showing the events of the past in a false [light] but also to teach us a general lesson of how a real politician, a great statesman, should behave."<sup>30</sup>

Supposedly, Endre Bajcsy-Zsilinszky was exaggerating here much in the same way as he did in his letter of 19 January 1942, when he had written about Bárdossy in a very favourable manner. Basically, he was closer to the truth in the former case, because Bárdossy was really mistaken when he tried to explain the motives of his actions through the example of Fráter György's policies. Beyond all this — and admitting that some similarities can be found in the situations after Mohács and after the spring of 1941 — the analogy was misleading because, while the sovereignty of the Hungarian Kingdom was

threatened by two great powers in the 16th century, the Soviets were not a real threat in 1941 as compared to the very real threat posed by Germany. So it was Bárdossy who, with his move to embroil his country in the war, virtually invited his and the country's tragedy. György Martinuzzi's greatness as statesman manifested itself in the fact that he sought to extract better conditions for the Hungarians at a time when the country had been split into three parts. Bárdossy, in turn, strove to thwart the German threat and, with his basically mistaken policy, he exposed the country to another danger. It is hardly appropriate to bring up the point in his defence that the other countries of this region also shared the same fate as Hungary after World War II. There is no reason for entering into explanations of the type "what could have happened if...." It should suffice to refer to the immense difference between being in the good graces of three great powers and being at war with them. In the former case Hungary could have got into the Soviet sphere of interest under more favourable conditions, as a minimum.

\* \* \*

As the front line drew nearer, Bárdossy and his family left for his native Szombathely in 1944, then in early 1945 — with the help of the Edmund Veesenmayer, Hitler's plenipotentiary commissioner in Hungary — moved to Bavaria to find refuge there. In late April 1945 when Nazi Germany was living its last days, Bárdossy called on Hans Frölich, the Swiss envoy to Germany, and applied for an entry visa to Switzerland. The envoy considered Bárdossy a diplomat, a person who essentially had done his duty as required by his post, and proposed that the visa to be granted. The Swiss Ministry of Foreign Affairs seems to have agreed with Frölich. In a few days Bárdossy crossed the border of Switzerland and was placed in a camp set up for refugees.

This situation, however, hurt his gentlemanly pride. He believed that, being in possession of a diplomatic passport, he and his family had the right to move freely. With this belief — consciously or unconsciously, who knows — he prepared his own demise. His case was brought before the Swiss minister of justice who was not so tolerant as Frölich had been. Although before the final decision on Bárdossy's fate they asked for the opinion of the ex-envoy Jaeger, who had served in Budapest, as well as of that of János Wettstein, Hungarian ex-envoy to Berne — and neither of them was against Bárdossy — the Swiss government decided to expel Bárdossy from Switzerland. Thus on May 4 he, together with his family, was transferred to Germany, to a place where American troops had already arrived. He was arrested and a few months later he was transported in shackles, in the company of a group of other alleged war-criminals, to Hungary.

It appears from the trial as a whole, but particularly from the sentence passed by the court, that there was a definite intention by the court to introduce a new view of history. The death-sentence pronounced was passed not only on Bárdossy himself but also on all what had happened in Hungary during a quarter of century between 1919 and 1944. This view was quite understandable at the time, amidst the still smouldering ruins and hurting wounds. It is quite another thing that this view remained essentially unchanged for several decades to come, and a long time had passed before it was slowly replaced by the more reasonable view of history. It was still considered appropriate as late as 1977 to echo the verdict of that trial and to describe Bárdossy as an utterly wicked criminal who "involved Hungary in World War II by attacking Yugoslavia and declaring war on two world powers, the Soviet Union and the United States,..."<sup>31</sup>

Historical analyses will certainly demonstrate that Marxist historical works produced in the fifties and sixties were inspired by the spirit of People's Tribunal trials which had condemned the major war criminals. Among the reasons for this four deserve special mention. The first undoubtedly has much to do with the fact that the trials were so near in time to the events of the war. Secondly, producing a constraining effect on historiography was also the fact that the regime in power after 1948, strove to legitimize its rule through controlling the writing of history. In its view, the more evils were said about the political regime of the previous quarter of a century, the more "convincing" became the arguments for the "advantages" of the new system. The third reason is connected with the international obligation imposed on Hungary of treating the question of Trianon as taboo. Finally, the fourth was the fact that the source-materials made available for use by historians was fragmented and/or tendentiously selected.

Today, half-a-century after the events, we have a historical perspective that is adequate for judging the events of the Second World War. Politics, of course, has its particular viewpoints even today, though often with an opposite tendency, which historians are expected to take into consideration. However, a historian who can ward off the fluctuations of everyday political life and does not aim at benefiting from day-to-day changes in public opinion, can easily and safely resist these pressures. True, the present-day Hungarian historiography is still in debt for clarifying problems related to the so-called Trianon-complex, but there are no longer obstacles in the way of a consistent work on this topic. In fact, sometimes care must be taken lest the aspects of the Trianon-issue should obscure other important factors. It was with this in mind that the material of the Bárdossy trial was published to help to clarify some of these problems.

In connection with the conduct of the Bárdossy-trial, it seems sufficient to establish that its verdict was not predetermined, even though the probability of passing a very severe sentence had been very high right from the beginning.

Bárdossy's wartime actions provided more than enough material for his just condemnation without any special preconception.

Somewhat different is the situation with the actual sentence passed by the court: first he had been sentenced to death by hanging, which was approved by the National Council of People's Tribunals, and it was only on the day of the execution that the Supreme National Council changed the sentence into death by firing squad. The utter severity of the sentence gave rise to many disputes at the time, which would be even more justifiable today. What makes the severity of the sentence even more disputable is an international comparative investigation of the post-war legal retaliations, from the findings of which it appears that, for example in Austria — where a not insignificant portion of the population participated in the Nazi oppression and persecution — not more than 32 persons were executed for similar war crimes, while the corresponding figure for Hungary was 189.<sup>32</sup>

At the same time the conduct of the trial was not perfect in several respects. This is suggested by the fact that the editor of the material of the trial had to add a good number of explanatory notes, had to rectify errors, correct false interpretations, and revise careless citations and references. Not infrequently the editor had to rectify strongly biased, in fact, ill-willed misrepresentations or to call the reader's attention to the presiding judge's unacceptable practice of sometimes referring to provisions of acts as source of law which had long been repealed, etc.

Nevertheless, the People's Tribunal essentially did not violate the usual norms of jurisdiction. This is proved by the fact that neither Bárdossy, nor his defence counsel appealed to the principle of "*nullum crimen sine lege*" (there is no crime without law), in other words, a lawful sentence may only be passed on a deed which had been already banned, or had been designated as a crime, at the time it was actually committed. Bárdossy, however, never admitted the competence of the People's Tribunal as a court, and his defence counsel at the trial of second instance went as far as submitting a claim of mistrial against the trial of first instance on the grounds that the presiding judge, Ákos Major had not the proper legal qualifications either as judge or as a lawyer, but the defence counsel did not bring up the principle of "*nullum crimen sine lege*" against the whole procedure. This obviously came from the logic which Bárdossy so consistently followed in connection with his acts. It was the principle of "*rebus sic stantibus*," i.e. one must interpret, define and face things as they are under the given circumstances. It was with reference to this principle that Bárdossy tended to justify his breaking the eternal friendship pact with Yugoslavia in 1941, as well as his right to occupy the South-Hungarian region. Bárdossy was also aware that law used to cope with the changing situations, adjusting itself to the new circumstances, and that obligations undertaken under international contracts would necessarily make their effect felt in the internal legal system as well. In the shadows of death — leaving behind the cynical traits of his attitude he had assumed in his life, he also came to recognize and feel the seriousness of

sufferings caused by World War II — Bárdossy worded his feelings thus: "I admit that all the emotions and bitterness that had justifiably accumulated should be vented. It should be made possible that the soul could feel some relief only in order that the soul recovering from its sufferings might find its way back to national unity. No sacrifice will be great enough to achieve this end." True, he still added that the making of such sacrifices had "nothing to do with jurisdiction,"<sup>33</sup> yet the basic idea underlying his statement was the recognition of the justness of emotions and bitterness.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Reconstructing the atmosphere of the trial and its political context is the important work of Ákos Major: *Népbíráskodás, forradalmi törvényesség. Egy népbíró visszaemlékezései* [People's jurisdiction, revolutionary legality: Recollections of a people's judge] Edited and prefaced by Tibor Zinner (Budapest, 1988).

<sup>2</sup>Dénes Halmossy: *Nemzetközi szerződések 1918-1945* [International pacts and contracts 1918-1945] Second revised and enlarged ed. (Budapest, 1983), p. 505.

<sup>3</sup>It should be mentioned here that in his memoirs, Vince Nagy — who had been a leading personality in the bourgeois democratic revolution of 1918 and subsequently was one of the defence counsels to Mihály Károlyi in the lawsuit against him, then one of the political prosecutors in the Szálasi-trial in 1946 — claims that István Riesz, the then minister of justice, invited him to choose from among the chief war-criminals those he wished to prosecute in the capacity of state prosecutor. In his reply Nagy declared that his only choice was Ferenc Szálasi, because "in my opinion Bárdossy and Imrédy were constitutionally appointed prime ministers, and so — by virtue of the 1848 acts — they may be called to account for the crimes they committed in this capacity only by a parliamentary court of justice. I most definitely find them guilty of crimes committed on several counts against our country and people. I would be willing to act as prosecutor against them before a parliamentary judiciary. But led by my sense of constitutional justice, I should not accept it before a normal criminal court. On this account, I choose Szálasi who came to power in a non-constitutional way." Vince Nagy, *Októbertől októberig* [October to October] (Budapest, 1991), p. 335.

<sup>4</sup>Expressions used in the sentence of the court of first instance.

<sup>5</sup>Major, *op. cit.*, pp. 119, 203, 213-215. Under the Trianon Peace Treaty of 1920, Sub-Carpathia (along with Northern Hungary) was annexed to the newly formed Czechoslovakia; South-Hungary (including such regions as Bácska and part of the Bánát) was attached to form part of Yugoslavia (more particularly to Serbia). Croatia, which had formally also belonged to the Hungarian Kingdom, was also detached to become part of Yugoslavia. Transylvania and other parts of East-Hungary, together with the remaining parts of the Bánát, were annexed to Romania. Throughout the text the term "historical Hungary" refers to the pre-Trianon state of the territory of Hungary.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.* pp. 218, 221-223.

<sup>7</sup>*Ítélt a történelem. A Bárdossy-per. 1. A vád. 2. A tárgyalás és ítélet. A Magyar Országos Tudósító és a Magyar Távirati Iroda hivatalos kiadásából szerkeszti Ábrahám Ferenc és Kussinszky Endre* [History judges. The Bárdossy Trial. 1. The accusation. 2.

Proceedings and sentence. Edited from the official publications of the Hungarian National Reporter and the Hungarian Telegraphic Agency by Ferenc Ábrahám and Endre Kussinszky] (Budapest, 1945).

<sup>8</sup>László Bárdossy, *A nemzet védelmében. Utolsó beszédei az ún. népbíróság előtt* [In defence of the nation. His last pleas before the so-called people's tribunals] (Fahrgewagen, 1976). It should be noted here that relying on the above cited Swiss publication, the second issue (of November-December 1988) of *Hunnia Füzetek* (Hunnia Booklets) also printed — in somewhat abridged form — Bárdossy's last plea before the court of first instance.

<sup>9</sup>Bárdossy, *op. cit.*

<sup>10</sup>I.e. the Horthy-era, especially its first period; counter-revolutionary in the sense that it opposed — and repudiated — the previous bourgeois democratic and communist revolutions of 1918-1919; it was also characterized by a strong nationalist-revisionist attitude, in which a constant demand for the revision of the territorial decisions of the Trianon Peace Treaty was also implied.

<sup>11</sup>Hungarian National Archives. Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Political papers. (Hereafter HNA K 63). Also, Domokos Szent-Iványi, *Csonka Magyarország külpolitikája 1919 júniusától 1944. március 19-ig* [The foreign policy of post-Trianon Hungary from June 1919 to March 1944], p. 559.

<sup>12</sup>"Bárdossy László bemutatkozó programbeszéde a képviselőházban 1941. IV. 14-én" [László Bárdossy's policy speech in the House of Representatives on April 14 1941] In *Napló*, Vol. X, (1939), pp. 3-8 (The 1939 session of the Parliament formally lasted several years.)

<sup>13</sup>In his major synthesis, Rudolf L. Braham pointed out that the Hungarian administration decided on the "repatriation" of "stateless" Jews in June 1941. In July, 30 to 35 thousand persons were arrested, of whom 18 thousand were actually deported. The Germans were not prepared for such a glut of Jews from Hungary, and asked the Hungarian administration to stop further deportation, stating that "they do not know what to do with them", "they endanger our communication lines". Out of those who had been deported to the neighbourhood of Kamenyev-Podolsk (in the Ukraine), some 16 thousand were killed, and two thousand managed to escape. Minister of the Interior Ferenc Keresztes-Fischer was informed of the massacre by one of them — the Hungarian administration may rightly be supposed to have not been aware that the deportation of Jews would mean their slaughter — and he stopped deportations. Cf. *A magyar holocaust* [The Hungarian holocaust] (Budapest, 1988), Vol. 1. pp. 168-174.

<sup>14</sup>After the first Vienna Award, on November 6, 1938, the day of Horthy's marching into the Slovak part of the city of Komárom (Komarno), the poet Mihály Babits published a poem entitled "Áldás a magyarra" (Blessing on the Hungarians) in the newspaper *Pesti Napló*. The first strophe of which reads:

"Ne mondjátok, hogy a haza nagyobbodik,  
A haza, a haza egyenlő volt mindig,  
Ezer év óta már, és mindig az marad,  
Mert nem darabokból összetákolta darab:  
Egy test a mi hazánk, eleven valami!  
Nem lehet azt csak úgy vagdalni, toldani."

For lack of an artistic English translation, this strophe can be rendered into prose thus:

"Do not say that the fatherland is expanding,  
The fatherland, the fatherland has always been the same

Since a thousand of years, and will ever remain so,  
Because it is not a piece composed of pieces itself;  
Our fatherland is one body, something alive!

It cannot be simply dissected and then pieced together again."

László Láng was so kind as to call my attention to this poem, for which I express my best thanks herewith. (P.P.)

<sup>15</sup>Péter Gosztonyi, *Magyarország a második világháborúban. Tanulmányok és riportok Magyarország második világháborús szerepéről* [Hungary in World War II. Studies and reports on Hungary's role in World War II], Vol. I. (Munich, 1986), p. 33.

<sup>16</sup>Gyula Juhász, *Magyarország külpolitikája 1919-1945* [The foreign policy of Hungary 1919-1945] Third revised ed. (Budapest, 1988), p. 156. See also the selected paper of this author: *A háború és Magyarország, 1938-1945* [The war and Hungary] (Budapest, 1986).

<sup>17</sup>The air-raid on Kassa (now Košice in Slovakia) has been a topic widely dealt with in the literature. Both in Hungarian historiography and in the public media, the main train of thought has been represented over the past decades by the conception that the air-raid had been concocted jointly by the German and Hungarian general staffs in a conspirative manner. This conception must have been strongly motivated by certain actual political considerations, as it is also beyond doubt that at the time, right after the event had taken place, without any thorough examination of the circumstances of the air-raid, views with quite the opposite actual political aims were formed and began spreading widely, according to which the Soviets had executed the raid. The connection between the Bárdossy-trial and the historico-political consciousness of later times is very palpable in this case too. The People's Tribunal, on the one hand, abstained from interrogating Ádám Krúdy, on whose role as an "enlightening" informer of Bárdossy — which role virtually never existed — so great an emphasis was placed later. On the other hand, the Tribunal also failed to apply to the Allied Powers for the extradition of Béla Csekme whose incidental examination at the trial would have ruined the German version for the simple reason that the planes of the Hungarian air-force might also have participated in the air-raid. These procedural defects of the trial were dealt with in a self-critical manner by Major, *op. cit.*, pp. 243-245. A staff-officer of the Hungarian engineering corps, Captain Julián Borsányi summarized the findings of his historical investigations in Hungarian language in *A magyar tragédia nyitánya. Az 1941. június 26-i bombatámadás dokumentációja* [Overture to the Hungarian tragedy. A documentation of the bombing raid of June 26 1941] (Munich, 1985). A conference arranged on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of Hungary's entry into war against the Soviet Union at the Institute and Museum of War History as well as issue 2 of 1991 of the war historical journal *Hadtörténeti Közlemények* also treated this problem. But — as has been also correctly established by Julián Borsányi in his work cited below — the very essence of all this certainly lies in the mere fact that Hungarian historical research still has to go a long way to achieve a satisfying result. Cf. Julián Borsányi, "Háborúba sodródásunk fehér foltjai. Személyes észrevételek a kassai bombatámadásról" [Blank spots of the history of our engagement in the war. Some personal comments on the bombing raid on Kassa] *Hadtörténeti Közlemények*, No. 2, 1991. pp. 88-113. **Editor's note:** for English-language treatments of the subject see the following papers by N.F. Dreisziger: "New Twist to an Old Riddle: The Bombing of Kassa (Košice), June 26, 1941," *Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 44, No. 2, (June 1972), pp. 232-42; "Contradictory Evidence Concerning Hungary's Declaration of War on the USSR in June, 1941,"

*Canadian Slavonic Papers*, Vol. 19, No. 4 (Dec. 1977), pp. 480-88; and, "The Kassa Bombing: The Riddle of Ádám Krúdy," in Dreisziger, ed. *Hungary and the Second World War* (Toronto: *Hungarian Studies Review*, 1983), pp. 79-98. These studies suggest that Ádám Krúdy was lying (possibly for patriotic reasons), and that the air-raid might have been carried out by the Soviets after all, but was meant to hit a Slovak target, in retaliation for the Slovak declaration of war on the U.S.S.R. the day before.

<sup>18</sup>Endre Bajcsy-Zsilinszky Fond 28/206, in the Széchényi National Library, Department of Manuscripts. The letter was published by Loránt Tilkovszky: *Bajcsy-Zsilinszky Endre. Írások tőle és róla* [Endre Bajcsy-Zsilinszky. Writings by and about him] (Budapest, 1986), pp. 153-160.

<sup>19</sup>Bárdossy, *op. cit.*, p. 201.

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. II, notes 9, 10, 53 and 209; see also Sándor Szakály: "'... Magyarország és a Szovjetunió között a hadiállapot beállott:' Egy döntés politikai hátteréről" ["...The state of war between Hungary and the Soviet Union has set in," On the political background of a decision], *Hadtörténeti Közlemények*, 1991, No. 2.

<sup>21</sup>Gosztonyi, *op. cit.*, vol. I, p. 23.

<sup>22</sup>*Magyarország és a második világháború. Titkos diplomáciai okmányok a háború előzményeihez és történetéhez* [Hungary and World War II. Secret diplomatic documents to the antecedents and history of World War II] Documents selected and introductory studies written by Magda Ádám, Gyula Juhász, Lajos Kerekes (Budapest, 1959), Supplement 2 to No. 152.

<sup>23</sup>A palace serving in the discussed period as the office and residence of the head of government in power.

<sup>24</sup>For the life and mentality of László Bárdossy, see the documentation in the "Szent-Iványi manuscript," pp. 558-564. HNA K 63.

<sup>25</sup>In 1526 the advancing Turkish army, led by Suleiman the Magnificent, inflicted a decisive defeat on the allied Hungarian forces at the battlefield of Mohács. In fact, this defeat led to the 150-year Turkish occupation of part of Hungary.

<sup>26</sup>Fráter György (Brother George; originally George Martinuzzi, a Paulinite monk, his name is written in its widely accepted Hungarian form) (1482-1551), Hungarian statesman, later cardinal; his policy — aimed at ousting the Turks, in alliance with Habsburg forces, and reuniting Hungary under the Habsburgs — met with failure. Having started negotiations with Turkish leaders, he was unjustly suspected of treason by the Austrian imperial military leader Castaldo who then had him killed.

<sup>27</sup>László Bárdossy's work (1943) cited formerly in the text, p. 334.

<sup>28</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 336-337.

<sup>30</sup>Tilkovszky, p. 203.

<sup>31</sup>Elek Karsai, *Ítélt a nép* [The people judge] (Budapest, 1977), p. 60.

<sup>32</sup>Interjú Gosztonyi Péterrel (An interview with Péter Gosztonyi), *168 óra* [168 hours], July 4, 1989, issue.

<sup>33</sup>Bárdossy, *op. cit.*, pp. 237-238.



Document

**A Dove? A Hawk? Perhaps a Sparrow:  
Bárdossy Defends his Wartime Record before  
the Americans, July 1945**

Introduced and edited by

**N.F. Dreisziger**

When the 56-year-old former Royal Hungarian Prime Minister László Bárdossy was transferred from Switzerland to the American-occupied zone of Germany in the spring of 1945, his chances of being brought before a special court of justice or war-crimes tribunal increased exponentially.<sup>1</sup> For the time being, he was detained in a camp near the city of Augsburg, probably very near the site of the battle where, a millennium earlier, an international army under the command of Holy Roman Emperor Otto I dealt a crushing blow to a Hungarian force that had been allied with Otto's German enemies. Now, after an even larger-scale defeat inflicted on German and Hungarian forces, another Magyar leader awaited the judgement of the victors. He must have had in mind the terrible retribution that had been inflicted in the summer of 955 on the commanders of the defeated Magyar army.<sup>2</sup> But 1945 was not 955, and taking vengeance was not instant, especially not in the lands occupied by the Western Allies. Before the victors would mete out justice to the vanquished, much preparation had to be done. The preliminaries of these preparations would involve the interrogation of prospective subjects of judicial prosecutions. Bárdossy himself was interrogated by personnel of the German Intelligence Section of the 7th American Army. A transcript of this interrogation survived and can be found in the records of the Office of Strategic Services (OSS). It is published here for the first time.

The text containing Bárdossy's interrogation, like the transcripts of the interrogation of numerous other prominent Axis personalities who had fallen into American hands, is not a source that throws much new light on the events of the Second World War. The officers conducting the questioning rarely knew much about the background and activities of the person they interrogated, and the little they knew tended to be derived from sources that were highly prejudiced against anybody associated with the Axis. Furthermore, the persons interrogated were

apparently not in a position to prepare for their questioning; they were probably not allowed to bring notes with them, and they were certainly not in possession of the records which could have refreshed their memories of events. These circumstances notwithstanding, the transcripts of these interrogations are useful in that they reveal much about the frames of mind that those questioned experienced at the end of the war. This fact is no doubt true of the transcript of Bárdossy's interrogation.

Though it is not obvious from the document — the matter is mentioned explicitly only in the concluding section — what was in the back of the former Hungarian Prime Minister's mind throughout the interrogation was the probability that he would soon face judicial prosecution before some kind of a war-crimes tribunal, though he must have hoped that this would be an international one and not one in Hungary or in another East European country.<sup>3</sup> For this reason the answers Bárdossy gave to his interrogators' questions were phrased especially to demonstrate his innocence in the decisions his government had made while he had been in office, decisions that his captors and prospective judges could view as having contributed to the slaughter and human suffering that was experienced during the war. According to the testimony Bárdossy gave to his American interrogators in July of 1945, he had shouldered only limited responsibility for his nation's involvement in the war.

Bárdossy employed a series of arguments to prove his minimal responsibility for Hungary's becoming a belligerent on Germany's side. First of all, he stressed that, during his "*short*" term in office "(eleven months)" "every decision of the government over which I presided ha[d] been [taken]... with the consent of the Regent and with the explicit or tacit approval of the Parliament." These decisions, according to the former Prime Minister, were dictated "only by the interests of our... nation." According to Bárdossy, two of the principal aims of his government in 1941 had been to "keep the unity of our nation" and to "fulfil our national obligation toward our Hungarian brethren [in] the territories severed from Hungary in 1919."

To keep the "unity" of the Magyar nation, in Bárdossy's view, was to act in accordance with Hungarian public opinion; and public opinion in Hungary obliged Bárdossy to embark on the very steps that four years later brought against him accusations of being a war criminal. "Public opinion," he argued, demanded that Hungarian troops enter the Magyar-populated regions of Yugoslavia, once that state had collapsed under the German *Wehrmacht's* onslaught. The Hungarian nation would not have tolerated the occupation of Vojvodina by German troops, and its transformation into a German *Gau* under a Nazi *Gauleiter*. Public opinion, that is, anti-communist sentiments, were also instrumental in Hungary's involvement in the war against the U.S.S.R. To go against national consensus, according to Bárdossy, would have destroyed the political unity of the country and would have exposed it to foreign (i.e. German) influence and interference to a degree even greater than had been the case under his leadership.

The most important consideration in Bárdossy's decisions, as he explained to his American interrogators, had been the "national obligation" his country had to the Hungarians beyond the borders of truncated Hungary. As has been mentioned, that particular motive played a vital part in the April, 1941, move to send troops into Hungary's one-time southern provinces, as it had been the motivating force behind many of the actions of Bárdossy's predecessors from the fall of 1938 to the spring of 1941.

These were Bárdossy's main arguments in 1945 in defence of his record, aside from his somewhat confusing statements as to when and why Hungary followed the German example in declaring war on the United States after the onset of a state of war between the U.S. and Japan. Since in July of 1945 Bárdossy was not in possession of his private papers or of the relevant government records, and had no access to legal or other pertinent advice, he could not make an effective defence of his actions of four years earlier. In fact, an examination of the evidence enables historians to say more in defence of his leadership. As Dr. Pál Pritz has pointed out in this volume, Bárdossy cannot be exonerated for some of his over-hasty and ill-advised decisions he had made while he had been in office, it is nevertheless true that he was not the "hawk" that he has been made out to be in the nearly fifty years after his death, and that his vilification as a war-criminal is quite unwarranted.

The most onerous charge that was levelled against Bárdossy after the war by his detractors has been that he was the Hungarian leader most responsible for engineering his country's involvement in war against four countries, including three great powers. These four nations were (in chronological order) Yugoslavia, the U.S.S.R., Great Britain, and the United States. Viewed from a historical perspective of half-a-century, and in light of the documentary evidence, it is obvious that these charges have to be qualified and, in one instance at least, should be dismissed altogether.

\* \* \*

The Hungarian decision regarding involvement in the occupation of the Magyar-populated regions of Yugoslavia had been actually taken before Bárdossy became Prime Minister. It should be recalled that it was that decision, enthusiastically endorsed by Regent Miklós Horthy himself, that caused enough grief to Prime Minister Pál Teleki to prompt him to take his own life. Bárdossy might have agreed with Horthy and, as he would argue in 1945, with the rest of the country's population, but he only implemented a policy that he had inherited from the crisis that pre-dated his appointment. This circumstance does not absolve him entirely from shouldering responsibility for Hungary's actions at the time, but it places the issue of his guilt into different light.

The circumstances of Bárdossy's responsibility for the involvement of Hungary in the war against Soviet Russia are different. On the one hand, in this

case he had been at the helm of the government for some three months and, therefore, he cannot distance himself from the decision on grounds of its timing. On the other hand, however, Bárdossy's guilt in this matter is not straightforward for another reason. The reason for this is the fact that the record of his actions prior to the German invasion of the U.S.S.R. suggests that he was not in favour of Hungarian participation in that war, and opposed those among Hungary's elite who thought otherwise.

Hungarian participation in the invasion of Soviet Russia had not been counted on by the Nazi leadership. Unlike in April of 1941, when Yugoslavia was invaded, the Germans did not need Hungary as a staging-ground for their deployment against their intended target. Furthermore, in June of 1941 Hitler considered the Hungarians a risk to the security of *Operation Barbarossa* and refused to inform them of his plans until the last minute. In Budapest, however, no one of importance seems to have doubted the probability of war between the *Reich* and the Soviet Union. There was, however, no agreement among Hungary's political and military circles regarding the question what role Hungary should play in the expected conflict.<sup>4</sup>

The division of views on the question of cooperation with the Third *Reich* was not new. Ever since the start of Hitler's program of expansion in eastern Europe there had been men within the Hungarian leadership who had opposed the idea of military collaboration with the Nazis. However, with Pál Teleki dead and the cautious elder-statesman István Bethlen's leverage in the country's government reduced, the influence of this group had reached its nadir by the summer of 1941. At the same time, the position of their opponents had been strengthened as a result of the Germans' great victories during 1940. The accession of Rumania to the Axis camp the same year also had an impact: Hungary now had an influential competitor for Hitler's graces. The leaders in Budapest had four times succeeded in revising the territorial provisions of the Treaty of Trianon in their country's favour in less than four years, each time with German support or acquiescence. By 1941, however, it became evident that, unless Hungary outperformed Romania in the race for the *Führer's* good will, the spoils might go to the Rumanians in the future.<sup>5</sup>

Despite the existence of these complicating factors, there is no evidence that Prime Minister Bárdossy sought his country's participation in the planned German attack on Soviet Russia. A different outlook prevailed, however, among some members of the Hungarian military. The chief spokesman for Hungary's pro-German officer corps was General Henrik Werth, the Chief of the General Staff. During the late spring of 1941 Werth made repeated attempts to convert Bárdossy to the idea of voluntary participation in the expected German invasion of the Soviet Union. Werth's demands for a Hungarian-German military alliance, however, were firmly rejected, and the government continued to maintain its stand for a while even after the start of the German invasion of Russia on June 22nd.<sup>6</sup> But soon enormous pressure was exerted on Bárdossy's government to change its course. Pro-Nazi and stridently anti-Soviet elements within the

country demanded a show of solidarity with Hitler's "crusade" against communism and a warning came from Rome that Hungary's inaction might have harmful consequences. Slovakia had also joined the war against the U.S.S.R., leaving Hungary as the only central European state not to have done so. More important still was a message received from Germany through unofficial channels to the effect that if Hungary wanted to participate in the campaign against Russia, she would have to join immediately and voluntarily.<sup>7</sup> The message was delivered in "emphatic" language by General Kurt Himer, the German High Command's representative in Hungary, to General Werth who passed it on to Bárdossy. Evidently disturbed by developments, in the afternoon of the 24th Bárdossy summoned Otto von Erdmannsdorff, the German Minister to Hungary, for an interview and told him that the matter of Hungary's participation was up to the country's civilian government to decide. If Germany desired Hungary's assistance she would have to request it through the regular diplomatic channels.<sup>8</sup>

The Hungarian Prime Minister's response to the German demand deserves attention. There may be those who would dismiss it as posturing, or even an attempt to extract concessions from Germany in return for Hungarian participation. But it is doubtful if Bárdossy could really expect the *Führer* practically to beg for Hungary's assistance, especially when all of Germany's other friends had offered their help voluntarily. Bárdossy's motives were probably different. In telling the Germans that Hungary's government would consider the question of participation in the war if Germany had asked for this officially, the Prime Minister probably wanted to avoid his country's involvement in the war without having to admit openly that Hungary did not want to participate. Three times during the past three years Hitler had moved or was about to move against one of Hungary's neighbours, and three times the Hungarian leaders proved most reluctant — on two occasions they had in fact told Hitler in advance that they would not join him in a war (at the time of Hitler's planned attack on Czechoslovakia in the late summer of 1938, and in the summer of the following year, before the invasion of Poland). Taking Hitler's temper and power into consideration, Bárdossy could not tell the Germans for a fourth time that Hungary wished to stay out of the conflict, but he hoped to accomplish this through requesting what the Germans had promised not to do: ask for Hungarian help formally.<sup>9</sup>

Bárdossy continued to stand by his policy of non-involvement only for another day. The event that prompted him to abandon his original stance took place on the 26th, and it was the air-raids on Kassa (today's Košice, in Slovakia) and other places in northeastern Hungary. It was this development that unnerved him. There is no need to re-tell the story of these raids in detail, as they have been the subject of a great many studies.<sup>10</sup> Compared with the attack on Kassa, the attacks on targets in Sub-Carpathia left little or no damage. Near the town of Rahó (Rakhov) trains were attacked. Some sources refer to action against the city of Munkács (Munkachevo), although what, if anything, was bombed there no one seems to know. More familiar is the story of the attack on Kassa where,

a few minutes after one o'clock in the afternoon, unidentified aircraft approached the town, dropped their bombs, and departed. Several buildings were destroyed or damaged in the bombing, including the local post- and telegraph office. It should be added that, contrary to certain historical accounts of the event, the Hungarian Air Force did not have a base at Kassa. There was only a small airfield, used by the training craft of the Miklós Horthy Air Force Academy. None of these planes was in a position to give chase to the attackers.

The consequences of the attack are better known. After an on-the-spot investigation, the local military authorities concluded that the attackers had been Russian and reported the news to Budapest accordingly. In the capital, reaction was one of indignation. On hearing the news, Horthy is reported to have become so agitated that he gave orders for immediate reprisals. Bárdossy reacted differently. He could not believe that the intruders were Russians. He saw the whole affair as a plot to force his hand and to involve Hungary in the conflict. And if the advocates of war resorted to such underhanded and ruthless means to achieve their ends, resistance was useless. It was in this mood that Bárdossy convened his cabinet. Given the circumstances and the moods of the participants, the outcome of their deliberations was predictable. That same day the cabinet passed a resolution calling for the declaration of the existence of a state of war between Hungary and the USSR. Thus, within several hours after the Kassa raid, Hungary was plunged into war.<sup>11</sup>

\* \* \*

The accusation that Bárdossy had been also responsible for the onset, in December of 1941, of a state of war between Hungary and the United Kingdom is even less valid than the charge that he had "deliberately" involved his country in the German war against Soviet Russia. Yet it has been repeated numerous times, and in some cases his government has been squarely accused of issuing the Hungarian declaration of war on Great Britain.<sup>12</sup> In reality, however, it was not the Hungarian government that had declared war first, but the government of Great Britain. The roots of this development go back to the summer of 1941.

The German invasion of the U.S.S.R. had ended the Berlin-Moscow alliance and created a military alignment between London and the Kremlin. Not surprisingly, a few weeks after the German attack, the British and Soviet governments began discussions concerning the conduct of the now common war effort against the Axis powers. In early September the question of what to do with Finland — whose armies were now fighting alongside the *Wehrmacht* and threatened the security of Leningrad — came up in an interview Sir Stafford Cripps, the British Ambassador in Moscow, had with Soviet leader Joseph Stalin. During the discussion it became evident that Stalin wanted Britain to declare war on Finland. This request was formally presented to the Foreign Office in mid-October by Soviet Foreign Minister Vyacheslav Molotov. Four days later,

Ivan Maisky, the Soviet Ambassador in London, pressed the British Foreign Office "very urgently for a favourable reply." The British leaders had two reservations about complying with the Soviet request. They believed that united action by the members of the British Commonwealth was necessary in the matter, and they were worried that a British declaration of war on Finland would displease the American public which was thought to be quite sympathetic to the Finns.<sup>13</sup>

The idea of declaring war on Finland was also unpopular in Canada, in particular with the country's Prime Minister, William Lyon Mackenzie King. At a meeting of the Canadian Cabinet War Committee in Ottawa on the 29th of October King predicted that there would be "popular reluctance" in both Canada and the United States to accept further declarations of war, especially when urged by the Soviets. According to King, there were additional reasons for rejecting Stalin's demands. One of these had to do with the fact that many Finns were employed in essential industries in Canada, a situation which could be "adversely affected by a declaration of war." Taking all this into consideration, the War Committee agreed that British Government should be told that for the time being the Canadian government was not prepared to comply with the Soviet demand.<sup>14</sup>

In view of the doubts that existed both in London and Ottawa concerning the wisdom of declaring war on Finland, and the apparent impossibility of achieving Commonwealth unity in the matter even if the U.K. government was ready to agree, Downing Street refused Stalin's request. But the Soviet leader persisted and went even further, insisting that the British, as well as the other members of the British Commonwealth — and even the United States! — declare war on Finland, as well as on Hungary and Rumania. Finally, at the end of November the U.K. leadership decided to give in to the requests of their Russian ally. The governments of the Commonwealth countries were urged to act in unison and, after some discussion and a brief delay, they agreed. Thereafter the British Foreign Office issued ultimatums to the governments of Finland, Hungary and Rumania, demanding that they end their military operations against the U.S.S.R.; and as these demands were not complied with, the U.K. government decided to go ahead with the planned declarations of war.<sup>15</sup> In the morning of the 7th of December, the members of the British Commonwealth declared war on Finland, Hungary and Rumania. In the evening of that day came the news that the forces of Imperial Japan had attacked Pearl Harbor, causing the outbreak of war between the United States and Japan.

Bárdossy played no role in these decisions, other than the fact that his administration did not comply with the British ultimatum, but it was hardly in position to do so. Somewhat different was the next and last declaration of war that the Hungarian Prime Minister is accused of. This followed the onset of war between the U.S. and Japan, and the decision by Hitler to demonstrate the Third *Reich's* solidarity with its ally by declaring war on the United States. On this occasion, the Germans treated the Hungarians differently from the way they had

dealt with them in June of 1941. At that time, it might be recalled, no official demands were issued to Budapest to join the war against the Soviet Union. Now, five months later, the Germans squarely told Bárdossy that paragraph 3 of the Berlin-Rome-Tokyo Tripartite Pact, to which Hungary had also acceded, required a Hungarian declaration of war against the United States.<sup>16</sup> There was not much Bárdossy could do to argue in face of such an explicit demand, and he did not get into any arguments. In the wake of the British declaration of war on Hungary, Bárdossy probably felt that whether his country was at peace or at war with the United States, mattered little under the circumstances.

\* \* \*

Bárdossy was at the helm of the Hungarian government in a fateful period. During this time Hungary drifted into the war even though that was not the wish, and certainly not the aim, of her Prime Minister. Bárdossy might have been a quick-witted and knowledgeable person, but no amount of astuteness and verbal ability could help him to stir the ship of his nation in exactly the direction he desired in the stormy times that he was in office. He was the agile sparrow among hawks and doves, but his gifts were not enough to handle the grave hurdles fate threw at him and his nation during his time in office. Certainly, he was not a dove of peace, but men of such persuasion could not have risen to the head of the Hungary's government under the internal and international circumstances of the times. His American interrogators concluded that he was a "sparrow... perhaps a hawk." And a hawk he was found to be by his nation that after the war began looking for explanations for the tragedy that befell it, and ended up singling out scapegoats for that tragedy.

From near Augsburg, Bárdossy was taken to Salzburg in Austria where the Americans collected the Hungarians who were to be returned to Hungary to face charges.<sup>17</sup> He was put on the very first plane that took these men back to Budapest, and — as Dr. Pritz has outlined in his paper in this volume — he was the first to be condemned to death by the special People's Tribunal established to try Hungary's "war criminals." The sparrow became a victim of the whirlwind that the hawks of war had unleashed on the world two generations ago.<sup>18</sup>

## NOTES

The author is indebted to various agencies that have helped to defray his research expenses in recent years. These include the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, and the ARP program of the Department of National Defence of Canada.

<sup>1</sup>Pál Pritz, "Bárdossy László," in *Magyar diplomácia a két háború között* [Hungarian diplomacy between the two wars] (Budapest, 1995), p. 121.



<sup>2</sup>In the Battle of Lechfeld, a Magyar force of nomadic horsemen, which was allied with Emperor Otto's enemies, was crushed by an army of armoured knights commanded by Otto. At the time the Hungarians were much feared and hated — previously they had often plundered much of Europe — and now no mercy was shown to them. Legend has it that only a handful of them were let go to spread the news of the slaughter, while the corpses of their leaders were hanged high over the cathedral in Augsburg.

<sup>3</sup>After the war, the Yugoslav regime of Marshall Tito was actively demanding the "bringing to justice" of all Hungarians who had been in leading positions at the time of the Axis invasion of Yugoslavia in April of 1941.

<sup>4</sup>N.F. Dreisziger: "New Twist to an Old Riddle: The Bombing of Kassa (Košice), June 26, 1941," *Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 44, No. 2, (June 1972), pp. 233; see also my "Contradictory Evidence Concerning Hungary's Declaration of War on the USSR in June, 1941," *Canadian Slavonic Papers*, Vol. 19, No. 4 (Dec. 1977), pp. 480-88.

<sup>5</sup>Dreisziger, "New Twist...", pp. 233f.

<sup>6</sup>C.A. Macartney, *October 15th: A History of Modern Hungary, 1929-1944*, Vol. 2 (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1957), chapter 2. This work was published in the U.S. as *A History of Hungary, 1929-1944* (New York: Praeger, 1957). Also, N.F. Dreisziger, "The Kassa Bombing: The Riddle of Ádám Krúdy," in *Hungary and the Second World War*, Dreisziger, ed. (Toronto: *Hungarian Studies Review*, 1983), p. 81.

<sup>7</sup>*Documents of German Foreign Policy*, vol. 13, document no. 54. Also: Dreisziger, "The Kassa..." p. 81.

<sup>8</sup>A transcript of Bárdossy's discussion with Ambassador Erdmannsdorff can be found in Gyula Juhász (ed.), *Magyarország külpolitikája a nyugati hadjárattól a Szovjetunió megtámadásáig, 1940-1941* [Hungary's foreign policy from the time of the Western Campaign to the invasion of the Soviet Union], vol. V of the series: *Diplomáciai iratok Magyarország külpolitikájához, 1936-1945* [Diplomatic documents on Hungary's foreign policy, 1936-1945] (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1982), doc. no. 872.

<sup>9</sup>Dreisziger, "New Twist...", p. 235.

<sup>10</sup>The literature of this subject is discussed in Dr. Pritz's paper in this volume, note 17. For my writings see the papers "New Twist...", and "The Kassa...", cited above. Still another twist to the story is offered by Thomas Sakmyster, "The Search for a Causus Belli and the Origins of the Kassa Bombing," in *Hungary and the Second World War*, *op. cit.*, pp. 53-65.

<sup>11</sup>Dreisziger, "The Kassa...", p. 82. See also, C.A. Macartney, "Hungary's Declaration of War on the U.S.S.R. in 1941," in *Studies in Diplomatic History and Historiography*, ed. A.O. Sarkissian (London, 1961), p. 165.

<sup>12</sup>The accusation is repeated in a recent English-language history of Hungary. See Loránd Tilkovszky, "The Late Interwar Years and World War II," in Peter F. Sugar *et al.* (eds.), *A History of Hungary* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990), p. 347.

<sup>13</sup>Cipher telegram, the United Kingdom's Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs to the Canadian Prime Minister [Mackenzie King], 27 October 1941, copy in the Records of the Canadian Department of External Affairs, RG 25, file 2859-40c vol. 2930, in the National Archives of Canada (hereafter NAC). In his correspondence with U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt about the same subject, Stalin hinted that he was ready to make some territorial concessions to the Finns should they abandon their

German allies. Vojtech Mastny, *Russia's Road to the Cold War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979), pp. 50f.

<sup>14</sup>Minutes of the meeting of Canada's Cabinet War Committee, 29 October 1941, copy in the W.L.M. King Papers, J4 series, vol. 424. NAC. Also, King' diary entries for Oct. 29 and 30, *The King Diaries*, NAC.

<sup>15</sup>The minutes of the meeting of Canada's Cabinet War Committee, 27 November 1941, copy in the King Papers, J4 series, vol. 424. Also, Minutes of the meeting of 1 December 1941, in the same volume of the King Papers. See also King's diary entries for these days. Privately King admitted that Canada had no quarrel "whatever" with the countries in question. Yet he felt strongly that solidarity with Britain had to be maintained and Soviet Russia had to be assured that she would get all the support possible from the British Commonwealth.

<sup>16</sup>*A Wilhelmstrasse és Magyarország: német diplomáciai iratok Magyarországról, 1933-1944* [The Wilhelmstrasse and Hungary: German Diplomatic Documents on Hungary, 1933-1944] György Ránki *et al.* eds. (Budapest: Kossuth, 1968), p. 639, especially note 3. According to Bárdossy, the Germans had also told him at the time that Rumania and Bulgaria had already declared war on the United States. From the speech of Bárdossy before the People's Tribunal, in his trial in the first instance, Oct. 29 to 3 Nov. 1945. See László Bárdossy, *A nemzet védelmében* [In defence of the Nation] (Fahrwangen, Switzerland: Duna Verlag, 1976), p. 63.

<sup>17</sup>Glimpses of Bárdossy's days in Salzburg are given in Ödön Málnássi, *Magyar márttyrok* [Hungarian Martyrs] 2nd ed. (London, 1958), pp. 20f. Málnássi was taken back to Hungary later and spent years in jail for his writings in favour of the war against the Soviets and of Hungary's wartime governments.

<sup>18</sup>Bárdossy was allowed to talk to American military intelligence men once again before his deportation to Hungary. This document, entitled "Hungary's Part in World War II," is dated 9 September 1945 and is referred to in the transcript of the interrogation of Edmund Veessenmayer (former German Minister to Hungary, 1944-45) dated at Weisbaden, 5 October 1945. The Veessenmayer interview can be found in the Records of the OSS, 1944-45 series, Vol. 312, Doc. no. XL 22552. A copy of Bárdossy's statement has been made available to Dr. Pritz by Dr. Péter Gosztanyi of Switzerland, and is printed, in Magyar translation, in Pál Pritz (ed.), *Bárdossy László a Népbíróság előtt* [László Bárdossy before the People's Tribunal] (Budapest: Maecenas, 1991), pp. 23-31.

## Document:

### Editor's Note:

The document appended here is reproduced much as it had been written in 1945. Titles are underlined instead of italicized, and Hungarian diacritical marks are not provided as they had been invariably omitted by the document's authors. A few editorial corrections or explanations are given in square brackets. The report can be found in the Records of the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), regular series (Record Group 226) which are deposited in the National Archives of the United States. Its identification number is 142019.

PWB - CPT Hq 7th Army  
German Intelligence Section

2 July 1945

SPECIAL INTERROGATION REPORT No. 9.

SUBJECT: Interrogation of Dr. Laszlo de Bardossy, former Prime Minister and some-time Foreign Minister of Hungary.

TO: Commanding Officer, PWB-CPT, 7th Army.

Portrait of a Gentleman and Diplomatist

On the 21 June, 1945, a Hungarian aristocrat set down on paper the skeleton of his life. Life had been good to him, it had never been dull - and while the stuffy little room at Camp Baerenkeller near Augsburg was not a prison cell, it was certainly not as pleasant as a villa on Balaton Foeldvar [*sic*, Balatonföldvár]. Besides there was his room-mate: "An old man who is always complaining". The aristocrat disliked complaints and people who complained. He had always liked his privacy. When he finished writing the outline of his life, it looked like this:

**Bardossy, Laszlo**

Born in 1890 (10.12.) in Szombathely, Hungary  
Entered the Hungarian Civil Service in 1913  
Has been taken over to the Hungarian Diplomatic Service 1922  
Appointed Counsellor to the Hungarian Legation in London 1929  
Appointed Hungarian Minister in Bucharest 1934  
Nominated Hungarian Minister for Foreign Affairs in Feb. 1941  
Nominated Hungarian Prime Minister 6. April 1941  
Demissioned 6. March 1942

He later added that he had been educated at the universities of Paris, Geneva and Budapest. He had received an LLD in 1912 - "Naturally from Budapest".

He thought of all the interesting and entertaining people he had known, and reflected on the bitter jest of being cooped up with a nobody who complained.

"If only I had something to read - something that could be read over and over again. I have my Bible, of course, - but could you get me something like Shakespeare?"

\* \* \*

When one sees him face to face in animated conversation, the frail, quiet man has the alertness of a sparrow. His finely molded and expressively mobile features together with his long, fine, silver hair remind one of a portrait of Franz Liszt. As he converses in his fluent English, he is poised and has full command of himself. Sometimes his long fingers unconsciously toy with an enamelled signet ring on his right hand. He is gracious: "I am so glad you brought this up, for that permits me to say..." He makes concessions in a gentlemanly manner: "You are perfectly right! Absolutely right! I must agree, but..." And as a result of these graceful "buts", one imagines him in the red robe of a Cardinal of **Richelieu's** time. A sparrow? perhaps a hawk.

#### From Trianon to Treachery?

In retrospect the diplomatist sees his high policy as having been determined by three guiding principles of great clarity:

"During my short term of office (eleven months) every decision of the government over which I presided has been - always with the consent of the Regent and with the explicit or tacit approval of the Parliament - directed only by the interests of our country and nation. Our aim was: (1) To keep the unity of our nation; (2) Not to allow foreign interference in our state affairs internal or external; (3) To fulfill our national obligation toward our Hungarian brethren on the territories severed from Hungary in 1919.

"Ad. 1.) The keeping of the nation's unity has been served by the government in refraining from all decisions which could have provoked division within the Hungarian nation. That is: The government has always put special point to remain in constant harmony with the Hungarian public opinion which during my term of office could express itself freely.

"Ad. 2) In order to keep out direct foreign interference, it seemed necessary, even unavoidable at given occasions and to a certain extent, to fulfill the wishes of Germany [so] that her government should not find false pretext to invade the country and to take over the handling of our affairs.

"Ad. 3) The national obligation to free [those] Hungarians living outside the national frontier line of 1919 under alien servitude, has spelled for us the moral duty to liberate when possible, former Hungarian territories with a Hungarian population..."

It was the attempt to achieve both points 2.) and 3.) that led to the diplomatic dance on eggs and sleight of hand that characterized Hungarian foreign policy from 1933 to 1945, and finally resulted "in direct foreign interference", the "fulfilment of the wishes of Germany" and the eventual loss of "Hungarian brethren on the territories severed from Hungary in 1919".

The critical [events?] in Hungarian foreign affairs took place while **Bardossy** was in Bucharest as Hungarian Minister from 1934 to early 1941. As far as he personally was concerned at this time he regarded his major problem the question of Hungarian minorities - is outlined in 3.) above. The particular segment of this problem that he as Hungarian Minister to Rumania had to deal with was the question of Transylvania.

**Bardossy** was asked to define exactly what he meant by "public opinion" - in authority which he in common with other Hungarian statesmen invariable appealed to as an ultimate ratio in the whole matter of Hungarian minorities abroad.

"I am so glad you brought this up! It allows me to say that 'public opinion' in this question meant the entire people - the whole country, all classes. If I may be permitted to do so, I should like briefly to review the history of this question which pros the statement.

"You will recall that immediately after the last war Hungary had a Communist government for a brief time under Bela **Kuhn** [*sic*, Kún]. Even this government had at the very outset as one of its cardinal principles the re-attachment to Hungary of territories with Hungarian majorities.

"Later on a peasant government called the 'Party of Small Landowners' whose leader was **Szabo** Nagyatadi also declared as one of its cardinal principles opposition to the Trianon Treaty.

“The upper classes, as represented by Counts **Bethlen** and **Teleki** - well, I might say that they were naturally against it”.

In the light of this tradition and weight of public opinion, **Bardossy** conceived his major task in Bucharest to be “to point out the impossibility of the situation” with regard to Transylvania. As Minister in Bucharest I never felt German support in this direction. We had more or less the support of the Rome government. The head of the Fascist state declared his sympathy in 1935. As to Germany - they didn't want to expose themselves. They didn't mean to mix in these “Danubian affairs”.

The first German support came in the shape of the Second Vienna Award in 1940, ceding half of Transylvania to Hungary. Although “it seemed that the initiative came from Rumania in asking that an award be made, the Vienna decision “satisfied neither the Rumanians nor the Hungarians”. “Relations became more strained. We were on the point of being forced to take action by public opinion”.

Nevertheless Hungary and the Hungarians felt a “certain gratitude toward Germany for the awards”, particularly since all other governments had failed to show interest in helping Hungary.

\* \* \*

“We did not declare war on Yugoslavia - we merely carried out a military action in what had become a vacuum”.

This statement sums up the Premier's attitude toward the whole affair of Hungarian annexation through military occupation of the Bacska [Bácska] region from Yugoslavia on 10 April, 1941.

It was all quite legal, if posing certain nice difficulties, in the Premier's view. After the putsch which overthrew the pro-German **Alnoar-Markovitch** government of Yugoslavia (“until then the most cherished nation for Germany in the Danube Valley”), the German government approached Count **Teleki** asking him to join Germany against Yugoslavia and thus regain her lost territories.

“It was very enticing offer for the dream of all Hungarians - very tempting. On the other had we had a moral duty. We had concluded a friendship agreement with Yugoslavia at the behest of Germany only a few months before. It was a very difficult situation for poor Count **Teleki**”!

The fact that Count **Teleki** committed suicide during this crisis is brushed aside by **Bardossy** as "the result of a breakdown of a feeble nervous constitution, the call of a family heritage in a moment of despair when he felt he could no more bear the strain of the burden which governmental duties were putting on him for more than three years".

It was at this critical juncture that **Bardossy** was called by the Regent to jump into the breach. "His Highness perhaps thought I was less mixed up in internal affairs and thus less prey to their pressure because I had been in Bucharest all these years".

The "very difficult situation" which spelled "a moral duty" and had called Count **Teleki**'s "family heritage in a moment of despair", was dissipated into so much thin air for the new Premier as a result of "a telephonic message at midnight April 10", informing that Premier - who had been very patient for four days - that an independent Croat state had been declared in Zagreb. At the same time, according to **Bardossy**, Yugoslav forces had evacuated the territories between the Danube and the Tisa [Tisza] rivers.

"By carrying out the reoccupation, Hungary followed the Soviet example, set on 18 September 1939 when Russian forces entered former Polish territories on the basis that Poland had ceased to exist. If Hungary would not have acted as she did on 11 April 1941, the German Army would have - without any doubt - entered the so-called Bacska [Bácska] and would have kept it under German occupation".

Thus no problem existed, since no state existed. No declaration or war was necessary, since one does not declare war on a non-entity. The moral problem of the friendship pact with Yugoslavia similarly vanished in this stroke of central European magic, for now the only moral problem was to save the territory from German occupation "with all its far-reaching political consequences".

Hungarian diplomatic tradition, together with the memory of "poor Count **Teleki**" were also simultaneously honored, for now "both of Count **Teleki**'s conditions in the event of a Yugoslav-German war had been fulfilled". There was no Yugoslav government. There was no Yugoslav Army. Hungary's moral duty was clear.

#### A Declaration of war and a "Declaration of Solidarity"

Many and complicated are the questions which perplex a Prime Minister, but none were more so than those of Russo-Hungarian relations.

On 22 June 1941, the German Ambassador von **Erdmannsdorff** - "a gentleman" - paid a call on Prime Minister de **Bardossy**. In the course of the conversation the German informed him that Rumania and Finland were joining Germany in her war against Russia. **Bardossy** felt that this was "a sort of invitation" for Hungary to join the party too.

That night he apparently had another of his sessions of "hesitations and reflections", for on June 23 the Hungarian Government formally announced that it had severed diplomatic relations with the Kremlin.

To the Prime Minister's surprise and pique, "they laughed at this in Berlin and Rome". Meanwhile the ogre of public opinion once more raised its head in the Hungarian homeland.

"Public opinion wanted the war - it was growing impossible for any government to resist public opinion, and the army wanted the war - perhaps foolishly, thinking that it would go brilliantly".

It was at this point that the Minister's perplexities and doubts were cleared up and the issue decided by "the repeated and unprovoked bombing of Hungarian towns by Russian planes".

In 1938 the territory of Karpatho-Ruthenia (formerly the easternmost tip of Slovakia) was "re-annexed" to Hungary by the government of **Bela Imredy**. In his discussion of the problem **Bardossy** emphasized the fact that this territory had always constituted a kind of ethnical no-man's land, pointing out that President **Benes** of Czechoslovakia "had repeatedly said that he was holding it out as a sort of gage toward the Russians". When pressed the Prime Minister admitted that ethnically the territory was of mixed population, "mostly Slavonic in character". He further pointed out factors which he felt should not be overlooked in the connection: "But it had water-power and lumber and had been part of Hungary for - oh, a thousand years!" Thus it was necessary to "round out the economy of Hungary". It was in this territory that the towns of Muncacz [Munkács] and Kassa were "repeatedly" (twice) bombed. The investigating committee "proved that the bombs were of Russian make". The Prime Minister drafted what he considered a well tempered declaration of war. As he remembers it, it read as follows:

"As a result of the repeated and unprovoked bombing of the Hungarian towns of Muncacz [Munkács] and Kassa by Russian planes, the Hungarian Government feels itself to be in a state of war with Russia".

Berlin and Rome made no comment. In 1942 "**Ribbentrop** came to Budapest to ask for more troops".



In this episode too, Hungarian tradition and moral obligations were also happily honoured. When asked if he did not consider the possibility of keeping down the growing German domination by going to war with Russia against Germany at this point, the Prime Minister was obviously horrified, pointing out that for years "the leading Hungarian politician and brilliant writer **Eckhart** [*sic*, Tibor Eckhardt?] had unofficially made the promise that Hungary would go to war against Russia and defend Karpatho-Ruthenia if the Axis Powers would permit Hungary to re-annex it. Moreover the Regent felt a moral duty to the anti-Bolshevist heritage of every Hungarian government since Bela Kuhn's [Kún]".

No less thorny a problem, and one which the Prime Minister eventually solved with the same brilliance and dexterity, confronted him later that year, when "one day we were told that a state of war exists between the States and the Reich... They made me understand that I had to declare war too". With an air for obvious pride **Bardossy** exclaims quietly: "I did not!"

It was his impression that he was being asked to declare war under the terms of the Tri-partite Pact which provided that each of the signatory powers would come to the assistance of the other if it were attacked.

The Prime Minister was surprised to learn that in point of technical fact it was Germany who had declared war on the United States. After he had been given a brief review of the events of the week of December 7, 1941, he exclaimed softly: "I am so glad to know that! You see, we had only the German view which told us that the United States had provoked and started the war".

In any event he is now pleased to retail [*sic* re-tell?] the facts proving that he never declared war on the United States. He informed the German representative of his position under three headings:

- (1) "I am quite willing to break off relations
- (2) "I don't want to become the laughing stock of Europe: the little country, Hungary, declaring war on the colossus of America!
- (3) "I can offer neither military nor political support. I have no ships except those that go from Buda to Pest. There are too many Hungarian nationals in America, and it is also in the interest of the Reich not to antagonize them".

The pressure of the German continued, however. Obviously the Prime Minister had to produce a Solomon's judgement. As he sees it, his problem was "not to provoke a power which was at its height at this point" and at the same time to avoid declaring war on the United States. "After many hesitations and reflections, I decided on the following: 'A Declaration of Solidarity' with

Germany in her war with the United States. I may say that the next morning when Mr. **Pell**, the American Minister, called on me he congratulated me on the wording of the formula". He further states that

"The declaration has not been in any way a declaration of war... As best seen and proved by the fact that the President of the U.S. has later found it necessary to declare war on Hungary which he would not have done if he would have considered our previous statement as a declaration of war".

### Conclusions

Laszlo de **Bardossy** is a gracious, cultivated man; an aristocrat in the European sense of the term who is tied - in spite of the opportunities he has had to become a citizen of the world - to a narrow nationalistic point of view which, when stripped of its veneer of his soft-spoken punctilio, is as bigoted as that of the lowliest Hungarian peasant. Laszlo de **Bardossy** fits the pattern of the gentleman - civilized conversation is possible with him.

It might be well to consider here by way of conclusion certain statements made by the Prime Minister in his conversation which seem to throw a rather oblique light on his true convictions. It is believed that comment on these statements would be superfluous.

"There was at that time a general belief that a clash of the Communist outlook with the Capitalist outlook was inevitable. Sooner or later it had to come up. This becomes important when one considers it in connection with Russia's obviously pan-Slavistic point of view. I may say that I still believe in this theory. I believe it will come".

(Re: Declaration of war on Russia)

"Yes, that is perfectly true - I was informed of events leading to the state of war between Germany and the United States through Hungarian diplomatic representatives in the states. But that was so long ago that just now it completely slipped my mind".

(Re: When reminded that the "German point of view" was not the only information he had access to)

"Yes, it is true that we played down over the radio the extent of Hungarian participation in the war against Russia. But this was primarily for foreign consumption. When I was Prime Minister only small forces were sent to the front - it is too long ago to remember the exact figure. I was not careful enough to make notes at the time. Later **Kallay** [Miklós Kállay] tolerated this bad and clumsy game. Luckily I got out of this in time".

(Re: When proof was offered that apparently "public opinion" had to be conditioned to the Russian war.)

That this is no ordinary predicament he is in at present, Laszlo de **Bardossy** seems to realize. That he has a poised courage in view of this is undeniable. And yet, Laszlo de **Bardossy** loves life - it has treated him well, and there are so many interesting people.

He professes to be curious in regard to this present status:

"In the course of the interrogation, I took the liberty of asking whether the U.S.A. Government considered me as a so-called 'War criminal' and if so whether this is the reason for my detention here?

"In posing the question I had in mind that should the answer be in the affirmative: I will have to reckon with my being brought before an International Court of Justice.

"I thought and still believe that my extradition to a so-called Hungarian Government which is not, or at least is not yet supported by a freely elected Parliament, would hardly be in accordance with the principles of justice".

T/5 George Freimarck  
T/5 Irving M. Rowe

Note: The writers wish to express their indebtedness and gratitude to Lt. **Granville** (NAIC) for furnishing valuable background material on Mr. **Bardossy**. All errors of judgement are naturally the writers'.

G.F.  
I.M.R.



## Part 2

### Review Articles

#### **La France et le bassin des Carpathes après la Première Guerre mondiale**

**Paul Pilisi**

*Documents diplomatiques français sur l'histoire du bassin des Carpathes 1918-1932*, Volume 1, octobre 1918 - août 1919, sous la direction de Mme Magda Ádám. Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1993. 864 p.

Il s'agit de documents de la plus haute importance pour l'histoire contemporaine de la Hongrie. En premier lieu, c'est durant cette période que la configuration du bassin des Carpathes sera décidée: lors du traité de Trianon, les puissances victorieuses transformeront ce fait en droit des vainqueurs en distribuant les trois-quarts du territoire de la Hongrie historique à leurs clients. Deuxièmement, suite à l'effondrement du système soviétique à l'Est, les problèmes et les cicatrices, issus de la Première Guerre mondiale reviennent à la surface au grand étonnement d'États, pourtant responsables de leur ignorance, de mauvaise foi et d'actes délibérés à l'époque. Troisièmement, l'Autriche-Hongrie, avec ses avantages et ses défauts, garantissait un bien-être matériel et spirituel à ses peuples jamais égalé par les États successeurs, sans parler de l'oppression ou des massacres délibérés en ex-Yougoslavie. Enfin, il s'agit de documents, parfois secrets, jamais publiés depuis lors.

À la lumière de ces documents, il devient de plus en plus évident, sans parler des traités secrets, mieux connus, cédant des territoires et populations pour une déclaration de guerre aux mieux offrants, que le traité de Trianon n'était qu'une formalité, sanctionnant le fait accompli.

Les documents numérotés sont classés en ordre chronologique en indiquant le nom, la provenance aussi bien que la nature de ceux-ci (dépêches, télégrammes, lettres). Les extraits des documents seront reproduits tels quels<sup>1</sup>.

---

<sup>1</sup>Les références mises entre parenthèses désignent la classification d'origine tandis que celles après les citations indiquent le classement dans le livre.

Le 17 octobre 1918, le ministre des Affaires extérieures de la Monarchie austro-hongroise, le comte István Burian, présente au président américain Wilson l'acte de reddition. La «révolution des chrysanthèmes» met au pouvoir le gouvernement du comte Michel Károlyi, dont le parti, le «Parti de Károlyi» gouverne en coalition avec le Parti Bourgeois Radical d'Oscar Jászi, le Parti Social Démocrate, et exercera ses fonctions dès le 25 octobre 1918 sous le nom de «Conseil National hongrois». Le gouvernement avait une confiance illimitée dans les principes wilsoniens et dans la bonne foi des Alliés.

Le programme gouvernemental proposait la transformation de la Hongrie historique en une «fédération démocratique» dont le ministre des nationalités, O. Jászi, avait publié le projet des «États-Unis Danubiens» en 1918. À ce titre, Jászi entamait des négociations avec les représentants des nationalités en vue de préserver l'intégrité territoriale de la Hongrie historique au sein de structures fédératives.

Les documents diplomatiques français ne laissent aucun doute sur une politique foncièrement hostile à l'égard des Magyars ennemis, dont le démembrement du pays n'était qu'une question de processus dans lequel Roumains, Tchécoslovaques et Serbes avaient le droit de nourrir «toutes les hypothèses».

Une note sur la politique française à suivre en Autriche-Hongrie, probablement rédigée par J. Laroche, sous-directeur d'Europe au Ministère des Affaires étrangères, insiste sur le fait que «nous avons, de tous les Alliés, la meilleure situation». Ce document, sans date ni numéro, prescrit le comportement que les corps français d'occupation devaient adopter envers les populations «ennemies» et «alliées» de la région. L'attitude «envers les Magyars doit être indulgente». (Document no 30, p. 62.)

C'est le 13 novembre 1918 qu'une convention militaire humiliante avait été signée entre les représentants des armées alliées et le gouvernement hongrois à Belgrade. Les termes de cet armistice imposaient à la Hongrie des lignes de démarcations, des obligations politico-militaires et à la fois économiques particulièrement onéreuses. En outre, les Affaires étrangères donnent l'instruction aux ambassades, le ton et la manière de traiter la Hongrie. Le télégramme secret de Pichon, ministre des Affaires étrangères, adressé le 29 novembre, à 23 heures 50 minutes, aux ambassadeurs de France, insiste sur la «lourde responsabilité des Hongrois de la guerre», met en garde contre «la tactique des hommes d'État hongrois», de «l'impudence de la part du Comte Károlyi à essayer de marquer ainsi par une façade ultradémocratique le but réel poursuivi par le Gouvernement hongrois lequel vise uniquement à maintenir dans l'asservissement des nationalités non magyares. Le général Franchet d'Esperey reçoit... de traiter le pseudo gouvernement hongrois comme une simple autorité locale, de fait, et n'avoir avec lui que les rapports nécessités par la situation militaire». (Document no 55, pp. 111-112.)

Il n'est pas étonnant de constater que les comités roumains et slovaques avaient carrément rejeté les propositions de Jászi. Ce dernier mentionne, dans

ses mémoires, que ces comités, comme celui des Roumains de Transylvanie, lui signifiaient qu'ils voulaient créer leurs «États nationaux».

Les témoignages des documents diplomatiques français autorisent à présumer que le démembrement de la Hongrie historique avait commencé aussitôt. Le général Henrys, commandant de l'Armée française d'Orient, en poste à Belgrade, dans un télégramme (no 213/2b) du 6 décembre au général Franchet d'Esperey, commandant en chef des Armées Alliées d'Orient, stipule que Károlyi «nie le droit à la Roumanie d'occuper la Transylvanie». En outre, il ajoute que les «milieux serbes s'inquiètent de ce que les Roumains parlent de terre roumaine jusqu'au Theiss et Danube». (Document no 70, p. 126.)

Le général Henrys, dans un télégramme du 12 décembre, (no 332/2B) expédié au lieutenant-colonel Vix, chef de la Mission militaire alliée à Budapest, transmet les instructions du général Franchet d'Esperey concernant l'occupation de la Transylvanie par l'armée roumaine: «...vous prie de répondre Gouvernement Hongrois que l'Armistice prévoyait implicitement occupation Transylvanie par Roumanie, puisque Roumains sont considérés comme faisant partie entente». (Document no 79, p. 135.)

Le lieutenant-colonel Vix, dans une dépêche du 19 décembre, (no 472/S) adressée au général Henrys, estime que, dans le processus de démembrement de la Hongrie, les limites ont été déjà dépassées. Il convient de souligner avec insistance que le lieutenant-colonel Vix, en poste à Budapest, ne cesse d'attirer l'attention de ses supérieurs sur les excès commis par les «petits alliés» de la France: «Je relève que l'acharnement des nationalités autrefois asservies à la Hongrie, aujourd'hui soutenue par l'Entente, peut pousser les Hongrois à bout. Tout en se montrant ferme et très exigeant envers la Hongrie, il est des limites qu'il conviendrait de ne pas dépasser. J'estime qu'on les dépasse». (Document no 92, p. 147.)

À la lumière des dépêches, télégrammes et procès-verbaux, inconnus auparavant, le rôle de la France, dans le démembrement de la Hongrie, devient de plus en plus évident. La personnalité et les agissements du lieutenant-colonel Vix, chef de la Mission militaire alliée à Budapest, reçoit aussi un éclairage peu connu. Malgré tout, c'est lui qui avait même osé critiquer la politique permissive de son gouvernement envers les «petits alliés», d'une part, et la politique ouvertement hostile et intransigeante vis-à-vis des Hongrois, d'autre part.

Bien avant Trianon, Clemenceau, dans un télégramme (no 15373 BS/3) du 19 décembre à l'adresse du général Franchet d'Esperey, précise les «limites historiques slovaques» telles qu'établies par les «renseignements des Affaires étrangères». (Document no 94, p. 148.)

Ce fait est confirmé dans un long télégramme (no 621/S) du 23 décembre, émis de Budapest et adressé au général Henrys par le lieutenant-colonel Vix. Ce dernier signale qu'à son «grand étonnement», Milan Hodza lui a montré une carte «fixant les frontières qui séparent l'État Tchécoslovaque de l'État Hongrois», telles que décidées par le Conseil de Versailles. Comme chef de la mission militaire des Alliés à Budapest, il critique, il faut le dire, de façon

courageuse, l'attitude des Alliés, leur manque de respect de la Convention de Belgrade du 13 novembre 1918.

La décision prise à Versailles, en ce qui concerne l'occupation de la Slovaquie par les Tchécoslovaques, constitue à mon avis, une première atteinte grave à la Convention. La convention du 13 novembre n'est plus en somme qu'un chiffon de papier. L'attitude prise par nos petites alliés (Tchécoslovaques, Roumains et Serbes) et par nous-mêmes... semblent bien montrer que dès maintenant il n'est plus qu'un seul droit: le droit du plus fort... Les Tchécoslovaques, niant que la convention leur soit applicable en aucune de ses parties... s'imposent en maître absolus... Les Roumains, prêts à outrepasser les ordres du général Berthelot montrent un égal acharnement... Les Serbes ont commis dès le début bien des abus. (Document no 110, pp. 159-160.)

Un rapport secret (no 5.284/3), rédigé à Belgrade le 17 septembre sur la situation en Hongrie, insiste sur le fait que «l'armée hongroise peut être considérée comme non existante». Ce rapport passe en revue, en connaissance de cause, les exactions roumaines, tchécoslovaques et serbes dans un style descriptif, se limitant aux faits, sans commentaires: «...en Transylvanie, les Roumains, se croyant appuyés par l'Armée du Danube, tendant à dépasser la ligne de démarcation fixée par la Convention, et, dans le Banat de Temesvár, ne déguisent pas leurs ambitions, provoquant ainsi l'inquiétude des Serbes». Le rapport secret décrit aussi la situation socio-économique désastreuse de la Hongrie et prévoit la chute du gouvernement Károlyi, «des troubles et des désordres graves». (Document no 111, p. 170.)

Károlyi ne soupçonnait peut-être pas que le gouvernement français envisageait, dès le début, sa chute et les troubles qui se produiraient par la suite. ci-après. Károlyi et son gouvernement étaient limités au contact avec le lieutenant-colonel Vix, représentant des Alliées. Jamais le gouvernement de Károlyi n'a été invité à donner son avis, des preuves, son accord ou désaccord au gouvernement français. En outre, les rapports des militaires, de Vix, de Henrys ou de Berthelot, conformes à la situation, n'ont jamais été considérés par le gouvernement français. Au contraire, Clemenceau interviendra, à plusieurs reprises, pour réprimander et blâmer sévèrement les hauts officiers qui oseront critiquer la politique officielle de la France et de ses Alliés.

Ainsi, le comte Károlyi, président du Conseil National Hongrois, avait transmis une lettre de protestation, le 28 décembre, au lieutenant-colonel Vix, contre le démembrement de la Hongrie.

Les territoires hongrois revendiqués par les Tchèques ne faisaient jamais partie du royaume de Bohême. Ils ne formaient à aucune époque de l'histoire une province distincte de l'État hongrois et, par conséquent, ni les Tchèques, ni les Slovaques ne peuvent pas réclamer des limites



«historiques» d'une «Slovaquie» qui n'a jamais existée... L'arrachement ou l'occupation seule de villes ardemment vénérées comme des vrais foyers de la millénaire culture hongroise, telles que Pozsony (Presbourg) ancienne capitale de la Hongrie, Kassa, ville préférée du prince François Rákóczi, ce grand ami et allié de la France... exaspérerait l'âme hongroise. (Document no 113, pp. 173-174.)

Les témoignages affirment que le lieutenant-colonel Vix était un interlocuteur loyal et défendait, de façon consécutive, les Hongrois contre les accusations gratuites. En outre, il démontre que les exactions, commises par les Roumains, ont été attribuées de façon intentionnelle aux Hongrois, victimes plutôt qu'agresseurs. En ce qui concerne les exactions en Transylvanie, son télégramme (no 947/S) du 6 janvier 1917 au général Henrys est révélateur:

...des gardes nationaux roumains ex-soldats de l'armée Hongroise ayant conservé leur armes, ont occupé tous les villages. Sans cadre et sans scrupules, animés comme tous les Roumains de Transylvanie, d'une haine profonde des Hongrois, ces gardes nationaux ne peuvent être un élément d'ordre: ils ont, sinon exécuté eux-mêmes ou participé au pillage des propriétés Hongroises (la preuve officielle manque), du moins toléré ces pillages et laissé libre les exécutants.... Le commandement militaire roumain, considère la zone nouvellement occupée comme un pays conquis et devenu définitivement Roumain. La visite du Général Berthelot a renforcé encore ce sentiment. (Document no 120, pp. 182-183.)

Le supérieur immédiat du lieutenant-colonel Vix, le général Berthelot, commandant de l'Armée de Danube, témoin oculaire du non-respect de la convention de Belgrade, informait son gouvernement sur le processus de démembrement de la Hongrie. La preuve est irréfutable puisque Clemenceau, au lieu de considérer les faits, laisse entendre que tout était décidé contre «Bulgares ou les Hongrois, c'est-à-dire l'ennemi». Son télégramme au général Berthelot (sans date et no d'enregistrement) peut être considéré comme un avertissement. En effet, le général donnait un compte rendu objectif de la situation en Transylvanie, à son gouvernement en énumérant les exactions commises par l'armée roumaine contre les Magyars. (N.B. Clemenceau désigne déjà la Transylvanie comme la Roumanie.) «Votre télégramme ne se contente pas d'exposer l'état d'esprit en Roumanie (Transylvanie P.P.) et les inquiétudes que vous en ressentez, mais blâme la politique du gouvernement.... La Roumanie est assurée, en toute hypothèse, de l'agissante sympathie de la France pour ses buts essentiels ...». (Document no 135, pp. 198-199.)

Parmi les buts essentiels roumains, la Transylvanie représentait la priorité absolue, la cause même de son entrée en guerre contre les promesses de l'Entente. Le 17 août 1916, un traité secret avait été signé à Bucarest entre la

Roumanie et l'Entente. Ce traité a promis la Bucovine, la Transylvanie, Le Banat et la partie orientale de la grande plaine hongroise à la Roumanie en contre-partie de son entrée en guerre contre l'Autriche-Hongrie et l'Allemagne. Il est plausible que les hauts officiers français ignoraient l'existence du traité.

Pour faire comprendre au général Berthelot le total soutien de la France à l'égard des Roumains et l'hostilité envers les Magyars, le télégramme secret (no 1169/BS/3) de Clemenceau, expédié le 15 janvier 1919, répète ses avertissements, cette fois sans ambages. Les adjectifs utilisés ne laissent aucun doute sur les intentions de Clemenceau: les rapports, documents et télégrammes sont considérés comme des «incriminations» nulles et non avenues. Le ton de ce télégramme laissait planer le doute sérieux de révocation, en cas de refus d'obéissance à la politique du gouvernement français:

Les décisions que vous incriminez touchant la Dobroudja, le Banat, la Transylvanie, n'ont aucunement le caractère que vous leur attribuez, et ce que vous en dites est sans fondement en fait et en droit.... Il n'y a par conséquent rien de fondé dans les récriminations roumaines. Vous devriez être le premier à le reconnaître, à le déclarer et à vous inscrire en faux contre elles, au lieu de vous faire leur avocat, de les encourager et de blâmer la politique de la France et de ses alliés, ce qui est inadmissible de votre part. (Document no 136, pp. 200-201.)

Ce deuxième télégramme secret de Clemenceau dissipe tout malentendu possible sur l'attitude du gouvernement français à l'égard des «petits alliés» et des «ennemis». En outre, à la lumière de ces documents, il est également pertinent de poser la question à savoir dans quelle mesure le gouvernement français précipite l'avènement du bolchevisme en Hongrie, permettant ainsi à ses «petits alliés» de parachever la conquête du territoire hongrois sous prétexte de «combattre» le bolchevisme. Le gouvernement français, mieux que quiconque, disposait des informations objectives, non seulement sur la situation en Hongrie mais aussi sur le bassin des Carpathes.

Émile Hauguénin, membre du Service de renseignement français (2e bureau), dans une étude détaillée et documentée, du 22 janvier 1919, informe son ministre des Affaires étrangères sur la situation socio-économique, militaire et politique en Autriche, en Hongrie et en Bohême. Ainsi, le gouvernement français savait pertinemment que la situation du gouvernement Károlyi était désespérée: «...Comte Károlyi... me l'a répété avec une émotion désespérée dans deux longs entretiens: l'Entente, sur laquelle il comptait... l'a abandonné, il est à présent sans appui, l'homme le plus détestable de la Hongrie». La description de la situation de crise est conforme à la réalité. L'agent secret prévient le ministre français des Affaires étrangères de cette «crise profonde, totale et bientôt, sans doute, tumultueuse». (Document no 148, pp. 215-216.)

Les officiers et généraux français, déployés dans les bassins des Carpathes, avaient constaté les faits sur le terrain et il n'est pas étonnant d'apercevoir

qu'au nom d'un certain honneur, ils ont défendu assez régulièrement la cause des Magyars. Le télégramme secret, que Clemenceau adressait au général Franchet d'Esperey, commandant en chef des Armées Alliées d'Orient, le 24 janvier (no 774 BS/s, Secret), est révélateur à cet égard. Clemenceau accumulait les postes de président du Conseil et de ministre de la Guerre, il refusa d'accepter la démission du général. Par contre, il lui indique «l'attitude» qu'il «doit prendre vis-à-vis du Gouvernement Roumain...». Vous m'avez offert par anticipation de démissionner pour le cas où je ne serais pas de votre avis: je vous ai fait connaître que je n'étais pas de votre avis.... Ceci dit, pour que la situation soit claire, je dois vous faire connaître que M. Bratiano est venu me raconter sur son compte à peu près tout ce que vous m'avez dit de la question roumaine dans votre dépêche... il m'a sérieusement demandé de l'écouter pendant une heure». (Document no 151, pp. 220-221.)

Ce télégramme secret démontre clairement que les émissaires roumains présentaient à Clemenceau leurs versions et que ce dernier leur avait donné raison plutôt qu'aux hauts responsables de l'Armée française.

Ce télégramme confirme également que les représentants des «petits alliés» de l'Entente se trouvaient à Paris pour informer le gouvernement français et pour participer aux travaux des Commissions relatives au démembrement de la Hongrie.

Le 8 février 1919, la Commission des affaires roumaines et yougoslaves s'était réunie à Paris. Le procès-verbal de la séance confirme que la réunion avait comme objectif principal le partage de la Hongrie (Document no 1). «Le Président expose que la Commission est saisie de deux mémoires, l'un roumain, et l'autre serbe... ces mémoires sont bien l'expression officielle des revendications des Gouvernements intéressés, revendications qui ont d'ailleurs été soumises au Conseil suprême des Alliés par M. Bratiano, pour la Roumanie, et par M. Vesnitch, pour la Serbie». (Document 176, p. 248.)

L'annexe 1 de ce procès-verbal contient le «Mémoire présenté par la délégation roumaine. Les revendications territoriales». Ce mémoire réclame «pour la grande unité roumaine toutes les âmes roumaines... entre le Danube, la Theiss et le Dniester.... 1. La Transylvanie proprement dite, avec une partie des comitats limitrophes de Hongrie (en tout 85 000 kilomètres carrés). 2. Le Banat de Temesvar (28 000 kilomètres carrés). 3. La Bukovine (10 000 kilomètres carrés)». (Ibidem, p. 252.)

Le mémoire roumain rectifie les statistiques hongroises sous prétexte qu'il s'agit de chiffres «volontairement falsifiés». D'après les statistiques roumaines, rectifiées, les Szeklers ne sont pas considérés comme des Hongrois. «Des rectifications incontestables portent le nombre de Roumains à au moins 2 900 000, soit 62,5%, et réduisent le nombre des Hongrois à 700 000, soit 15%, non compris les Szeklers». (Ibidem, p. 254.)

En ce qui concerne les revendications roumaines sur le «Banat de Temesvár», le mémoire roumain utilise, entre autres, des arguments semblables:

Il n'a pu venir à l'esprit de personne de contester à la Roumanie le droit de revendiquer l'union politique d'un territoire où les Roumains vivent depuis de longs siècles, et où ils sont au nombre de 600 000 auprès de moins de 400 000 Allemands, colons venus depuis le XVIIIe siècle, pour ne parler que des éléments ethniques les plus importants. (Ibidem, p. 255, Les Magyars ne sont même pas mentionnés.)

Le mémoire prévient la Commission qu'en cas contraire, «on n'aboutirait qu'à la désorganisation économique, à l'arrêt du développement de toute une région et à la perspective de conflits». (Ibidem, p. 258.)

L'annexe II est le «Mémoire présenté par la délégation serbo-croate-slovène et concernant les revendications du Royaume des Serbes, Croates et Slovènes». Ce mémoire retrace l'histoire de la Serbie, exalte la solidarité des Serbes, des Croates et des Slovènes, et réclame «l'union à notre État de tous les pays qui, en accord avec le principe des nationalités doivent lui appartenir». (Ibidem, p. 262.)

L'annexe III conteste les revendications roumaines sur le Banat. Du côté serbe, comme du côté roumain, les arguments historiques pleines de redondances ne s'appuient sur aucun fait et pullulent d'omissions. Cette annexe conteste les revendications des Roumains, au nom de l'histoire, du principe des nationalités, réclamant la possession «exclusive» du Banat. «Le Banat est peuplé de Serbes, de Hongrois, de Roumains et d'Allemands. Les Serbes sont indigènes; les autres nationalités sont venus s'y établir postérieurement en qualité de colons». (Ibidem, p. 263.) Le mémoire propose d'identifier des arguments géographiques, économiques, historiques pour appuyer la revendication serbe:

Les Hongrois se retirant de plus en plus au Nord devant l'avance turque... et le pays prit un caractère entièrement serbe.... Nulle part on ne trouve trace des Roumains... l'histoire ne mentionne absolument pas les Roumains dans cette partie du Banat où les Serbes ont développé une activité politique et civilisatrice si grande. Les Roumains ne descendirent pas dans la grande plaine du Banat avant le XVIIIe siècle, en même temps que les colons allemands et les Magyars.... (Ibidem, pp. 265-266).

En ce qui concerne les statistiques, le mémoire prétend que la statistique hongroise «est notoirement peu sûre, surtout au détriment des Slaves». (Ibidem, p. 270.) L'Annexe IV concerne les frontières Nord du Royaume des Serbes-Croates-Slovènes et la délimitation entre Serbes et Magyars dans la Batchka. L'annexe prétend que la statistique hongroise «de cette région est, encore plus que celle du Banat, faussé à l'avantage de la nationalité magyare». (Ibidem, p. 271.) D'après les statistiques hongroises de 1910 dans le Batchka, il y avait 812 382 habitants dont 363 513 Magyars et 145 063 Serbes. Les statistiques rectifiées par ce mémoire, indiquent que le nombre de Serbes, de Croates et

d'autres slaves est de 245.567 et le nombre des Magyars diminue à 293 256. Parmi les arguments expliquant ces chiffres, et les écarts, voici le suivant:

Dans la Batchka, comme dans le Banat, les fonctionnaires, employés et serveurs des différents services, des diverses institutions des chemins de fer, étaient recrutés dans les rangs des Magyars fanatiques qui consacraient leur vie entière à la propagande plutôt qu'à leur service. Des fonctionnaires magyars abandonneraient cette région, comme toutes celles peuplées d'une majorité non magyare, aussitôt que le pouvoir magyar aurait cessé de s'y exercer. (Ibidem, p. 273.)

En modifiant les statistiques sous n'importe quel prétexte, les revendications serbes visaient une partie des Départements de Baranya et de Somogy. Il convient de préciser que ces revendications se référaient implicitement à la ligne de démarcation fixée par la Convention militaire de Belgrade, du 13 novembre 1918, laquelle convention, d'après le lieutenant-colonel Vix, est devenue un «chiffon de papier». En effet, Barcs, Pécs, Baja, Mohács et d'autres localités se trouvaient du côté serbo-croate-slovène de la ligne de démarcation.

Pour des raisons analogues, l'État des Serbes, Croates et Slovènes doit revendiquer l'étroite zone au Nord de la Drave, qui renferme le chemin de fer reliant les régions yougoslaves au-delà de la Moura... (ligne Zákány-Barcs-Siklos-Mohács). Dans cette bande de territoire, il y a de nombreuses localités serbo-croates, tandis que le nombre des Magyars de cette région, qui devraient être annexés à notre État, n'atteint que quelques milliers d'hommes. (Ibidem, 274.)

Les arguments évoqués mentionnent les Hongrois et les Allemands comme des «colons» tandis que la population serbe est identifiée comme «indigène». Le document affirme, que «Les colonies allemandes et magyares, jouissant de la bienveillance et de la protection des autorités hongroises, se comportaient peu amicalement envers les indigènes». (Idem.) Cette affirmation est en contradiction avec l'argument qui sera présenté le 25 février devant la Commission des affaires roumaines et yougoslaves. En ce qui concerne le Banat, la délégation serbe affirme «que la grande majorité des terres arables dans ces régions appartiennent à de riches familles serbes, héritières démocratiques de la noblesse rurale émigrée de Serbie vers le Banat au treizième siècle». (Document no 198, p. 356.)

Si c'était le cas, comment est-il possible que les riches familles serbes, héritières «démocratiques» de la noblesse rurale, soient opprimées par les employés ou journaliers hongrois «inamicaux» par le simple fait qu'ils soient d'origine hongroise? Un autre argument évoque que la «question de la Bacska

tient particulièrement à coeur aux Serbes, car cette province est le berceau de leur civilisation». (Idem.)

Suite à la mise en demeure de Clemenceau, les dépêches des militaires deviennent copies-conformes à la volonté de celui-ci, malgré quelques réticences du lieutenant-colonel Vix.

Ainsi, le général Patey, imposé par Clemenceau, chargé par le général Berthelot d'enquêter sur la situation en Transylvanie, dans un rapport sans numéro du 8 février, se conforme aux instructions reçues. Quant aux exactions des Roumains contre les Magyars, le général français les efface d'un trait de plume. «Si regrettables que soient les actes de brutalité subis par quelques personnes, ils sont infiniment moins graves que ceux commis par nos ennemis pendant plus de 4 ans». (Document no 177, p. 281.)

Le général Patey reproduit dans les annexes II, III et IV, les dépêches du lieutenant-colonel Vix et les utilisera contre ce dernier. L'annexe IV intègre le télégramme (no 654/2S) du lieutenant-colonel de Budapest sans date, lequel réitère l'attitude du gouvernement hongrois face à l'indépendance de la Transylvanie:

Primo - Les déclarations du Comité dirigeant de Sibiu concernant l'indépendance de la Transylvanie ne peuvent être prises en considération que si celui-ci peut fournir la pièce authentique établissant que le Gouvernement Hongrois a reconnu cette indépendance... le Gouvernement Hongrois s'est toujours refusé, avant comme après l'armistice, à reconnaître cette indépendance. (Ibidem, p. 287.)

Le général Patey attribue en partie l'attitude du lieutenant-colonel Vix aux Magyars, puisqu'il doit répondre «aux questions qui lui étaient posées par nos ennemis, dont l'habileté est réputée». Le général mentionne implicitement que le lieutenant-colonel n'était pas informé des clauses du traité secret de Bucarest de 1916. «La teneur des télégrammes du Lieutenant-Colonel Vix montre un état de fatigue ou d'exaspération que j'estime incompatible avec la complexité et la délicatesse de sa tâche... le Lieutenant-colonel Vix qui a plus de 2 mois de présence à Budapest, doit recevoir, le plus tôt possible, une autre affectation...». (Ibidem, pp. 292-293.)

La dernière partie du rapport, intitulée «considérations générales», conformément aux vœux et instructions de Clemenceau, est un plaidoyer sans nuance pour la politique du gouvernement français. Pour dissiper tout malentendu, il attire l'attention du général Berthelot, commandant de l'Armée du Danube, sur le traité secret de Bucarest, d'août 1916, lequel promettait la Transylvanie entière à la Roumanie.

En tout cas, tous les alliés et surtout la France, qui a accepté par accord de 1916 l'éventualité du rattachement de la Transylvanie à la Roumanie, peuvent-ils être défavorables à la réalisation des aspirations

du conseil national roumain de Transylvanie reconnu déjà par nos alliés roumains?... Il importe que par l'occupation sans délai, des points stratégiques d'Arad, Nagy-Varad, Szatmarnémeti nous écartions le danger de nouvelles hostilités et protégeons les populations roumaines... qui a mis toute confiance en nous, et à qui, à tous les points de vue nous avons le devoir de donner notre appui.... Le conseil national roumain de Transylvanie est composé d'hommes au coeur chaud... capables... de prendre dans la grande Roumanie la place que leurs belles capacités ne peut manquer de leur vouloir. (Ibidem, pp. 296-297.)

En ce qui concerne la protection des populations roumaines, voici le document concerné. Le procès-verbal de la réunion de la Commission du 17 février, rapporte que d'après le délégué britannique, Leeper, ce triangle en question est habité par une population presque exclusivement magyare. À Szatmár-Németi, par exemple, il y a 33 000 Magyars contre 1 000 Roumains. (Document no 185, p. 34.)

Il est un fait indéniable que le général, ignorant la configuration ethnique et historique de la Transylvanie, reproduisait les versions roumaines dénoncées auparavant par le lieutenant-colonel Vix.

Voici le genre de rapport qu'attendait Clemenceau, d'autant plus que, dès le 11 février, les Commissions des affaires roumaines et yougoslaves ainsi que tchéco-slovaques se réuniront régulièrement en vue de tracer les frontières de la Hongrie déjà divisée. Pendant que ces commissions poursuivent leurs travaux, le gouvernement hongrois ne cesse d'expédier des protestations auprès du lieutenant-colonel Vix. (Documents no 179, pp. 303-305, no 182, pp. 315-316; no 186, pp. 326-327.)

Suite au rapport du général Patey, du 11 au 25 février, la Commission des affaires roumaines et yougoslaves tiendra ses réunions, présidées par Tardieu, collaborateur et homme de confiance de Clemenceau, nommé président de cette Commission. Les délégations française, britannique, italienne et américaine participent aux réunions et les représentants roumains, serbes et tchéco-slovaques sont appelés devant la Commission pour justifier leurs revendications territoriales.

Les procès-verbaux révèlent que toutes les délégations étaient au courant du traité secret de Bucarest de 1916. Ces documents confirment que si les arguments et les statistiques même rectifiées jusqu'à 20% contre les Hongrois étaient favorables à ceux-ci, les délégués évoquaient des raisons d'ordre économique, de communication terrestre ou ferroviaire, voire stratégiques contre les «ennemis», les Magyars, et de façon répétitive, en faveur des «alliés». Les interventions des délégués français et du président de la Commission, Tardieu, attestent que la France avait joué un rôle de leader, et de façon consécutive, contre la Hongrie.

Si «la frontière revendiquée par la Roumanie engloberait une bande de territoire presque exclusivement hongrois...», le président Tardieu évoque que des

«communications par voie ferrée...» ou «l'absence de toute ligne de rocade au pied des montagnes placerait la Roumanie dans une situation désavantageuse en cas de conflit avec la Hongrie». (Procès-verbal de la séance du 11 février 1919, Document no 178, pp. 300-301.) Lors de cette séance, sur la proposition du président, la Commission décide de confier au secrétariat de produire à l'échelle 1:1 000 000 les tracés des frontières entre la Hongrie et la Roumanie.

À l'occasion de la réunion du 13 février, le délégué britannique, Sir Eyre Crowe, expose, de façon explicite, les solutions appliquées aux questions ethniques susceptibles d'apporter des modifications. En cas de majorité magyare, «le principe de sympathie pour la Roumanie» doit l'emporter. Il s'agit de deux poids, deux mesures applicables envers l'ennemi et l'allié. «Le problème se pose d'une manière toute différente pour les Grands Alliés, suivant que les difficultés ethnographiques se présentent entre la Roumanie et la Hongrie qui est leur ennemi, ou entre la Roumanie et la Serbie qui sont toutes deux leurs alliées». (Procès-verbal de la séance du 13 février. Document no 181, p. 307.)

Les procès-verbaux attestent que des arguments circonstanciels voire négligeables ont été évoqués en vue de justifier le traité secret de Bucarest de 1916, lequel promettait la Transylvanie entière à la Roumanie. Ainsi, le président Tardieu fait prévaloir des conditions géographiques, l'importance ou la direction des chemins de fer vis-à-vis des faits ethniques attestant la présence des majorités magyares. «...tout en croyant devoir réviser le traité de 1916, la Délégation française considère que les clauses négatives de cet accord, celles qui enlèvent des territoires à l'ennemi, représentent le point de vue définitif des gouvernements signataires et ne sauraient être modifiées au bénéfice de la Hongrie». (Ibidem, p. 314.)

La Commission reprend ses travaux le 17 février et l'enjeu de la séance est de tracer la frontière entre la Hongrie et la Roumanie. Le délégué italien, De Martino, déclare que la Délégation italienne se place, en principe, en faveur du maintien de la frontière tracée par le traité de Bucarest de 1916. Étant donné que la Commission est d'accord sur le principe, il ne reste que des détails à régler, l'appartenance de quelques villes ou villages.

Le représentant français, Laroche, interroge la délégation britannique sur la raison pour laquelle elle refuse d'attribuer la ville de Huszt à la Roumanie? Sir Eyre Crowe lui déclare que «Huszt n'est pas nécessaire à la Roumanie» et il ne faut pas attribuer «à la Roumanie plus de territoire qu'il n'est absolument nécessaire». (Procès-verbal de la séance du 17 février, Document no 185, p. 320.)

Au cours de l'échange sur l'attribution de la ville de Szatmárnémeti et de sa région, les délégations admettent que la ville et ses alentours sont habités «par une population presque entièrement magyare. À Szatmárnémeti, par exemple, il y a 33 000 Magyars contre 1 000 Roumains, et la proportion est à peu près la même dans les autres parties du pays. La Délégation britannique est cependant d'avis que l'importance de maintenir les communications entre la Roumanie et la



Tchécoslovaquie justifie l'attribution de cette région à la Roumanie». (Ibidem, p. 321.)

Le délégué français Laroche, évoque régulièrement la «supercherie» des statistiques hongroises et insiste sur des arguments peu habituels à propos des majorités des Magyars dans les villes de Transylvanie. L'argument utilisé par le délégué français sera évoqué presque mot à mot par Bratiano, le 22 février, devant la même commission.

Laroche: «...La Commission ne doit pas se laisser impressionner par l'importance des majorités hongroises dans les villes. La nationalité n'a pas, en effet, autant d'importance à la ville qu'à la campagne.... On peut prévoir que dans les villes comme Nagy-Varad, qui deviendraient, si elles étaient attribuées à la Roumanie, des centres de commerce et d'industrie roumains, on rencontrerait bientôt plus de Magyars roumanisés qu'on n'y trouve actuellement de Roumains magyarisés». (Ibidem, pp. 321-322. Si la rectification des statistiques n'avait pas de poids, on utilisait ce genre d'arguments sans fondement.)

Suite à la réunion du 19 février, celle du 22 est entièrement consacrée à l'exposé de Bratiano et aux réponses qu'il donne aux questions posées par le président. Le Président du conseil roumain, concernant les «fortes majorités magyares» dans les villes de Transylvanie, évoque les mêmes arguments que le délégué français, Laroche, servait devant la même Commission. Bratiano affirme que les Magyars des villes de Transylvanie, ayant une majorité magyare, n'ont pas autant d'importance que les villages. Ainsi, les Magyares des villes de Transylvanie s'assimileront plus vite aux Roumains ou ils quitteront la Roumanie.

M. Bratiano distingue, parmi la population magyare des villes, outre l'élément artificiel, fonctionnaires, militaires, bourgeois ou mêmes ouvriers maintenus par l'administration hongroise, et l'élément permanent qui, par son travail, s'est créé des attaches solides dans le pays. M. Vaida-Voevod cite l'exemple de Kolozsvár où plus de vingt institutions d'enseignement ont été concentrées en vue de la magyarisation. M. Bratiano déclare que le Gouvernement roumain compte faciliter la sortie de l'élément artificiel qu'il ne désire pas conserver et se montrer libéral, envers l'élément permanent dont l'assimilation sera l'oeuvre non pas de mesures administratives, mais du temps et de l'intérêt. (Ibidem, p. 347.)

À l'occasion de la réunion de la même Commission, le 25 février, le président et les membres des délégations se trouvaient dans une situation embarrassante. C'était l'audience de la délégation serbe, laquelle conteste la prétention roumaine sur le Banat et considère le traité de Bucarest de 1916, lequel accordait à la Roumanie ce territoire, comme nul et non avenue. Les Serbes reprochent aux Alliés d'avoir promis le Banat aux Roumains comme butin de guerre. Dans la mesure où la Serbie n'obtiendrait pas gain de cause dans cette question, elle recourrait au plébiscite, aux principes wilsoniens. Pour

évoquer l'ambiance entre Alliés, il est intéressant de reproduire un large extrait des reprochés et arguments servis par la délégation serbe, notés dans le procès-verbal.

M. Cvijitch estime que les cartes roumaines sont purement fantaisistes... M. Vesnitch ne peut cacher sa surprise de ce que la Serbie et la Roumanie, appelées à exposer leur différend devant la Commission, soient traitées sur le même pied. Or la Serbie a pris part à la guerre du premier au dernier jour sans jamais fléchir. La Roumanie après avoir choisi son heure et s'être fait garantir par le traité le prix de son intervention... a conclu la paix avec l'ennemi.... Si les Grandes Puissances entendent considérer la Roumanie comme allié, la Serbie, que cette décision surprendrait fort, ne pourrait les suivre. En tous cas, elle ne peut reconnaître aucune valeur au traité d'alliance sur lequel les Roumains s'appuient pour revendiquer le Banat... l'ambition démesurée des Roumains tire habilement parti. (Procès-verbal de la séance du 25 février, Document no 198, pp. 355, 356 et 357.)

Il convient de souligner avec insistance que tous les procès-verbaux des réunions des Commissions des affaires roumaines et yougoslaves comme celles des Affaires tchécoslovaques ont été classés sans numéro.

L'attitude serbe laissait sous-entendre à la Commission que la Serbie, étant donné les largesses exagérées envers les Roumains, accepterait des compensations ailleurs. Le procès-verbal indique que la délégation serbe revendique le Bacska jusqu'à la ligne de démarcation fixée par la convention de Belgrade du 13 novembre 1918. Cependant la délégation serbe insiste que son gouvernement «pour le Bacska, où il se trouve en présence d'ennemi... ne se prêterait à cette consultation que si la Conférence décidait d'une manière générale de recourir à cette procédure pour résoudre les différends internationaux entre alliés et ennemis». (Ibidem, p. 357.)

L'attitude de la Serbie est devenue gênante et menaçante, voire dangereuse pour les Alliés d'autant plus que le gouvernement hongrois fondait tout espoir sur des principes solennellement déclarés par le président américain Wilson. En effet, les membres de la délégation américaine ont été disposés à accepter en premier, le principe du référendum ouvrant ainsi une brèche dangereuse dans l'unanimité de la Commission. Les Américains n'étaient pas parties prenantes dans le traité de Bucarest de 1916, d'une part, et les 14 points du président Wilson ont été en contradiction flagrante avec les clauses de ce traité secret, d'autre part. Lors de la séance du 2 mars, le délégué américain, le Dr Seymour, à propos du rattachement de Nagy-Károly et Szatmár-Németi, fait remarquer que «la proposition britannique ajouterait à la Roumanie 125 000 Magyars et seulement 2 000 Roumains... il est impossible d'accepter le point de vue britannique». (Document no 204, p. 379.)

En clair, la délégation serbe voulait faire savoir à la Commission que les largesses fantaisistes et sans bornes accordées à la Roumanie opportuniste devaient être également accordées à la Serbie qui a supporté, beaucoup plus que l'alliée roumaine incertaine, le fardeau de la guerre.

Le lendemain, une conférence de la paix a été convoquée à la hâte, dont le rapport établissait les frontières entre la Hongrie et la Roumanie. (Document no 199, pp. 358-359.) Ce rapport sans numéro a été signé par les représentants en chef des délégations française, britannique, italienne et américaine. Malgré cela, la Commission des affaires roumaines et yougoslaves se réunira tout simplement pour justifier les nouvelles frontières ou les nouvelles «délimitations» entre la Roumanie et la Hongrie.

À l'occasion de la réunion de la Commission, le 28 février, le procès-verbal atteste derechef le témoignage de partialité incontestable de la délégation française contre la Hongrie.

M. Laroche (France) a été le premier à invoquer ce principe pour certaines villes de Transylvanie, où l'administration hongroise a créé artificiellement des majorités magyares... mais il conteste l'application à la Bacska où les Serbes ont dû lutter contre l'administration hongroise... M. Laroche estime d'ailleurs... que la Commission ne doit pas, quel que soit son souci légitime d'impartialité, hésiter à faire pencher la balance du côté allié... M. Laroche est peu favorable à un arrangement qui ferait prendre pied aux Hongrois dans le Banat en introduisant ainsi l'ennemi entre deux alliées. (Document no 201, pp. 365-366.)

Le délégué italien, De Martino, est d'avis que dans l'intérêt du règlement stable de la paix, les Alliés ne peuvent pas négliger les «considérations ethniques et économiques, voire stratégiques qui seraient vitales pour cette puissance» - c'est-à-dire pour la Hongrie. Cependant, «la Délégation italienne, qui reste fidèle au traité de 1916, était disposée à donner à la Roumanie le Banat tout entier». (Ibidem, p. 367.)

Étant donné le désaccord à propos des frontières hungaro-yougoslaves et yougoslavo-roumaines, mettant en jeu l'attribution de la ville de Szeged et de sa région, la séance est ajournée au 2 mars.

Le 1er mars, Clemenceau, dans un télégramme secret (T.No.2138 BS/3 Secret) au général Franchet d'Esperey, indique déjà les «limites» de la Roumanie, (Transylvanie, P.P.) et de la Hongrie lesquelles correspondent aux frontières tracées par la commission. (Document no 202, p. 369.)

Clinchant, chargé d'affaires de France à Berne, dans une dépêche du 5 mars expédiée à Pichon, ministre français des Affaires étrangères, annexe des documents originaux et attire l'attention du gouvernement français sur le non respect de l'armistice par les Alliées et sur la situation du gouvernement hongrois.

Si dans les questions économiques les Alliés voulaient ne pas prêter l'oreille aux prétentions injustifiées des nationalités, le Gouvernement serait capable de maintenir un ordre parfait en Hongrie. Malheureusement, le démembrement du pays, l'occupation des mines, l'interruption du trafic, et les difficultés de ravitaillement qui en résultent ont provoqué dans tout le pays de graves désordres politiques et économiques. D'autre part, l'amertume causée par l'attitude intransigeante des Alliés rend chaque jour plus difficile la situation du Gouvernement, de sorte que l'on peut craindre une explosion prochaine du Bolchévisme.... La convention d'armistice n'est aucunement respectée. Chacune des ses prescriptions est journellement violée par les Autorités occupantes, militaires et civiles. Le gouvernement Hongrois proteste chaque fois auprès de la Commission ministérielle d'armistice, mais ses protestations restent sans réponse.... Il suffira de citer ici quelques exemple. Je viens de recevoir le télégramme suivant: Jeno Sebo, Chef de gare de Lupony (Lupény) a été assommé à coup de bâtons par les Roumains. (No 1766/1919 27 1.)

D'après un rapport télégraphique, les Roumains, ont dans la houillère de Vulona, fusillé l'ingénieur Westhof et administré la bastonnade à l'ingénieur en chef Pécsi. (No 1771/1919 30 1.)

Les Roumains font les déclarations les plus variées mais ils se conduisent, en réalité, comme s'ils étaient définitivement établis dans le pays. Nous pourrions multiplier les citations.... En ce qui concerne les revendications des divers États voisins, le Gouvernement Hongrois a accepté... la libre disposition des peuples. Il faut, par conséquent, donner à toutes les nations vivant sur le territoire de l'ancien Royaume de Hongrie la possibilité de faire usage de ce droit. (Document no 212, pp. 395-396-397.)

Dans une dépêche du 10 mars de Budapest (Document no 7 Confidentiel), le lieutenant-colonel Vix s'adresse au général de Lobit, commandant de l'armée de Hongrie, et précise que le 12 décembre 1918, lors de son séjour à Bucarest, le général en chef a «autorisé l'avance roumaine au-delà de la ligne d'armistice». Le 16 décembre... l'ordre était donné au général Berthelot de suspendre toute avance. Cet ordre n'aurait d'ailleurs été communiqué aux troupes roumaines qu'à la date du 24. Je ne sais si le Général Commandant l'A.F.O...» (A.F.O. a pris le nom de l'Armée de Hongrie dès le 1er mars 1919 sous le commandement du général de Lobit) «a été avisé de ces faits. En ce qui me concerne, je n'en ai jamais rien su». Le lieutenant-colonel informe le général qu'à son instigation, le gouvernement hongrois a accepté d'arrêter des principaux leaders bolchéviques. Il exprime l'avis selon lequel la moindre opération militaire hongroise aurait comme résultat de repousser l'armée roumaine en dehors de Transylvanie. (Document no 223, pp. 417-418.)

Lors des séances de la Commission des affaires roumaines, yougoslaves et tchécoslovaques, les 11, 13 et 18 mars 1919, les procès-verbaux révèlent que

les décisions définitives, comme le tracé des frontières, sont en train d'être rédigées. Fontenay, ministre à Belgrade, dans une dépêche du 18 mars a dressée au ministre français des Affaires étrangères, indique état d'esprit des «petits alliés». «Chacun de nos alliés, vainqueur ou ami des vainqueurs, escompte déjà les agrandissements, soit conquis et mérités, soit simplement promis et réclamés; chacun est impatient de s'installer dans ses nouvelles limites, on a annoncé que dans la sentence qui va être prononcée on ne tiendra compte que de la Justice...». (Document no 240, p. 461.)

Puisque ces documents ont été rédigés en ne tenant compte «que de la Justice» avec une majuscule, le général de Lobit, commandant de l'armée de Hongrie, dans un télégramme secret, adressé au général Berthelot, dont copie a été expédiée simultanément au général Farret, commandant des troupes d'occupation du Banat, au général de Gondrecourt à Arad, au lieutenant-colonel Vix à Budapest et aux chefs des 2e et 4e bureaux - (T. No 597/3 Secret) - les informe des scénarios à suivre.

Priorité d'opérations: 1. Je vais présenter demain au Comte Karolyi une lettre lui signifiant les décisions du congrès de la paix....» (Document no 248, p. 473.) En fait, il s'agit des décisions des Commissions des affaires roumaines, yougoslaves et tchécoslovaques dont celles-ci ne laissaient aucun doute sur le démembrement de la Hongrie. La fameuse note de Vix a définitivement dissipé le peu d'espoir du gouvernement Károlyi sur les intentions des Alliés. Suite à la présentation de ce document, le lieutenant-colonel donne les détails sur sa mission. (Document T.No 964/3S Budapest, 20 mars 1919).

Primo: J'ai notifié la décision de la Conférence ce matin à 10 heures au Comte Karolyi, assisté de Mr. Berinkey, président du conseil et de Mr. Bohn (Bohm), ministre de la guerre. Le colonel anglais Baker, le commandant italien Pentimalli, le capitaine américain Roosevelt, le capitaine Ameil m'accompagnaient... Quinto: j'ai rompu le débat en rappelant que je demandais pour le 21 mars à 18 heures une réponse catégorique avec des garanties et que j'étais prêt d'ici là à régler toutes les questions de détail qui me seraient soumises par le Gouvernement hongrois. Sexto: Cet entretien a pris fin à 11h15. Conseil des Ministres se réunit ce soir. (Document no 249, p. 474.)

Le 22 mars 1919, à 18 h., le ministre de France à Belgrade, Fontenay, adresse un télégramme à son ministre des Affaires étrangères Pichon, lui indiquant la démission du gouvernement Károlyi et la prise du pouvoir par les Bolcheviks en Hongrie. (Document T. nos 124-; 25. Très urgent).

Un Gouvernement de soviet s'est alors constitué (et) le comte Károlyi a donné sa démission. Le Gouvernement des soviets a aussitôt déclaré la guerre aux (Yougo-Slaves), aux Roumains, aux Serbes.... Tout se serait passé sans (difficulté) si on se fût borné à demander l'occupation par les

troupes françaises de toute la zone contestée.... La faute a été de vouloir qu'à l'abri du rideau de nos troupes, les Roumains s'emparent de toute cette (immense) région avant que la Conférence n'ait prononcé sa sentence. (Document no 250, p. 475.)

Le général de Lobit, commandant de l'armée de Hongrie, dans une dépêche de Belgrade du 24 mars, adressée au lieutenant-colonel Vix, en connaissance de la lettre de démission de Károlyi, commente l'événement en ces termes: «Cette décision se trouve en pleine contradiction avec la convention militaire d'armistice du 13 novembre 1918 et ne respectant pas les intérêts vitaux du pays (Hongrie, P.P.), elle pourrait entraver le développement et troubler la Paix. Le Gouvernement Hongrois qui n'était pas invité à la conférence de la Paix et ne pouvait prêter son concours à la décision se vit obligé de donner aujourd'hui sa démission». (Document no 266, p. 489.)

Le gouvernement démissionnaire libère les leaders bolcheviks de prison et ceux-ci proclament aussitôt l'avènement de la République des Conseils de Hongrie invitant la Russie révolutionnaire à les soutenir. Dans une dépêche (D.No 132) du 24 mars, le ministre Fontenay, en poste à Belgrade, fait savoir au ministre des Affaires étrangères, Pichon, que «Béla Kun salue Lénine comme chef du Proletariat international, lui demande une alliance offensive et défensive avec le Gouvernement des Soviets et lui annonce que l'Entente en voulant intervenir en faveur des ambitions territoriales roumaines a provoqué la révolte en Hongrie... ce qui, parut insupportable, ce fut l'agrandissement roumain à l'abri du rideau formé par nos lignes...». (Document no 262, p. 486.)

Dans un aide-mémoire du même jour, remis au prince Borghese, envoyé spécial italien, le Commissaire de peuple aux affaires étrangères de la République des Conseils de Hongrie, Béla Kun, réitère l'attitude non seulement de son gouvernement mais aussi celle du précédent. «Le gouvernement de la République des Conseils de Hongrie se déclare prêt à négocier les questions territoriales sur la base du principe du droit de l'auto-détermination des peuples et il interprète l'intégrité territoriale uniquement en conformité de ce principe». (Document no 268, p. 492.)

Dans cette situation, les représentants des nationalités, Roumains, Serbes et Tchécoslovaques, demandent d'établir les frontières définitives aussi vite que possible. Ainsi, par des notes adressées à Clemenceau le 25 mars, Kramer, président du Conseil et Beneš, ministre des Affaires étrangères tchécoslovaque demandent de «tracer la ligne de démarcation qui serait celle qui a été décidée par la Commission territoriale de sorte que nous puissions la considérer comme la ligne de démarcation définitive». (Document no 275, p. 497.)

Ce document confirme en même temps l'interprétation unilatérale des termes du traité de Belgrade du 13 novembre où «ligne de démarcation» était entendue comme frontière définitive entre la Hongrie et les États successeurs. Le lieutenant-colonel Vix, par contre, avait comme mission de faire croire au gouvernement de Károlyi qu'il s'agissait bel et bien des «limites» provisoires

susceptibles d'éviter l'affrontement entre les Magyars et les nationalités. En outre, l'avènement du bolchevisme en Hongrie jouait carrément en faveur de l'annexion des territoires promis au nom de la lutte contre le bolchevisme. Une autre dépêche de Benès à Pichon, ministre français des Affaires étrangères, le 26 mars, insiste «qu'il est absolument nécessaire» de le faire en vue de combattre le bolchevisme en Hongrie, d'empêcher son extension dans les pays limitrophes et de protéger les populations non magyares. (Cf. Document no 277, p. 500.)

Du 31 mars au 1er avril, le lieutenant-colonel Vix expédie au général de Lobit, commandant de l'armée de Hongrie, les comptes rendus, suivant la chronologie des événements. Le compte-rendu no 4 est révélateur dans l'explication de l'avènement du bolchevisme par le témoin français le plus renseigné.

La crise nationale est plus grave. Elle intéresse l'ensemble de la nation hongroise. Les abus commis par les Alliés surtout par les Roumains depuis décembre, n'ont fait que s'aggraver.... La notification de la décision des Alliés, décision qui comporte une nouvelle avance des roumains, eut l'effet d'une catastrophe.... L'annexion brutale des deux tiers de la Hongrie, au profit de nos Alliés Serbes, Roumains et Tchèques rencontrera dans tous les partis des adversaires irréductibles. Il n'est pas un qui puisse accepter de sang froid un pareil morcellement du pays.... Il n'est pas douteux que les Hongrois accepteront plus facilement le sort qu'il leur est réservé si les annexions faites à leur détriment pouvaient être précédées d'un plébiscite et si l'Entente consentait à recevoir une délégation de personnalités qualifiées pour le renseigner et pour discuter au point de vue technique les différentes questions qui intéressent le pays (questions ethniques, économiques, financières, questions des Seklers, etc...) (Document no 298, p. 531.)

Étant donné que tout était déjà décidé dès le début, les rapports présentés au Conseil suprême des Alliés par les Commissions des affaires roumaines, serbes et tchécoslovaques définissent les frontières de la Hongrie conformément aux procès-verbaux et aux délibérations antérieures. En outre, les projets d'articles à insérer dans les préliminaires de paix avec la Hongrie régissent, entre autres, la nationalité. Les actes commis par les armées roumaine, serbe, tchèque ou par les bandes armées, dès la fin de la guerre, avaient provoqué la fuite d'une partie de la population en particulier de Transylvanie. Ce procédé de nettoyage ethnique, décrit par le romancier hongrois Dezső Szabó dans «Le village à la dérive», a été complété par les Alliés.

L'article 4, concernant la citoyenneté roumaine stipule: «...les ressortissants hongrois qui se seraient établis sur ces territoires postérieurement au 1er janvier 1910 ne pourraient acquérir la nationalité roumaine qu'avec une autorisation de l'État roumain». (Document no 323, p. 581.) Les articles concernant les Magyars des territoires cédés à la Serbie et à la Tchécoslovaquie contiennent des mesures implicites amonçant ces États à pratiquer, dans les faits, des

politiques discriminatoires envers ces citoyens de seconde zone ou candidats à l'expulsion. Les statistiques falsifiées présentées (Annexe III) par le même document reflètent l'attitude des commissions. (Cf. Ibidem, p. 580.)

Il est utile de confronter ces données avec le compte rendu du 2e bureau de l'état-major de l'armée, (Document C.-R., no 1870. Confidentiel, Prague, le 17 juin 1919) dont la copie a été envoyée au ministre des Affaires étrangères et au maréchal Foch.

La Slovaquie se trouve actuellement presque entièrement envahie par les Magyars. Il est intéressant de noter que la population, au lieu d'opposer une résistance aide les Hongrois contre les Tchèques.... Le mouvement Slovaque hostile aux Tchèques grandit de jour en jour.... Si les Slovaques ne veulent plus de l'impérialisme tchèque, et ces faits peuvent être facilement contrôlés, en dépit des mensonges de Masaryk, Kramarcz (Kramar) et Benes, que vaut la puissance trop élargie de ce petit peuple trop orgueilleux, mégalomane au suprême degré, qui veut avoir un mandat sur tout le monde slave? Devant ces faits, que vaut la carte géographique dressée à Paris où les Tchèques doivent faire jonction avec les Roumains et la future Russie, puisque le plus important chaînon intermédiaire, le Slovaque, se révolte déjà? Ici apparaît encore une fois la faillite du principe accordant trop de confiance aux comités dits Nationaux, dont la seule raison d'être fut de mentir.... (Document no 437, p. 702.)



## **Budapest and New York Compared**

**Béla Bodo**

Thomas Bender and Carl E. Schorske, editors. *Budapest and New York: Studies in Metropolitan Transformation, 1870-1930*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1994. Pp. xiv, 400.

This book is a result of close cooperation between American and Hungarian historians. The idea of writing a comparative history of New York and Budapest emerged in the late seventies, when decreasing political tension made scholarly exchanges possible. Most of the Hungarian historians who contributed to the book had been already established scholars by that time. On the American side, except for Carl E. Schorske, the writers are members of the 'revisionist' school: they started their academic careers in the early 1970s. Thus, proximity in age and ethnic ties fostered by prominent émigré scholars prepared the ground for cooperation. Academic politics played an important role as well. Indeed, the book would have not been possible without the sharing of certain political ideas.

The American contributors describe themselves as members of a generation who turned against the consensus school of American historiography. Their main experience was the Vietnam War, which, at least temporarily, destroyed much of the nationalist arrogance and self-righteousness that had permeated American foreign policy and academic discourse after the Second World War. Material interests, such as the need to secure employment after graduation and to create a distinct profile in the profession, played a role in the generational revolt as well. Shocked by the carnage of the war, these young scholars increasingly turned their attention to the Third World and, to lesser extent, the Communist states. They argued that détente should be extended onto the field of scholarly production; works dealing with the history and culture of these parts of the world should be based upon ideas such as coexistence, cooperation and mutual understanding. Thus, the rejection of the Cold War fostered sympathy for the more enlightened and liberal members of the political and cultural elite in Eastern Europe. The result of this rapprochement was rather curious. By cooperating with the liberal members of the elite, whose legitimacy was at best suspect in the eyes of the ruled, many American scholars came to defend willy-nilly the existence of Communist regimes. The Communist elite were also apt to use

these relations to legitimize their power. We have to emphasize, however, that there was no conspiracy behind the sympathy of American liberals for the reform Communists. The reasons for this sympathy were more mundane. First, American intellectuals always had a very narrow understanding of the people of Central and Eastern Europe. As part of their Anglo-Saxon cultural heritage, many of them still considered Eastern Europeans unfit for Western culture or democracy. The alliance of many of the small nations in Central and Eastern Europe with Nazi Germany and the implication of the elite and indeed a significant part of the population in the Holocaust only re-enforced these negative emotions. Secondly, as children of the American enlightenment, scholars on this side of the Atlantic never fully understood the political and cultural traditions of this region. They viewed romantic nationalism, Christian Socialism and populism with suspicion and often misinterpreted these political movements as fascist. American intellectuals could communicate more easily with reform Communists since they, at least on the surface, used the language of the enlightenment. Secondly, members of the American political and cultural elite had the tendency of seeing the world in the dichotomy of left and right. They hardly realized that these categories did not automatically apply to other cultures. Mistaking the Communists as members of the left, many American liberals reasoned that the enemy of their opponents could easily become their friends. This logic suffered from the obvious weakness that even the reform Communists sought to preserve one of the most dysfunctional political systems in history. Thus, the American left allied themselves with people who were in fact conservative. This was a strange, although rather harmless, alliance not dissimilar to the good relations between American conservatives and military dictators in the Third World.

Unfortunately we know very little about the cultural and political odyssey of Hungarian historians. The book, however, suggests at least two myths about their professional careers during the Kádár regime. One is the idea that members of the historical profession have helped to maintain, and thus have an exclusive claim to, the progressive intellectual tradition of the turn of the century. Second is the belief that, in the 1960s, Hungarian historians broke completely with the dogmatic Marxism of their predecessors and embraced the neo-positivist "New Histories" of the West. The reality must have been more complex. First, there is no direct line of continuity between the works of these scholars and the progressive writers of the turn of the century: to my knowledge, no surviving giant of *Nyugat* generation, for example, saw the historians of the Kádár regime as the guardians of the progressive intellectual tradition. Secondly, the progressives had defined their identities against the state and its official culture. They were influenced by the highly erotic Secession movement and the voluntarist and revolutionary avant-garde. Thirdly, the progressive movement in Hungary did not follow any official lines. Apart from the shared revulsion against the semi-feudal social and political system, there was very little that kept this movement together. Very few among these progressives, including those

who participated in, or at least sympathized with, the revolution of 1918 and the Soviet Republic a year later, ended up in the Communist camp.

After 1948, Hungarian historical profession became rapidly integrated into the Moscow school. For Erzsébeth Andics, József Révai, Emma Lederer and others, history merely provided the opportunity to demonstrate the eternal validity of political directives and simplified philosophical ideas. However, writers who contributed to the book under review here, belong not the first but the second generation of historians. They reached adulthood in the Stalinist 1950s and began their careers under the tutelage of turn-coat liberal or Stalinist intellectuals in the 1960s. It could not have been otherwise, since the profession had been completely purged in the previous two decades. It is a telling sign about the selection of these future scholars that they, unlike the progressives at the turn of the century or their American colleagues in the 1960s, never turned openly against their predecessors. There was no student revolt in Hungary in the 1960s; not the Vietnam War but the crushing of the Czech rebellion in 1968 was these scholars' most important formative experience. As a result of their careful selection and intellectual conformity, Hungarian historians never dared to challenge the official culture as directly as did their American counterparts. While American scholars prided themselves on their opposition to the official political culture, the way to success in Hungary required excellent political instincts and a high degree of adaptability to the ideology and political practice of regime. Hungary's historians of the Kádár era knew that their careers had been built on the ruins of the professional and private lives of the pre-Communist generation; they were aware that their position depended upon their usefulness to the regime. They knew that they had to defend the system and suppress democratic impulses and rebellious inclinations. Thus, the argument in the book that these historians "turned away from Marxism in all its forms" is dishonest. It would be very easy to show that in methodology, language and, especially, in political behaviour, the followers of the "New History" did not break with the official Eastern European historiography at least until the 1980s. Moreover, there is nothing wrong with Marxist history if it is pursued with intellectual integrity. The argument that the historians in question learned exclusively from the West, distorts the basic reality of the profession in Hungary in the 1960s and 1970s.. Hungarian intellectual life, with the possible exception of literature, could not recover from the cultural devastation of a lost war and an unsuccessful revolution. A deeply anti-intellectual regime destroyed the social sciences and prevented their revival through political intimidation, lack of funding and careful selection of conformist scholars. As a result, the state of the Hungarian historical profession became characterized by provincialism and conformity. Only a few historians, many but not all of them members of the old generation, could rise above the suffocating intellectual climate of the Kádár years. These tentative arguments do not want to paint a completely negative picture. A sense of justice and intellectual curiosity led a few members of this generation to break with their own past. I would even argue that the past is perhaps less important

than the present or the future for Hungarian historians. Unlike in East Germany, the historical profession in Hungary was not purged after the collapse of the Communist regime in 1989. The majority of Hungarian scholars have maintained and indeed increased their influence in the last few years. They are still productive and enjoy respect as authors and teachers. For the lack of a viable alternative, they are the best placed to represent the Hungarian social sciences abroad and pave the way for a new generation of historians at home.

The book has five parts, each discussing various aspects of social, political and cultural life in Budapest and New York between 1880 and 1945. The first part deals with political ideology and participation. In an informative essay, Zsuzsa L. Nagy examines the fate of urban progressivism under the tenure of István Bárczy, as mayor, before the outbreak of the First World War. In contrast to its American counterpart, she argues, urban progressivism in Budapest was represented by a few politicians elected on a very restricted franchise. The other important characteristic of this municipal system was *virilism*, which implied that payers of higher taxes enjoyed special privileges. Influential members of the German ethnic and the Jewish religious minorities played a prominent role in municipal politics before 1918. The position of minorities changed for the worse after the unsuccessful 1918-1919 revolutions. Following World War I, even Germans found it prudent to be discrete about their ethnicity. As a result of the counter-revolution, no Jew could hold municipal office in Budapest between the wars. The abolition of the system of *virilism* during the Bethlen administration in the early 1920s only strengthened the conservative gentry's hold on the city and the state. Liberalism in Budapest was also dealt a mortal blow in 1918. Even earlier, however, there were telling signs that liberalism in Hungary could not adapt itself to the age of nationalism and mass politics. Many of the progressives and socialists either emigrated after the revolutions of 1918 and 1919 or joined the radical, socialist and populist groups between the wars. Yet, though Nagy's essay is objective to the point of dryness, it lacks a clear focus. In my opinion, the economic and social developments of Budapest should have been the subject of a second essay. More should have been said about various movements and parties, such as the Social Democratic Party, which exerted considerable influence over the political life of the city in this period.

David C. Hammack paints a very different picture of New York at the turn of the twentieth century. Between 1870 and 1930 the city not only underwent an incredible expansion but its character was also transformed: in this period, New York turned from a mercantile city into the centre of America's new manufacturing corporations. The ethnic composition of the city changed as new ethnic groups from Eastern and Southern Europe left their mark on the city's political culture. In New York, the federal government never had a strong influence over the municipal administration; its hold actually weakened after 1880. Loose ties to the federal government and the countryside allowed the development of strong local identities. The political elite in the city came to be

dominated by a new merchant class at the expense of the old patricians. The members of the new elite identified with the urban progressive movement on social and political issues. They openly catered to the ethnic vote. Hammack argues that in New York ethnicity rather than class or ideology determined the loyalty of voting groups. The corrupt political machine fulfilled a useful function: it opened access to the political arena and helped to integrate individuals and ethnic groups into a democratic political culture. In New York, liberalism addressed itself to the pressing social and political problems of the day. The association of progressivism with liberalism ensured the survival of the nineteenth century liberal tradition — liberalism grew into democracy. On the whole, Hammack paints a rather flattering picture of New York politics. Recent literature, however, questions the social and political character of the progressive movement. Many historians discern a conservative trend in both the urban and the rural wing of this movement. Some, such as Gabriel Kolko, go so far as to argue that the intellectual and social climate remained conservative in the United States in this period. Moreover, a parallel reading of the two essays leaves the false impression that Budapest failed to conform to the pattern set by dynamic cities such as New York. In fact, municipal politics in Budapest was far from unique. The decline of liberalism was a general European development. The other great cities of the Habsburg Empire, such as Vienna and Prague, experienced a similar trend. If anything, the survival of liberalism was an American, or at best a French and Anglo-Saxon, phenomenon.

The second part of the book deals with the expansion of public spaces in the two cities. On the Hungarian side, Gábor Gyáni examines the original ideas of Christian Heinrich Nebbien, who planned Budapest's largest park, the Városliget, in the first half of the nineteenth century. The Városliget was created as a tribute to the nation. It was a national monument, where important national events, such as the Millennial Exhibition of 1896, was held. Gyáni argues that in Budapest the occupation of spaces in parks and other public areas by various groups reinforced rather than blurred cultural and social differences. Parks such as the Városmajor and the Népliget became appropriated by the workers, while the Margitsziget (Margit Island) and the Dunakorzó (Danube Walk) were frequented mainly by the middle and the upper classes. Even in places such as the Városliget, which was open to all classes, different parts of the park were occupied by different social groups. The appropriation and division of public space took place without serious challenges either from the lower or the middle and upper classes. Instead of parks, streets leading to the city centre became contested areas during turbulent events such as the annual May Day parades. Finally Gyáni describes the topography of the "Bloody-Red Thursday" on 23 May 1912. He relates the revolt to similar European events such as the Paris Commune and riots in Italy, where workers, like their Budapest counterparts, first attempted to conquer the city, and then having failed to do that, returned to their residential areas to defend themselves.

While Gábor Gyáni examines the intentions of the planners of the Városliget, Elizabeth Blackmar and Roy Rosenzweig highlight the social conflicts that developed in Central Park in New York. Unlike the Városliget, which was a national monument, Central Park was envisaged as a refuge from the hurly-burly of city life; it was to offer an alternative to commercial culture and entertainment. The designer of the park, Frederick Law Olmsted, created a rigid set of rules that served to enforce respectable behaviour in the park. The location of the park and the exclusion of a group of activities such as picnicking, gambling, hawking and peddling — activities that had been traditionally associated with the lifestyle of the lower-middle and working classes — ensured that Central Park preserved its middle-class character in the first decades after its creation in 1859. However, this character became increasingly challenged by the end of the 1870s. The rapid expansion of New York's boundaries, improved transportation, influx of a new group of immigrants from Eastern and Southern Europe, shorter working hours and rising wages made the park accessible at least on Sundays to the lower orders. The unrelenting campaign by religious, ethnic and working class organizations to democratize access to, and use of the park, finally proved successful. Under immense popular pressure, the Democratic city administration gradually relaxed the park rules after 1870. By the turn of the century, the rigid spatial boundaries between social classes were broken down and the park became an experimental field of, and indeed, a tribute to democracy. The two essays make very enjoyable reading and greatly promote our understanding of the development and use of public space before the outbreak of the First World War. Methodologically, Elizabeth Blackmar's and Roy Rosenzweig's essay follows a more modern approach by emphasizing the users' rather than the planners' point of view. Gyáni's work, on the other hand, makes more use of comparative history and places the use of public spaces in Budapest into a general European context.

The book's third section discusses the role of ethnicity. Deborah Dash Moore shows that in New York neighbourhoods were defined by their ever changing ethnic composition. Ethnicity also played an important role in the city's economy. Many immigrants were employed in ethnic businesses; others obtained their jobs in local factories and businesses thanks to their national connections. Ethnic groups tended to carve out a place in the job market until they made up the majority of owners and workers in certain industries and trades. The city also adapted itself to the different consumption patterns of various immigrant groups. Moore demonstrates, for example, that the construction of houses catered to the different expectations of Finns, Germans, Italians and Jews. Unlike New York, Budapest did not tolerate ethnic differences in residence, employment and consumption. István Teplán argues that the building style of the family houses in the St. Imre City in the outskirts of Budapest reflected the social conservatism and nationalism of their immigrant inhabitants rather than their geographical origins. Perhaps more than any other pair of essays, the reader can recognize important differences in the approach to social

history between Hungarian and American scholars. While Moore's essay flows well, Teplán often breaks the continuity of the essay with statistics and references. In my opinion, these should be placed in the footnotes. Moreover, references to authors such as Umberto Eco and Roland Barthes distract attention from the main line of the story. Generally they serve no useful purpose aside from demonstrating the author's erudition. Moore, on the other hand, strives for simplicity and clarity both in organization and expression. While she pays adequate attention to the Jewish part of the story, perhaps more examples from other, incidentally well researched, communities, such as the Italian or the Irish, would have helped the general reader to understand better the diversity and ethnic changes in New York.

The fourth part of the book deals with popular culture in the two cities. Robert W. Snyder explains how vaudeville served to integrate New Yorkers of different ethnicity and class into consumers of popular culture. This form of entertainment was rooted in particularized ethnic communities. Vaudeville performers such as Eddie Cantor, Belle Baker and Sophie Tucker began their careers in ethnic theatres. The gradual assimilation of the performers and the adaptation of their shows to the taste of a multi-ethnic audience turned these actors and their shows into agents of cultural integration. Neil Harris' chapter attributes the same integrating role to the press. Popular dailies created a unified consumer market that tied the population of the city together through gossips, scandals, puzzles and popularized political events. On the Hungarian side, Péter Hanák shows how operetta fulfilled the same role in the multi-ethnic Habsburg Empire. Although the nationalities could hardly agree upon anything, their shared indulgence in the music of Strauss, Broch, Lehár and Kálmán fostered a common cultural identity in the region. As Géza Buzinkay explains, comic weeklies played on the ethnic prejudices of their readers as well. Yet the mainly anti-Jewish jokes lost their appeal to the mainly Jewish editors as anti-Semitism became a dangerous political force after 1918. Buzinkay also shows how Yiddish and German jokes found their ways into Hungarian culture. Yet my impression is that the description of Budapest jokes as mere adaptations of German-Yiddish jokes is overdrawn. Even as foreign products, these jokes underwent an important transformation during translation. Linguistic and cultural environment made them Hungarian in the same way as German and French words and expressions had become integral parts of the Hungarian language and culture a century earlier. Secondly, the emphasis on the weeklies and their mainly lower middle-class readers omits the fact that the majority of the city's inhabitants were still workers. In Budapest, like other great cities such as Berlin and Paris, workers and artisans left an indelible mark on popular culture. Péter Eszterházy's works show the survival of this tradition today. On the American side, I feel that the statement that "nothing was more American than being ethnic" reflects more the consensus on the benefits of multiculturalism in the 1980s than the cultural reality at the turn of the century. New York in the 1890s was not the city of today; as the recent election campaign has

shown, America, including New York, is still rife with anti-immigrant sentiments. Apart from politics, where American nativism and racism manifested itself in the terror of the Ku Klux Klan, restrictive immigration laws, open discrimination of the job market, and the shameful treatment of Indians and African-Americans, immigrants had little reason to feel at home in New York. A better description of immigrants' feeling can be found in literary works such as the classical novel by Carlo Levi. In *Christ Stopped at Eboli*, Italian immigrants regularly escaped from the city to the countryside. Integration for these people meant a loss of identity, conflict between generations, and inevitable assimilation. The agents of this process were not only popular culture but schools, hospitals, police and, later, the army.

The book also discusses genres of high culture such as painting and literature. In one of the best-written essays, Wanda M. Corn explains the transformation of New York painting under the impact of the avant-garde. Until the first decade of the twentieth century, Americans used visual techniques borrowed from the painting of natural scenes to capture the dynamism of the city. Skyscrapers functioned as majestic mountains, whose height and graceful immobility only emphasized the faceless character of traffic and vitality of the masses in motion below. These techniques changed, however, before the outbreak of the First World War. Nature disappeared and the urban vision of New York was reduced to a few motives symbolizing modernity. Greater abstraction, expressionism and the distortion of space came to suggest power, virility, energy — the same attributes that painters and writers sought to project about America. As Éva Forgács demonstrates, however, modern painters in Budapest did not use the capital city as the symbol of modernity. Instead, they tried to discover their Hungariannes in the simplicity and purity of the countryside. Moreover, many of the progressive painters who did pay some attention to the modernity of Budapest were forced to emigrate after 1919. The question is how special were Hungarian painters in this regard? Was the abandonment of the city by its painters and writers a regression and a sign of backwardness as Forgács' essay suggests? Indeed, other cities such as Vienna and Prague were hardly ever used as symbols of modernity. The development of visual symbols that equated New York with the essence of modernity was the result of what could be coined as an "American ideology." This ideology signalled a break with the European tradition that had sought timeless perfection not in isolation but through constant references to the great achievements of the past.

Philip Fisher's essay shows a similar trend in literature. Naturalism, which was an international phenomenon, helped American writers to define the distinctiveness of New York from other cities and the countryside. As with the press, Fisher argues, literature served to transcend ethnic boundaries and create a democratic urban culture. On the Hungarian side, Miklós Lackó paints a rather unflattering picture of Hungarian writers and poets at the turn of the century. In his interpretation, Hungarian writers made little use of urban dialect and rarely turned to the social problems of the city. With the possible exception of Ferenc



Molnár's novels, the city is portrayed as an unfriendly and alien place. Lackó argues that Hungarian writers continued to draw too much upon the vernacular of the peasantry. They remained preoccupied with the national question; individual modernism hardly found an authentic voice in Hungary. I am not sure how special Hungary was in this respect. German writers of the period, Thomas Mann for example, were equally interested in the social and national questions of the day. It is equally mistaken to describe Endre Ady, Mihály Babits, Dezső Kosztolányi and Árpád Tóth as newcomers to city culture. These writers transcended not only the cultural barriers between Budapest and the countryside but they also modernized Hungarian language and raised Hungary's literature to a European level. In my opinion, the fashionable Hungarian view that the country's literature could never escape the prison of nationalism and provincialism is highly overdue for revision. Too much self-hatred is contained in this sentiment; if anything it was Hungarian literature and music, rather than the social sciences that formulated and answered questions of universal relevance.

*Budapest and New York* contains excellent essays from several prominent American and Hungarian historians. By complementing the similar works by Péter Hanák<sup>1</sup> and John Lukacs,<sup>2</sup> this book gives an additional impetus to research into Hungarian social history. It also broadens the horizon of the reading public on both sides of the Atlantic. By comparing Budapest with one of the metropolises of the world, the book raises the status of the Hungarian capital and stirs interest among the American public in the history and culture of a remote part of the world. Despite these merits, however, I think that the book makes for poor comparative history. The book concentrated too much on politics and culture. At least two essays should have been devoted exclusively to economic and social developments. The essays hardly ever refer to each other; the introduction by Carl E. Schorske and Thomas Bender describes but does not analyze the similarities and differences between the cities. Moreover, there are very few similarities between Budapest and New York; in fact, there is virtually no single factor that was shared exclusively by these two cities. In the case of New York, a comparison with London or Montreal would have yielded more rewards. Similarly, a comparison of Budapest with Prague, Dresden, Vienna and Belgrade would probably be more fruitful. Nevertheless, both as a feat of international cooperation and a stimulus for further research, the book deserves the highest praise.

---

<sup>1</sup> Hanák Péter, *A Kert és a Műhely*. Budapest, Gondolat. 1988.

<sup>2</sup> John Lukacs, *Budapest 1900: A Historical Portrait of a City and Its Culture*. New York, 1988.



## **An Encyclopedia of Medieval Hungarian History: The Achievement of the "Szeged School" of Medieval Hungarian Historical Studies.**

**Steven Béla Várdy**

*Korai Magyar Történeti Lexikon (9-14. század)* [Early Hungarian Historical Lexicon (9th-14th centuries)]. Editor-in-Chief: Gyula Kristó; editors: Pál Engel and Ferenc Makk. Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1994. 755 pp., 17 foldout historical maps, 31 in-text historical maps, 8 one to six pages long genealogical tables, 28 in-text genealogical lists, 22 in-text list of royal, provincial, and ecclesiastical officials.

In English-language historiography, historical dictionaries, lexicons, and encyclopedias are available in scores and even hundreds on almost every topic or sub-topic of history, and on most parts of the world. In contrast, Hungarian historical writing has never placed too much emphasis on producing historical encyclopedias and dictionaries. Thus, outside of basic multivolume encyclopedias (e.g. *A Pallas Nagy Lexikona*, *Révai Nagy Lexikona*, *Új Idők Lexikona*, *Új Magyar Lexikon*, etc.) and various biographical dictionaries (e.g. *Szinnyey's Magyar Írók*, *Gulyás's Magyar Írók*, *Irodalmi Lexikon*, *Magyar Irodalmi Lexikon*, *Magyar Életrajzi Lexikon*, *Új Magyar Irodalmi Lexikon*, etc.), historians have no encyclopedia-like works to turn to for ready reference concerning their discipline. This is all the more unusual, as during the past three decades the Hungarian Academy of Sciences has published numerous one- and multivolume lexicons and encyclopedias on such diverse subjects as philosophy, music, world literature, ethnography, art, and even on the city of Budapest. Historians, however, are forced to consult basic histories and multivolume historical syntheses in order to locate the needed pieces of information, even though finding them in such works is much more cumbersome and difficult than locating them in historical lexicons. The appearance of the volume under review has now eliminated some of these problems, especially with respect to medieval Hungarian history.

The *Early Hungarian Historical Lexicon* is indeed an impressive volume. It must have been a formidable undertaking to accomplish, even though the original intentions of the editors were not fully realized. As revealed by Editor-in-Chief, Gyula Kristó, in his preface to the volume, their original goal was

to produce a multivolume historical encyclopedia on the period stretching from the Hunnic invasions of the 4th-5th centuries to the end of the Anjous and the rise of the Luxemburgs to the Hungarian throne.

Initiated in the early 1980s, the early results of this project were incorporated into a small booklet that was published in 1987 and contained twenty-six articles. But then, having come to the conclusion that they lacked the needed manpower and the necessary funds to carry the project to its logical conclusion, the editors decided to salvage it by preparing a more limited one-volume work on the period between ca. 800 A.D. and the late 14th century. They did this by utilizing the already existing articles, complementing them with many shorter ones, and then turning the projected "encyclopedia" into a "lexikon" — even though many of the enclosed entries remained sufficiently extensive and detailed to qualify as encyclopedia articles. Thus, although called a "historical lexikon," the final product is really a kind of half-lexikon and half-encyclopedia. Yet, whatever one calls it, the *Early Hungarian Historical Lexikon* is an impressive work that is bound to make its mark upon the study and research of medieval Hungarian history.

It is a large, folio-size volume of 755 pages, with double columns, which, if reduced to the normal size, would make a book of about 1500 pages. It contains over 2,000 articles, written by 170 scholars, most of whom — but not all — are Hungarians from Hungary. Those from abroad with the exception of Juan Cabello — are all Hungarians from the surrounding states that used to be part of Historic Hungary and thus have large Hungarian minorities. It is lamentable — and this is one of the shortcomings of the volume — that the work is virtually devoid of contributions by Western scholars, even of ex-Hungarians who are working and writing in one of the many European or American institutions of higher learning and research. Thus, the list of contributors does not contain the names of such well known Hungarian medievalists abroad as those of János M. Bak, Imre Boba, Thomas von Bogyay, Leslie S. Domonkos, Astrik L. Gabriel, Denis Sinor, and Szabolcs de Vajay — not to speak of a number real American, German, French, British, and Japanese (i.e. Toru Senga) historians, who could have contributed to the volume. This is lamentable indeed, for the presence of these foreign and ex-Hungarian scholars could have added some international flavour to this unusually useful and needed work.

In conjunction with the 170 collaborators, it should also be pointed out that the list lacks not only some noted Western scholars, but also several well-known Hungarian scholars from Hungary and Transylvania, who normally should have been included. These include such well known scholars of medieval history as Antal Bartha, Károly Czeglédy, György Györffy, Zsigmond Jakó, György Székely, and perhaps a few others. We can only presume that some of them were eliminated by politics (i.e. Jakó of Transylvania), while others are absent as a result of the well-known antagonism and scholarly rivalry between Hungary's two important centres of medieval studies: Szeged and Budapest.

Although lacking an international flavour, and missing some prominent Hungarian contributors, the *Early Hungarian Historical Lexikon* is not a provincial work. It is rather a very impressive volume that sweeps through the whole region of Central and Eastern Europe, and occasionally even Western Europe, Near East, and Inner Asia. It concentrates on the Magyars and on Historic Hungary, but it also covers all of the surrounding areas, countries, provinces, and peoples who have interacted with the Magyars. Thus, in addition to extensive essays on the region's current and former nationalities and ethnic groups — such as the Alans, Arabs, Austrians, Avars, Bashkirs, Blaks [Vlachs], Bolgar-Turks, Bosnians, Bulgarians, Byzantines, Chuvats, Croats, Cumans, Czechs, East Franks, Eskils, Germans, Greeks, Ismaelites [Izmaelites], Italians, Jews, Kabars, Kangars, Karakitays, Karolingians, Karuls, Khazars, Kimeks, Kipchaks, Kirghiz, Magyars, Moldavian Changos, Mongols, Moravians, Oguz, Palóc, Pechenegs, Poles, Rumanians, Russians, Sabirs, Saxons of Transylvania and Upper Hungary, Serbs, Slavs, Slovaks, Slovenes, Székelys [Seklars], Türks, Uyghurs, Ukrainians, Ungrovlachs, Vallons, Vardars, Varhuns [Varkonys], Volga Bulgars, Wangars, Yaziges [Jász] — it also supplies lengthy articles on the interrelationship between the Magyars and many of these and other nations and nationalities. The later include essays on Arab-Hungarian, Aragonian-Hungarian, Austrian-Hungarian, Bashkir-Hungarian, Bavarian-Hungarian, Bosnian-Hungarian, Byzantine-Hungarian, Carinthian-Hungarian, Croato-Hungarian, Czech-Hungarian, Dalmatian-Hungarian, Danube-Bulgar-Hungarian, English-Hungarian, French-Hungarian, German-Hungarian, Hunnic-Hungarian, Italian-Hungarian, Khazar-Hungarian, Neapolitan-Hungarian, Norman-Hungarian, Pecheneg-Hungarian, Polish-Hungarian, Romanian-Hungarian, Russian-Hungarian, Serbian-Hungarian, Styrian-Hungarian, Venetian-Hungarian, and Volga-Bulgar-Hungarian inter-relationships, as well as on Hungary's relations with the Kingdom of Jerusalem and with the Papal Court. The list of these essays does not include articles on Slovak-Hungarian, Sloven-Hungarian, Ottoman Turkish-Hungarian, and Ukrainian-Hungarian interaction. But this is undoubtedly so because some of these nations did not as yet exist as distinct ethnic entities in those centuries (e.g. Slovaks and Ukrainians), while others did not as yet play a meaningful role in Hungarian history (e.g. Ottoman Turks and Slovenes).

A number of the nationalities or ethnic groups are not included among the entries, others are not cited with their internationally known names, while still others are cited in a way that is not commonly known to the average layman in Hungary or abroad. As an example, there is no separate essay on the Huns, who are mentioned only in connection with the rejected theory of common Hunnic-Hungarian descent. The "Vlachs" cross referenced as "Blaks" are mentioned only as some pre-Romanian inhabitants of the Carpathian Basin, who may have been Franks or others, but not in conjunction with the inhabitants of 14th through 19th century Moldavia and Wallachia, who in the mid-19th century had renamed themselves Rumanians. True, the latter can be found under the term "Ungrovlachs," but that is a term, which is unfamiliar to most average users. Thus, very

few would look for them under there. Also strange is the complete absence of the term "Oláh or Oláhok" by which the Rumanians [Vlachs] have been known in Hungary until the early or mid-20th century. It should have been included at least for cross reference purposes. Its absence seems to have been dictated by political considerations. This also holds true for the term "Tót or Tótok," which in common usage at least to the average Hungarian had "always" referred to the Slovaks of former Upper Hungary. The terms included, but only in conjunction with the inhabitants of medieval Slavonia [*Tótország*], which few Hungarians know ever existed. Certainly, far less than one in a hundred educated Hungarians would know that this term is supposed to mean Slavonians, instead of Slovaks. Thus, unless this Lexicon was prepared specifically for specialists in medieval Hungarian history, this phenomenon should have been pointed out and this term should also have been discussed in conjunction with the Slovaks.

These shortcomings notwithstanding, the *Early Hungarian Historical Lexicon* is a mighty work, and one that will be of great help both to historians and to the laymen for many years to come. Moreover, its very existence will be a catalyst for further research. The reason is that even unwittingly, it points to some of the white spots that still have to be filled by future historians.

The editors have to be commended for their liberality in their treatment of the individual contributions. It is quite evident that they did not try to practice *Gleichschaltung*, but permitted each author to express his or her views concerning a specific topic. They also encouraged their contributors to present both sides of major controversies, before coming to their own conclusions. This is evident from many of the enclosed essays. Also commendable is the fact that, while using primarily Hungarian terms, they cross-referenced them to their well known Latin variants (e.g. *évkönyv* = *annales*, *kegyúri jog* = *ius patronatus*, *királyi udvar* = *curia regia*, *nádor* = *comes palatinus*, *püspök* = *episcopus*, etc.). This also holds true for geographical names. They used the Hungarian versions that were official in the Kingdom of Hungary, but the same time they also cross-referenced these terms to other variants (e.g. Brasso = Corona = Kronstadt = Brasov, Kassa = Košice, Kolozsvár = Klausenburg = Cluj-Napoca, Pozsony = Pressburg = Bratislava, Ragusa = Dubrovnik, etc.). Moreover, they also indicated their current locations, if not in Hungary. They likewise worked out an acceptable system of transliteration of Arab, Greek, and Cyrillic Slavic terms that takes this transliteration uniform and easily comprehensible.

Before closing with a general commendation and praise for the scholar ship that went into this work, I would like to point out a few common omissions, as well as some of the rejections that are evident from this lexicon. The omissions include "*hét vezér*" [seven chiefs] and "*hét törzs*" [seven tribes] that are much more commonly used terms than "*hétmagyar*" [*hetumoger*] that has been included. Thus, while the names of all of the conquering tribes and most of the tribal leaders are given separate entries, it is virtually impossible to find a listing of these tribes and their alleged leaders as preserved, rightly or wrongly, by Anonymus in his *Gesta Hungarorum*.

The "rejections" include the short shrifting of Gyula László's "theory of double conquest" [*kettős honfoglalás*]. It is given a separate entry, but only to discredit it completely. While this may well be a valid scholarly point of view, what is bothersome is that this attitude is so pervasive that it leads to the total rejection of the notion that proto-Magyars or Magyar-like peoples may in fact have settled in the Carpathian Basin perhaps in several waves much before the Árpáadian conquest of the late 9th century.

The other "rejection" has to do with Great Moravia [*Moravia Magna*], a tiny 9th-century Slavic state, which 19th century Slovak Romanticism had reshaped into the "Great Moravian Empire." More recently, serious scholars have come up with the notion that this "Great Moravia" was located really on the southern Morava river in present-day Serbia. While this view may not be acceptable to most scholars, it is a sufficiently serious and well-founded scholarly theory that it should have been mentioned, along with its primary proponents: Imre Boba in the United States and Péter Püspöki Nagy in former Czechoslovakia and Hungary.

Having made my remarks, let me re-emphasize that, notwithstanding these omissions and disagreements, I regard the *Early Hungarian Historical Lexicon* a work of magnificent scholarship. It will help and influence virtually everyone who has an interest in medieval Hungarian and East-Central European history. Although its contributors come from all over Hungary, it is undoubtedly the product of the great "Szeged School" of Medieval Hungarian History which could, and perhaps should be called the "Kristó School." Gyula Kristó is a historian of tremendous scholarly capacity and proportions, who virtually single handed made the University of Szeged [JATE] into a primary centre of medieval studies in Hungary and East Central Europe. At the same time, he created a "school" that none of his financially better endowed Budapest colleagues were able to do. This is also indicated by the fact that it was Szeged, and not Budapest, that produced this extremely useful pioneer historical lexicon.

Many of the contributors of this volume, including co-editor Ferenc Makk, are Kristó's ex-students. And the scholarly productivity of the Szeged Centre of Medieval Studies can only be called stupendous. It is to be lamented that neither Kristó, nor his Centre, is as well known in Western Europe and North America as they deserve to be known. Perhaps it will be this volume that will make the difference, especially if it will also be published in English. In closing, I can only express my admiration, while at the same time encourage Gyula Kristó and his colleagues to continue this work, so as to come up ultimately with the originally proposed multivolume "Encyclopedia of the Early History of Hungary and the Hungarians" (p. 5).





Forthcoming in 1996:

**Special Issue:**

**Regent Miklós Horthy, István Horthy  
and the Second World War\***

Introduction, by N.F. DREISZIGER

István Horthy's Election as Vice-Regent in 1942, by RITA PÉNTEK

Miklós Horthy and Edmund Veessenmayer: Hungarian-German  
relations after March 1944, by PÁL PRITZ

Edmund Veessenmayer on Horthy and Hungary: An American Military  
Intelligence Document, introduced and edited by N.F. DREISZIGER

Miklós Horthy and the Allies, 1945-1946: Two Documents,  
by THOMAS SAKMYSTER

The Admiral on Horseback: A New Biography of Miklós Horthy,  
A review article by MARIO FENYO

and more...

\*contents and titles tentative





