

EAST-EUROPEAN PROBLEMS

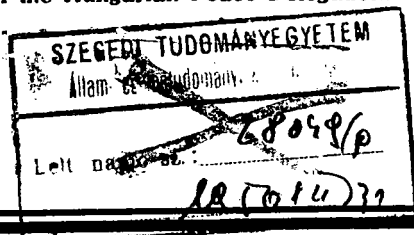
Nº 1.



The Peace-Treaty Proposed to Hungary

By

Count Albert Apponyi,
President of the Hungarian Peace Delegation.



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BUDAPEST
FERDINAND PFEIFER (ZEIDLER BROTHERS)

A TISZAEV. EG. KÖRÜLET
MISKOLCZI (EPERJESI) JÓGAKADÉMIAJÁNAK

11135

A Magyar Egyetemi és
Főiskolai Hallgatók Országos
Szövetségének tulajdona.

Ajándéku
örökös letétbe helyezve
1924-ben

a tiszai ág. hitv. ev. egyház-
kerület miskolczi (eperjesi)
jogakadémiájának tanári
könyvtárában.

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The Peace-Treaty offered to Hungary stands on the basis of one-sided information. Hungary never got a chance to represent the facts of her own problem from her own point of view; her enemies, her rivals, those who coveted her territories, they alone had a hearing. No wonder then that it became a perfect model of incongruity.

Let us give its outlines, in as few words as possible. It takes away from Hungary two thirds of her territory and of her population; it gives, to what is left of her, frontiers, defenceless, everywhere open to hostile invasion; it deprives her — by cutting off the peripheral regions — of almost all her wood-land, pasture-grounds, iron-ore, salt, oil, bituminous gas, water-power, of the greater part of her manufacturing establishments and of her coal-mines; it dissects the natural unity of her riversystem, so as to make impossible a rational system of water-regulation, which means that floods and dryness will alternate in the central plain left to her; it dissects the natural economic interdependence of the lowland and the mountainous border-districts and the whole system of communications based on it; it reduces her territory to the great central plain and her economic life to a merely agricultural one; but, at the same time, it deprives her agriculture, the only source of prosperity left to her, of every chance of progress — nay, of maintaining its present standard — by cutting it off, as we have seen, from all its raw-materials and from all its natural markets and by handing it over to the mercies of non-regulated waters. On this reduced and impoverished rump is laid to a large extent the burden of the national-debt contracted by the whole country, before its

mutilation, and the further burdens, undefined in numbers, resulting from the principle of "*reparations*". No account is taken of the fact that this country, after having suffered, like all the belligerents, from the war, has been plundered by four months of Bolshevik rule and other three months of Roumanian occupation. Payments are exacted from her without delay in her present state of distraction, which would have ruined her in the brightest days of her economic prosperity. Her commercial policy, her river-navigation are submitted to restrictions and regulations which make economic revival all but impossible. But this is not all. As we shall further see, flourishing Magyar towns — seats of learning — some of them lying on the new borderline or next to it, are taken from Hungary and subjected to the yoke of less cultured nations; immense cultural values, the fruit of patient Magyar intellectual work, are thereby destroyed. Deadly blows are inflicted on the country's moral as well as on her material interests.

This picture looks like a caricature; but no, it is a portrait.

That Treaty is a sentence of death. If it was not meant to be that, then it is a tremendous mistake, arising from the original sin of onesided information.

Now let us examine how far it is founded on justice or on general expediency. What is its ethical justification, what is its promise?

The Allied Powers hold the vanquished countries responsible for the outbreak of the war; there is professedly an element of retribution in the terms of peace offered to them. Very well; we shall waste no argument on this question; in war, the victorious party is right, the vanquished one is wrong; we take no pains to challenge the verdict. But, if justice is to prevail, retribution must be proportioned to guilt. *And, as no belli-*

gerent country on our side, neither Germany, nor Austria, nor Bulgaria has been afflicted by peace-terms nearly as cruel as those proposed to Hungary, it would appear that Hungary is to be considered as the most guilty of all.

Now this is a self-evident absurdity. The two component factors of moral and juridical responsibility are: freedom of will and the use that has been made of it. The first question asked in every criminal procedure is: was the culprit's will perfectly free? Applying that question to the case of Hungary, it appears that hers was not. She was not quite an independent country at the time before war, she was in connection with Austria and had to act with her in all foreign matters; *she had therefore no freedom of independent decision in the question of war, but only a vote in the common councils of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy.* On that ground alone she is less responsible than any other belligerent. But — what is more — there is documentary evidence, not to be challenged, that the Hungarian Prime-Minister, the late Count TISZA, opposed the sending of the famous Ultimatum to Serbia and advocated diplomatic instead of warlike action to the last. When taken off his feet by a comminatory message from Berlin, he at least obtained the adoption of a declaration of territorial disinterestment concerning Serbia, which, if communicated to the Powers in due time, might still have averted war. It was through no fault of his that this has not been done. *Count Tisza had in his anti-war action the hearty support of the whole country irrespective of party. He was her genuine spokesman. Had Hungary been able to decide for herself, there would have been no war.*

How is it possible then, from the retribution standpoint, to act towards her as if she were the most — instead of being, as she in fact was the least — responsible among the vanquished nations?

It is true that, once the dice were cast, she threw all her energies into the war and remained true to her allies to the last. But this was done after the outbreak, when it had become — much against her will — a question of self-defence and of national honour. It may sometimes be found expedient to reward treachery and to punish honesty; but you cannot construct this into an act of justice or into a juridical principle.

So much for the retributive side of our Peace-Treaty. Is it saying too much that, considered from that standpoint it appears as an act of glaring injustice?

But let us now examine it from the expediency side. The question might be asked whether the world at large would not profit by its being perpetrated against Hungary; whether great interests of mankind, such as peace made permanent, personal, racial, religious, political liberty prevailing over oppression, cultural, social and economic progress, would not be furthered by the destruction of Hungary and the development of the states constructed on her ruins? Should the answer to these questions turn out affirmative, abstract justice would have a hard case against such big prospects; but should it be negative, then again not a single word could be said in favour of a peace-work as harmful as it is unjust.

In order to answer this question we have simply to compare Hungary as she was before the war and the new states created or aggrandised through her dismemberment.

The Hungary of old is the finest natural geographic unity in Europe, whose limits are fixed by mountains and rivers; whose parts are economically interdependent, so as to make the whole almost self-supporting. No wonder, then, that this unity, whose boundaries nature had drawn, has been sanctioned by ten centuries of history: a witness not to be challenged, nor to be ignored in a fair-minded inquiry. Yes, we have the great

millennial fact to speak for us, more than 1000 years through which this part of Europe never gave trouble to the rest, rather averted from it whatever trouble threatened its tranquility and safety from the East. While historic Hungary stood, the troublesome area of Europe was as distant from the centre as the Balkan peninsula.

To make the moral cohesion of her people perfect, one factor alone was wanting: *racial unity*. On this plea is her dissection planned. New constructions should arise on her ruins, based on the racial principle, irrespective of geography, history, political economy.

Now let us consider what those new constructions will be like. At the first glimpse we shall make the astounding discovery that they are racially quite as mixed as Hungary has been. The racial composition of the latter was as follows: of the 18 million souls living in Hungary proper (we do not include Croatia, because her independence is an unchallenged fact) 54.5% were Magyar, 16.1% Roumanian, 10.7% Slovak, 10.4% German, 2.5% Serb, 2.5% Ruthenian, the rest miscellaneous. Now of the 16 to 18 millions of souls in Great-Roumania (the figures are not fixed to a nicety) 58.8 to 65% would be Roumanian, 12.7% to 15% Magyar (almost the same mutual proportion as in Hungary) 2.6% to 5.5% German and so on. The Czecho-Slovak state would number 13 million souls, of which 46—48.5% Czechs, 12.4% to 13.3% Slovaks (by no means the same race, but, if you choose to take into account their combined mass, it amounts to roughly 60%), 27.5% to 30.8% Germans, 6.5% Magyars and so on. The Serbo-Croat state comes nearer to the type of a racially homogeneous country, since roughly 40% of its 11—13 millions of souls would be Serbs, and 30—32% Croats and Slovenes, making a total of 70% Yougo-Slavs; could the natural antagonism between Serbs and roman catholic Croats be ignored, which is — to say the least — doubtful, it would be almost absolutely pure in a racia

sense, but for the annexion of parts of Hungary, in which the Yougo-Slavs are only 22% of the population-total, the Magyars 33% and the Germans 26.8%, so that this annexation stands in direct contradiction to the racial principle. We get like results if we consider from the same standpoint the Hungarian territories claimed by Roumania and by the Czecho-Slovak Republik. Roumania claims territories on which live about 5,260,000 souls, of which 53.2% are Roumanian, 32.5% Magyar, 10.6% German, the rest miscellaneous; on the Czecho-Slovak claimed territory live 3,570,000 souls, of which 47.6% Slovak, 30.3% Magyar, 7.4% German, 12.2% Ruthenian and so on.*

These figures show that the only principle of organic unity that had been wanting to Hungary's racial unity is likewise wanting to the states artificially built up on her ruins; the difference consists only in this, that Hungary was possessed of every other principle of unity, while the new states have none, absolutely none, and what is still worse: the leadership in them will be transferred to races of inferior culture, the results of which we may already notice, after one year's occupation, on the territories torn from Hungary. There is a wanton destruction of cultural values, universities, high-schools and others (on the territory occupied by Roumanian 5000 grammar schools are deserted, the former teacher having been expelled and nobody being found to supplement him, in consequence of which more than 200,000 children are left without education of any sort), there is a conspi-

* There is some difference between these figures and those alleged in an article published by the same author in this year's January—March issue of the "Revue politique internationale". The difference arises from the fact that the last mentioned article has been written before the publication of the Peace-Treaty and that, owing to this circumstance, its figures are based on the so called "Clemenceau line", which has been to some extent modified in the treaty draft. The difference is however so slight that it does not impair the force of the argument.

cuously lower level of public functionaries and we can notice the general prevalence of semi-barbarous methods of government.

What can result from this state of things? Will those people who are violently severed from their beloved old associations only to be subjected to alien government of an inferior sort, those four millions and a half of Magyars and Germans torn from Hungary, who suffer not only in their national consciousness but quite as much in their civilized habits, will they ever be reconciled to denationalization implying economic losses and cultural retrogression? Can the conscience of humanity tolerate such a downfall of millions? Anyhow it is dead certain that those new constructions with no vital principle in them will be distracted by the permanence of a most violent, because most legitimate, irredentism, and that through them Eastern and Central Europe will know no rest till the equilibrium represented by old Hungary is restored.

These facts contain the answer to the question: how far the destruction of Hungary and the constructions planned on her ruins might promote the general welfare of mankind?

But how is the principle of liberty affected by the Peace-Treaty? Last—but not least—let us examine this!

In its terms millions of men would be driven from one allegiance to another one, without being consulted as to their wishes. In the case of nearly half of them, of the Magyars and Germans who should become Czecho-Slovak or Roumanian or Yougoslav subjects, you may confidently assert that it would be done against their will, that it means moral torture to them. But not even the Slavs and Roumanians, who would be transplanted to states racially more homogeneous, can simply be "supposed" to long for such change, and there are many symptoms indicative of the reverse, chiefly among the Slovaks, Ruthenians and the Roman-Catholic Yougoslavs. There is only one

way to settle that question with a result that can no more be challenged: it is the plebiscite. And the plebiscite is what Hungary asks for and insists on. In every region claimed by our neighbours, so do we say, let the people decide; we unconditionally submit to its decision; we do not want a single soul to remain with us but by an act of free will. We have been charged with oppression of the non-Magyar nationalities: well, instead of going into argument, we propose to make those same people whom we are alleged to oppress, judge of our case. If we have really been oppressors, they will gladly seize upon this occasion to break away from us; but if they stick to the old country, then the charge of oppression is belied by those who know best. We accept this crucial test, we are anxious that it should be applied; if our opponents shrink from it, judgment goes against them by default. The good faith of both parties is then put into such clear light that, in fairness, the discussion must be considered as ended.

The plebiscite offers the only solution which combines justice with expediency. It would ensure the tranquility of Europe, since everybody would be where he desires; but it would at the same time make safe the interests of economic and cultural progress, since it is not to be supposed that the people concerned would vote for their own impoverishment and retrogression. On the liberty of nations, on their right of self-determination rests our whole case; we have laid it on that basis when we asked for a plebiscite. Let our opponents reject it, let them choose conquest and enslavement as the leading principle of their policy; they may be successful now, though we have too much confidence in the fair-minded wisdom of the Allied Powers to think so; but our principle is in any case fore-ordained to prevail after a passing hour of darkness, and we feel proud of having thrown in our lot with whatever is most sacred to humanity.