

The Impact of Trianon upon Hungary and the Hungarian Mind: The Nature of Interwar Hungarian Irredentism

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Developments in interwar Hungary were determined above all by the peace treaty signed in the Grand Palace of Versailles on June 4, 1920. The terms of this treaty were so harsh and punitive that one looks in vain for parallels in modern European history. On the basis of this treaty Hungary lost 71.4% of her territory and 63.6% of her population. Of the four beneficiary states Rumania alone received a larger share (39,800 square miles) of the country's former territory than that which was left to Hungary (35,900 square miles). While some of this loss could be justified on the basis of ethnic-linguistic considerations, this was not true about a sizable portion of the lost territories. As a matter of fact, historic Hungary's dismemberment also entailed the transfer of large Magyar-inhabited territories, along with close to 3.5 million ethnic Hungarians—fully one-third of the nation—to the new successor states. All this was done in the name of the very same principle—the principle of national self-determination—for which historic Hungary was torn apart. It should also be added that, with the exception of a small territory around Sopron in Western Hungary, the Hungarian demand for a plebiscite in the detached territories was rejected, and in this manner the principle of self-determination was once again violated. Moreover, the result of this rather arbitrarily and punitively applied principle was the creation of several new or enlarged states whose ethnic composition was hardly less mixed than that of Hungary prior to 1918. Thus, even if we count the Czechs and the Slovaks as one nation (which we can hardly do), Czechoslovakia had 34.7% minorities, while Poland had 30.4%, Rumania 25%, and Yugoslavia had no majority nationality at all. One can hardly question that in those days the principle of

national self-determination had to be accommodated somehow. While the Treaty of Trianon was an accommodation of that principle, it was also a violation of it.¹ It is in this light that one has to view the Hungarian reaction to this peace treaty.

The signing of the peace treaty was preceded in Hungary by the trauma of a lost war, two revolutions (a liberal-socialist and a communist), as well as a counterrevolution which, while restoring much of the old social and political system, was unable to save the country's territorial integrity (and not even many of its Magyar-inhabited territories). The regime that followed these upheavals was headed by Admiral Miklós Horthy (1868-1957), the last commander of the Austro-Hungarian fleet. The regime's orientation was determined almost exclusively by the psychological shock of Trianon and by the overriding desire to undo that treaty, whose terms were unacceptable to all Hungarians regardless of social background or ideological orientation. As a matter of fact, the shock of Trianon was so pervasive and so keenly felt that the syndrome it produced can only be compared to a malignant national disease.

The nature and magnitude of Trianon's psychological shock upon the contemporary Hungarian mind was perhaps best expressed by Gyula Szekfű (1883-1955), the "father" of the Hungarian version of the so-called *Geistesgeschichte* School of history and a dominant figure of interwar Hungarian historiography.

Szekfű gave vent to his feelings in the agonizing introduction to his first post-Trianon work, *Három nemzedék. Egy hanyatló kor története* (Three generations. The history of a declining age) (1920), in which he summarized his views on the causes of his nation's decline and fall. Szekfű wrote:

This book is my personal experience. In the midst of those trying events into which the catastrophe of October 1918 (the collapse of Austria-Hungary) had thrust us ..., I felt...that I would never be able to recover my strength and my will to work until having taken account of the (causes of that) decline that had led us to this disaster. I simply had to face up to the forces that have dragged my nation out of a stream of healthy evolution. Thus did I come to write this book, and...thus did I redeem my soul.²

The writing of *Három nemzedék* constituted a spiritual

catharsis through which Szekfű was able to release some of the psychological pressures that had accumulated within him. Not every Hungarian was able to follow this path and not every Hungarian intellectual was capable of producing a work of such proportions and significance. Yet, virtually every noted historian, sociologist and political thinker has written his own "Trianon book" or at least a "Trianon pamphlet." This holds true even for such left-leaning cosmopolitan thinkers as Oscar Jászi (1875-1957), associated with the progressive *Huszadik Század* (Twentieth Century), and the literary critic and publicist Hugo Ignótus (1869-1949) of the equally progressive *Nyugat* (The West).³

The Trianon shock thus became a lasting national malady that ever since 1918-1920 has ravaged the minds and hearts of most Hungarians, notwithstanding the fact that during the past three-and-a-half decades the open discussion or teaching of the nature and impact of this treaty has been a taboo in Hungary.⁴ That this was and is the case is best demonstrated by the recent rumblings in certain Hungarian intellectual circles where, for the first time in many years, a few people dare to talk and write about Trianon and the psychological dislocations it has caused. We may add that this new daring is partially the result of these intellectuals' growing concern for the Hungarian minorities beyond Hungary's Trianon frontiers, whose plight is becoming better known and less tolerable even to the largely depoliticized and denationalized average Hungarian.

An example of this growing concern and daring can be found in historian Péter Hanák's article in the July 25, 1981 issue of the influential *Élet és Irodalom* (Life and Literature). Entitled "Relative National Consciousness," this essay deals, at least in part, with the nature and development of the aforementioned Trianon syndrome in the period since World War II. Hanák writes:

We have been unable to digest Trianon consciously until our very own days. (After 1945) the whole complex problem of Trianon was placed on this list of those taboos that touched the path of nationalism. True, we did mention occasionally that the Treaty of Trianon was an unjust and an imperialistic peace. But we also added immediately that interwar revisionism was conceived in the nuptial bed of nationalism. Moreover, even though each of these assertions were

true individually, and each contained valid value judgments, neither from a logical, nor from a psychological or consciousness point of view were we able to resolve the contradictions between them. This is all the more lamentable as without examining the lasting shock impact of Trianon, we can neither approach, nor hope to understand the Hungarian *Weltanschauung* and the Hungarian national consciousness in the twentieth century.⁵

Having pointed to the problem caused by the Hungarian nation's lack of freedom to talk about this great national malady, Hanák continues by giving us a most penetrating and discerning assessment of the nature of the impact of the Trianon-shock upon the Hungarian psyche:

Our collapse in the war and (the terms of the Treaty of) Trianon have found the nation unprepared. Everything that up to that point used to be absolute, concrete and unambiguous was suddenly shattered. The unity of our country and of our nation vanished, and so did all our fictitious conceptualizations, as well as all historical and geographical realities...The trauma of defeat was so terribly deep, and it shook the nation's life-foundations to such a degree that for years and even for decades we could hardly expect anyone...to come up with an objective assessment (of this whole affair). After all, (Trianon meant) not only the dismemberment of a nation, but also the sudden relativization of such formerly absolute concepts as the *nation* and *national destiny*...One can hardly be amazed, therefore, that the initial reaction was (an intense desire) to revise the whole peace system... Trianon had in fact set a double trap for the Hungarian nation. On the one hand, it conscribed all elemental patriotism, all inclination to reconstruct one's nation, all justified emotions of grief into the service of...the counterrevolutionary regime; on the other hand, its flagrant injustices beclouded its righteous aspects, namely those of its features that were the unavoidable consequences of national developments in Central and Southeastern Europe. As such (Trianon) prevented us from recognizing the relativity of our place and role in the world, and the necessity of establishing good relations with the Danubian peoples...Thus, the Trianon trap had a tighter grip of the majority of our nation than did the dualistic system (that preceded it). The most

grotesque aspect of this tragic trap was that thereafter (Hungarian) national consciousness found itself bound not to a living, but to a non-existing, to a vanished absolute. ⁶

If—as is evident from Hanák's essay—Trianon produced a trauma that is still haunting most Hungarians after six decades of history and three and a half decades of enforced silence, how much more was this true in the years following the implementation of this punitive treaty? Whether we like it or not, or admit it or not, Trianon had in fact determined almost everything in interwar Hungary and this was true notwithstanding the fact that some elements of the country's political and social leadership were not only "sufferers," but also unwitting "beneficiaries" of the Trianon disease. This basically means that those who were opponents of the country's socio-economic transformation and modernization were able to blame Trianon for all of the nation's problems, as well as to use these problems as pretexts for hindering the necessary reforms. The latter, however, were much fewer in number than claimed by the regime's critics and detractors. The Trianon disease was and—to a large degree—is a national malady that engulfed and still engulfs much of the nation. Thus one did not really have to use artificial means to make it into the number one cause of the nation's problems during the interwar period. But before turning to a more detailed analysis of some aspects of its impact upon the Hungarian mind during those years, let us briefly summarize the history of that age.

The Horthy Regime

The political system and regime represented by Admiral Horthy has been referred to during the last three and a half decades by a number of derogatory expressions. ⁷ Thus, it has been called the period of "Horthy Fascism," "Horthy dictatorship," as well as the age of the "counterrevolutionary regime"—the latter being basically a self-selected term. While rejecting the first two as basically untrue, and accepting the latter only with certain qualifications (i.e. for the early phase of the Horthy regime), I prefer to call interwar Hungary's political system "conservative nationalist," ⁸ and many of its social and cultural manifestations as "neo-Baroque." (The latter term, by

the way, was first used by historian Szekfű, who was also one of the most influential ideologists of that period.)⁹ That the Horthy regime was conservative and nationalistic can hardly be questioned. But in addition to these two features it was also characterized by rabid anti-communism a powerful and polarized class structure the social and political pre-eminence of the gentry and aristocracy a virtual caste position of the military officer corps an unusual emphasis upon one's descent and inherited or acquired titles extreme respect for authority a kind of traditional anti-Semitism (which in its main course had nothing to do with the racist anti-Semitism of the Nazis and their Hungarian collaborators) and most importantly, a lack of adequate social consciousness or concern for the country's impoverished rural and urban workers. Simultaneously, however, the Horthy regime was also characterized by a functioning parliamentarism, by a somewhat narrowly based, though hardly nominal multi-party system, and by a legal system that stood for "law and order" and which on the whole was just and fair.

Hungary's regent, Admiral Horthy, whose name became almost synonymous with the period between the two world wars, was basically a conservative and traditionalist both by upbringing and temperament. He was strongly attached to the well-trying values of the old regime and suspicious of all new experimentations that might result in social dislocations, disorders and insubordinations that seemed to characterize the twentieth century.

Although a convinced conservative, Horthy was neither a dictator nor a tyrant. As a matter of fact, he was generally scrupulous in observing the terms of Hungary's undoubtedly dated constitutional system. His ideals coincided with the social and political values of the age of Emperor Francis Joseph. For this reason, he detested radicalism and revolution in any form—be it from the left or from the right. In his view, these radical movements were all bent on destroying that harmonious "neo-Baroque" social order he so dearly loved. Horthy's visible conservatism, however, did not necessarily make him an opponent of the much needed social and economic reforms. But because he detested mass movements, he was both suspicious of and extremely cautious about such reforms. Nor was he able to conceive of reform in any other way, except gradually and within

certain legal and social limitations. As a result, by the 1930s he was rapidly being left behind by all of the major reform movements, be they on the left, on the right, or somewhere in the middle, such as was the case of the so-called Populist Movement of that period.

For twenty-four years after 1920, Horthy reigned undisturbed and unchallenged as Hungary's regent and supreme military commander. He had the right to convene and dissolve the parliament, to appoint and dismiss the prime minister, as well as to return undesirable bills to the parliament. After 1937 his powers as regent were further increased, and thereafter he could not even be called to account by that elected body. Horthy, however, never transgressed his powers, and in most instances he even refrained from using them to their fullest extent. He tried to play the role of a benevolent constitutional monarch, and partly for this reason he did enjoy a considerable degree of genuine popularity. It was his prestige and popularity that saved Hungary from going too far to the radical right before World War II, and some of his moderating influence was felt even after Hungary's German occupation on March 19, 1944.

Like Regent Horthy himself, Hungary's political system was also basically conservative. The right to vote was limited and circumscribed by age, sex, property, educational and other qualifications (e.g. open voting in the countryside), which generally kept the number of the voters well below 50 percent of the country's adult population (i.e. between 26.6 percent and 33.8 percent of the total population).¹⁰ Despite this, there were in fact regular elections throughout the period, and these were held with the participation of several political parties that represented various shades of political opinions from the extreme right to as far left as the Social Democrats. Many of these parties were small, ephemeral and usually bound to specific "charismatic" or not-so-charismatic leaders. Those on the conservative right generally called themselves "Christian," "National," or both, while those in the middle or on the left usually referred to themselves as "Liberal," "Democratic," or "Socialist." Most of these parties went through various mergers, splits, and re-mergers as dictated by their ideological convictions and goals, or by the personal or national aspirations of their leaders.

In the early 1920s, the two most prominent of these parties

were the conservative nationalist Christian National Unity Party and the peasant-oriented Smallholders' Party, which together constituted the so-called "Christian Bloc." On February 23, 1922, these two parties merged to form the Catholic-Christian Smallholders', Peasant, and Bourgeois Party (*Keresztény-Keresztyény Kisgazda, Földműves és Polgári Párt*), commonly known as the Party of Unity (*Egységes Párt*), which then served through the next two decades—at times under slightly altered names—as the party of the government, which was always in control. During the 1930s these traditional parties were joined by several new political parties of the radical right, most of whom ultimately merged into Ferenc Szálasi's (1897-1946) Arrow Cross Party—the par excellence exponent of National Socialism in Hungary.

In spite of its name, the Party of Unity was far less united than generally presumed. Instead of being a monolithic organization, it was really a collection of various lesser parties and interest groups, all with their own special goals and programs. These included most everyone from the agrarians to the industrialists, from the pro-Habsburg legitimists to the "free electionist royalists," as well as the militant revisionists and the advocates of pragmatism and compromise in foreign policy. They were bound together only by their commonly shared irredentism and anti-communism, and by their basic attachment to the conservative social order. Most of them also subscribed to a certain amount of anti-Semitism that stemmed largely from the heavy Jewish participation in Béla Kún's Bolshevik revolution in Hungary. But outside the initial months of the counterrevolutionary reaction, this anti-Semitism manifested itself more in polemics than in an actual governmental policy. As a matter of fact, anti-Semitism did not really become part of the official policy until World War II, and even then only grudgingly and largely under outside pressures from Nazi Germany. It should perhaps also be mentioned that in spite of the Unity Party's attachments to the traditional order of things, it had a significant number of individuals and power groups that were dedicated to various degrees and levels of social and economic reforms, some of which were in fact implemented during the 1920s and 1930s.

Next to ever present revisionism, the first of the two interwar decades in Hungary was characterized primarily by a policy of political, economic, social and ideological-cultural consolida-

tion, insofar as this was permitted by the territorial, national, economic and psychological dislocations caused by Trianon. The man primarily responsible for this consolidation was Count István Bethlen (1874-1947), a Transylvanian-Hungarian magnate, whose ancestral homeland had been attached to Rumania. Bethlen was a cultured, intelligent, clever and pragmatic man, but he was perhaps even more conservative than the regent himself. He began his prime ministership by terminating the remnants of the disorder and lawlessness connected with the two revolutions and the counterrevolution. This normalization was accompanied by the neutralization of the regime's most significant legitimate opposition through the inclusion of the Smallholders' Party into the Party of Unity, and by making the latter into a relatively docile instrument of his government's policies.

Bethlen also initiated a foreign policy to undo the effects of Trianon by all possible peaceful means. His most significant step in this direction was rapprochement with Italy, and the signing of the Italo-Hungarian Treaty of Friendship and Arbitration in 1927 (April 5). This treaty was basically the first momentous break in Hungary's diplomatic isolation, after years of encirclement by the French-supported Little Entente (Czechoslovakia, Rumania, and Yugoslavia). From this time onward the Italian orientation remained one of the cornerstones of Hungarian foreign policy, which ultimately led to some tangible, albeit temporary success in the form of the Italian-supported partial revisions of Hungary's Trianon frontiers between 1938 and 1941.¹¹

The relatively peaceful Bethlen Era came to an end in 1931. It did so largely because of the world depression, which undermined Hungary's fragile economy and thereby the whole Bethlen system. The country's increasing economic plight, the accompanying poverty and unemployment, and in particular the rising dissatisfaction of its unemployed young intelligentsia created a situation that made the upcoming change unavoidable. This change took the form of the fall of Bethlen's conservative regime and the rise of a new regime and spirit that pushed Hungary gradually in the direction of the radical right.

After a brief interlude, the man who replaced Bethlen in 1932 and initiated this shift to the right was General Gyula Gömbös (1886-1936), one of the leaders of the postwar counterrevolution.

Gömbös was a man of relatively humble birth, but with a phenomenal ego, who became one of the most vocal spokesmen of the new *völkisch* nationalism that engulfed Hungary in the wake of the Trianon tragedy. Perhaps because of his populist nationalism, and perhaps also because of his origins, Gömbös appeared more amenable to social reform. But—probably under the influence of Mussolini and the Italian model—he wished these necessary social changes to take place under the leadership of an all-powerful *folk tribune* and in this case he was naturally thinking of himself.

Gömbös promised much, but once in power he delivered relatively little by way of social reform. True, he abandoned Bethlen's aristocratic restraint, but he replaced it primarily with a sonorous sloganism and with a growing air of radicalism. In foreign policy Gömbös continued Bethlen's pro-Italian orientation. At the same time, however, he also moved closer to Germany. His dream and goal was a form of German-Italian-Hungarian partnership and joint control over Central and Southeastern Europe a goal which, in light of the vast differences in the human and material resources of these three countries, lacked all elements of realism. Gömbös's shift in foreign policy had momentous implications for Hungary, for it threatened to carry the country into the Berlin-Rome Axis, as well as toward a less-than peaceful solution to its revisionist claims. Moreover, it also resulted in the rise of various pro-German elements to positions of influence in the army and the state bureaucracy, which in turn made it even more difficult for the country's conservative political leadership to keep Hungary out of dangerous diplomatic and even military entanglements with Nazi Germany.

Gömbös's prime ministership also coincided with the birth of the first Hungarian National Socialist groups and political parties, including Ferenc Szálasi's Party of National Will (*Nemzeti Akarat Pártja*), which he founded in March 1935. This party was the most important forerunner of the much better known Arrow Cross Party (*Nyilaskeresztes Párt*), which subsequently unified most of the Hungarian Nazi and Fascist organizations on October 23, 1937.¹²

Following Gömbös's death on October 6, 1936, Horthy and his conservative followers decided to put a stop to this dangerous rightward drift in Hungary. The conservative wing of the

government party allied itself with various anti-rightist and anti-German groups, including the royalist Christian Party, the resurrected Smallholders' Party, the Social Democratic Party and a number of smaller liberal groups. Their opponents consisted of the government party's right wing, supported by various other smaller rightist parties and political formations. The conservatives stressed the need for domestic peace, order, traditional values and peaceful revisionism. The radicals, on the other hand, argued for social reforms, a closer relationship with Germany, and a more militant foreign policy to achieve Hungary's national goals. Regent Horthy naturally supported the first of these groups, but the general trend of the times favoured the latter. And the spirit of the times appeared to have captured even some of the Horthy-selected successors of Gömbös who were appointed specifically for the purpose of stemming this rightward tide. As a matter of fact, two of these prime ministers (Béla Imrédy and László Bárdossy) actually accelerated this trend to the right, while one of them (Bárdossy) was responsible for taking the country into the war and thereby sealing Hungary's fate once more. True, this declaration of war against the Soviet Union was made illegally, i.e. without the knowledge and approval of the Hungarian Parliament, but ultimately this made no difference. Hungary's presence on the side of Nazi Germany and later in the ranks of the defeated states made it impossible for her to retain even those regained territories to which she was fully entitled simply on the basis of ethnic-linguistic considerations. In this way the Hungarian nation and national psyche suffered another serious blow after World War II a blow that not even thirty-six years of enforced silence has been able to eradicate.

Reaction to Trianon

As has been seen, the interwar period in Hungary was an era of social and political conservatism that was increasingly under pressure from right-wing radicalism. This period was also an age of emotional nationalism that engulfed the whole nation after World War I and the country's dismemberment. This emotional nationalism was different from its immediate predecessor in that it gave birth to a powerful desire to act, i.e. to save whatever could be saved and to restore whatever could be restored. This activism manifested itself in many shapes and forms from the

foundation of scores of secret societies and national defense leagues to the birth of new tendencies in education, literature, the arts, as well as historiography. In light of space limitations and my own interests, this paper will focus on the change in historical thinking and history writing as an example of the “Trianon Syndrome” in interwar Hungary.

The so-called patriotic secret societies were established immediately after the war, and their primary and almost exclusive goal was to undo by whatever means the terms of Trianon. The best known and most influential of these societies included the Hungarian National Defense Association (*Magyar Országos Véderő Egyesület, MOVE*), the Association of Awakening Hungarians (*Ébredő Magyarok Egyesülete, ÉME*), The Blood Oath Society of the Double Cross (*Kettőskereszt Vészövetség*), the United Christian League (*Egyesült Keresztény Liga*), the more extremist Hungarian Cultural League (*Magyar Kultúrliga*) led by the white terrorist Pál Prónay (1875-1945), the Federation of the Nameless (*Névtelenek Szövetsége*), the Association of Etelköz (*Etelközi Szövetség, EKSZ or EX*), which was also known under the pseudonyms of Council of Chiefs (*Vezérek Tanácsa, VT*) and the Hungarian Scientific Association for the Protection of Ethnicity (*Magyar Tudományos Fajvédő Egyesület*). In addition to their emotional nationalism and activism, the most common features of these associations included staunch anti-communist and counter-revolutionary sentiments, as well as various degrees of anti-Semitism, and most importantly, powerful irredentism.¹³

Side by side with these and similar action-oriented secret societies, the interwar years also gave birth to an almost equal number of non-secret irredentist organizations, whose primary goal was to fight for revisionism by means of publishing propagandistic or semi-scholarly works and by establishing contacts with various influential Western political and scholarly circles. The most active of these societies included the Hungarian Territorial Integrity League (*Magyarország Területi Épségének Védelmi Ligája*), which began to publish a series of informative pamphlets on Hungary's case as early as 1919 the National Association of Defense Leagues (a *Védőligák Országos Szövetsége*), established in order to coordinate the work of all openly irredentist associations the Hungarian National Federation (*Magyar Nemzeti Szövetség*), which eventually absorbed

both of the above associations and the Hungarian Revisionist League (*Magyar Revíziós Liga*), established in 1927 as a federation of about three dozen irredentist organizations, largely as a result of the pro-Hungarian revisionist campaign initiated by Lord Harold Sidney Harmsworth Rothermere, a significant figure of contemporary British journalism.¹⁴ Revisionist work and revisionist agitation, however, was also carried out by such influential scholarly or semi-scholarly organizations as the Hungarian Historical Association, the Hungarian Geographical Association, the Hungarian Foreign Affairs Association, and later also by a number of research institutes, including the Political Science Institute of the Hungarian Statistical Association, the minority institutes of the universities of Budapest, Pécs, Debrecen and Szeged, the Hungarian Historical Institute, and the Transylvanian Research Institute. These research institutes, however, were founded only in the period between 1935 and 1941, and consequently their impact was probably less than could have been otherwise.¹⁵

While the composition of the membership and the nature of the irredentist activities of these various societies and associations were very different, they did have a common goal the revision of Hungary's new frontiers, even though they disagreed regarding the means to achieve this goal. The secret societies, for example, often engaged in activities that later proved to be unacceptable and even detrimental to the cause. Their power to act irresponsibly, however, was soon curtailed by Prime Minister Bethlen during his policy of consolidation.

At the same time the revisionist activities of the purely irredentist or scholarly associations continued and even increased with the support of the regime. But it was soon filled with the spirit of "neo-nationalism," a new ideological orientation developed by Count Kuno Klebelsberg (1875-1932), the President of the Hungarian Historical Association from 1917 to 1932, and Hungary's Minister for Culture and Religion during the first half of the interwar period, from 1922 until 1931. Moreover, because the Hungarian crusade for the revision of the new frontiers was based almost exclusively on historical rights (and not on the principle of self-determination), the heaviest burden in demonstrating the righteousness of the Hungarian claims fell on the shoulders of Hungary's historians, who, in addition, were obliged to readjust their views in the spirit of neo-nationalism.

Formulated by Klebelsberg during the mid-1920s, neo-nationalism was basically an effort to adjust Hungarian nationalism and Hungarian historical thinking to the new realities of the post-Trianon period namely, to the realities that constricted Hungarian political control to a small central section of the former Kingdom of Hungary, while at the same time leaving one-third of the nation on the other side of the new frontiers. In light of these conditions it was necessary to reorient the attention of the Magyars from the concept of the *state* to the concept of the *nation*, and from the consciousness of their *political dominance* to a belief in their continued *cultural pre-eminence* in the Carpathian Basin.¹⁶

While emphasizing the significance of the *nation* over the *state*, the new ideology of neo-nationalism also stressed the alleged unique “state-forming capacities” of the Magyars. Apparently, Klebelsberg was convinced that if the Hungarians were able to retain their cultural pre-eminence in the area, then — in conjunction with their capacity for political leadership — this pre-eminence would ultimately lead to the restoration of historic Hungary’s unity. It was this belief that prompted Klebelsberg to demand the reorientation of Hungarian nationalism from confrontation to cooperation with the region’s other nationalities although this cooperation was still to be carried out under Hungarian political and intellectual leadership.

The views formulated by Klebelsberg were generally acclaimed by most historians, who were probably more affected by Trianon than any other segment of the Hungarian intelligentsia — with the possible exception of the psychologically even more sensitive poets. For this reason, examining the role, attitude and activities of historians is a good way of measuring the impact of Trianon upon the Hungarian psyche. And this is both natural and understandable, for contrary to the situation in our own age of rapid change, historians of that period were accustomed to “living in the past.” They were the products of a traditional world, attached to their nation’s traditions. For them the legitimate study and research of history usually ended at least a half a century before their own time. They studied, re-studied and even re-lived psychologically the ups and downs of their nation’s history. Thus, the shock of Trianon probably affected them to a far greater degree than most of their countrymen.¹⁷ This is all the more likely, as in addition to having lost a large

segment of their country and a third of their nation, they also lost much of the "historical stage" that used to serve as a forum of their nation's history and of their efforts to re-create that history.

The loss of this historical stage also meant the loss of many written and unwritten sources of Hungarian history, along with the whole intellectual-cultural environment that inspired historians in the past and served as a catalyst in practicing their art. For these historians, Trianon also meant the end of a relatively comfortable existence and a secure way of life, which turned the national catastrophe into a personal calamity that was bound to affect their relationship to Clio's art. Their initial reaction was one of confusion and the production of numerous so-called "Trianon books" and "Trianon pamphlets." Subsequently, however, they fell in line with the basic orientation of Bethlen's policy of consolidation and with Klebelsberg's philosophy of neo-nationalism, and undertook a systematic effort to refute the historical arguments that had been used to justify the Treaty of Trianon by attempting to prove the lack of validity of the anti-Hungarian claims. By doing so, however, they also expressed their disregard for twentieth-century realities, namely that historical arguments now had very little weight when confronted with the new principle of national self-determination.

Although all Hungarian historians were one in their denunciation of Trianon and in offering their services to the cause of revisionism, the historian who was most effective in applying the principles of neo-nationalism to history-writing, and did so on a rather sophisticated level, was the already mentioned Gyula Szekfű. But Szekfű did more than that he augmented Klebelsberg's views with his own convictions to the effect that Hungary's destiny—its past and future—were linked inseparably to what he called the "German Christian World."

Szekfű first summarized and synthesized his views on the nature of Hungarian historical evolution in 1917, in his well-known work *A magyar állam életrajza* (The biography of the Hungarian State), wherein he discussed the history of his nation within the context of the history of "German Christian" Central Europe, which he regarded as the most important single factor in Hungary's millennial history.¹⁸ And even though the collapse of Austria-Hungary and the Bismarckian German Empire seemed to have ended this whole German-Christian Central European configuration, Szekfű continued to promote this idea into the late

1930s and the early 1940s, when he turned against it because of his intense dislike of Nazism. This is evident both from his writings and his editorial policy at the influential *Magyar Szemle* (Hungarian Review), which he founded in 1927.¹⁹ In the second edition of his above-mentioned work, for example, Szekfű expressed the view that “the Hungarians can only hope to escape from their current predicament if they follow the well-trodden path..., i.e. if they walk hand in hand with Germanic Central Europe.” In his view, this was “one of the clear-cut teachings of...(Hungarian) history,” which can hardly be disregarded without perils and misfortunes to the nation as a whole.²⁰

One cannot bypass this view without pointing out that prior to Trianon — and to some degree even beyond — many Hungarians, including numerous historians, held anti-German and anti-Habsburg views. Thus, Szekfű’s belief in the unavoidable common destiny of Germany and Hungary was far from popular in Hungary and it remained so notwithstanding Szekfű’s bemoaning of Hungary’s independence and all that it implied after the disintegration of the realm of the Habsburgs. But to Szekfű, independence without power, independence at the expense of historic Hungary’s integrity, was anything but desirable. As he put it:

Those of us who amidst those nerve-wracking days of our collapse were able to preserve our sense of history...were also forced to recognize...that our suddenly gained freedom is only the freedom...of a hungry winter wolf. Having been freed from the clutches of Central Europe, we stood there alone and friendless... We were free, but a bloodied and despoiled small nation... A free prey to be robbed, looted and destroyed freely by anyone who happened to be stronger.

Then, as if to drive home his point, Szekfű finished his assessment of the situation by pointing to the harsh consequences of this “freedom” (i.e. separation) from Central Europe

And the “stronger ones” did come..., and the borders of our free nation became ever more constricted... Thus did Hungary — freed from dependence on Central Europe — shrink back by centuries within the span of only a few days.²¹

Although anti-Habsburg and anti-German sentiments continued

to pervade a sizable segment of interwar Hungary's educated circles, Szekfű's above analysis of Hungary's dependence on Germanic Central Europe was soon widely accepted. As a matter of fact, this belief became one of the important dogmas of interwar Hungarian thinking, both among politicians and among intellectuals. It became an important belief, alongside the already mentioned emphasis upon the alleged unique historical role to the Hungarians in the Carpathian Basin. These views became part of the official cultural policy initiated by Klebelsberg, and they were also incorporated into Szekfű's influential multi-volumed *Magyar történet* (Magyar History), co-authored with the noted medievalist and cultural politician, Bálint Hóman (1885-1951), during the late 1920s and early 1930s.²² This work popularized Szekfű's view's on such a grand scale that they soon came to form the cornerstone of interwar Hungarian historical thinking. Szekfű's ideas influenced the thinking and publications of most professional and non-professional historians and scholars in the related disciplines and perhaps even more importantly, also permeated the history textbooks of that period.

In line with the official cultural policy of that period, the history textbooks—written by such prominent historians as Sándor Domanovszky, Dezső Szabó, István Miskolczy and György Balanyi — were all at pains to emphasize Hungary's and the Magyar peoples' relationship to Germanic Christian Central Europe.²³ They also stressed their nation's primary historical rights to the Carpathian Basin, as well as its alleged special capacity for political leadership and cultural pre-eminence in that area. Nor were they modest in pointing out their nation's role and sacrifice in having defended Western Christendom against "Oriental barbarism," a phenomenon that was not in harmony with the new so-called Turanian orientation that also gained some popularity in Hungary in the wake of the Trianon tragedy.²⁴ (This claim of having been the defenders of Western Christendom, by the way, was not limited to the Hungarians. Similar claims have also been advanced by most of the nationalities of Central and Southeastern Europe.)

While portraying the unique historical role of the Hungarians in the Carpathian Basin and deriving therefrom a historically justifiable claim to the whole area, these history textbooks also stressed the singular geographical and economic unity of historic

Hungary. They proclaimed its dismemberment an unnatural act, which was against the innate interest of the region and its inhabitants. These books also asserted that the abnormal state of affairs created by the Treaty could not possibly be upheld for a protracted period of time. In light of the above, it should not even come as a surprise that geography in interwar Hungary was taught as if Trianon had never taken place. Whole generations of youngsters grew up having only historic Hungary's borders etched into their minds and fully convinced that Trianon Hungary was but a temporary phenomenon that was bound to disappear like an evil nightmare.

Although understandable, this attitude was in a sense a kind of self-deception that was also evident in many other spheres of contemporary Hungarian life. One of the most visible manifestations of this tendency was the increasing popularity of the above mentioned Turanian movement, which, within the context of interwar Hungary, was both a form of escapism, as well as a form of reaction against the so-called "faithless" and "treacherous" West that had abandoned Hungary. It should be kept in mind that the Hungarians were truly convinced of their singular role in having served as one of the most important bulwarks of Western Christendom, and they expected gratitude in return. Instead of gratitude, however, they were rewarded by a total lack of appreciation for their role, which was then crowned—so they believed—by Hungary's dismemberment at Trianon. The extent of this real or imagined "ingratitude" shook the Hungarians to the point where many of them, particularly the less sophisticated, were willing to turn their backs on the West, while at the same time searching for help and solace amidst their real or imagined relatives in the East. Some of these disenchanted Hungarians were willing to go so far as to call for purging "Hungarian Civilization" of all of its millennial Christian culture and faith, and for its replacement by an allegedly indigenous and ancient, "pure" Magyar culture and religion. A number of them actually proclaimed King St. Stephen, the Christianizer of Hungary, as his nation's number one enemy, while at the same time demanding that Stephen's pagan adversaries—such as Koppány and Vazul—be proclaimed the new heroes and "saint" of the Magyars. As one can expect, most thoughtful Hungarians declined to go along with this extreme and naive manifestation of Turanism, which Szekfű rightfully

called a form of "new paganism."²⁵ The rise and relative popularity of this strange phenomenon, however, still tells us something. It reveals, among others, the extent of the psychological dislocation and the depth of the emotional misery in which the Hungarian nation found itself after Trianon. Moreover, it also reveals some of the subtle motivating forces that may have been responsible for pushing the nation in the direction of radicalism and various forms of extremism particularly in light of its apparent inability to receive a relatively just hearing for its complaints before an accepted and authoritative forum of the makers of world politics. Despair is probably the worst possible counselor, and in a state of hopelessness, individuals as well as nations may lose their direction and commit acts which in retrospect appear irrational and unthinkable. This was certainly demonstrated by some of the developments in interwar Hungary.

Conclusions

It may be concluded from the above that interwar Hungary's most fundamental problem was the inability of the Hungarian psyche to adjust itself to the new realities, i.e. to free itself from the national malady that we can rightfully call the "Trianon Syndrome." This, in turn, prevented the nation from trying to solve its most urgent social, economic and political problems in the spirit of realism. At the beginning of this period, the Hungarian reaction to Trianon was emotional, haphazard, misdirected and outright wrong. Later this reaction took at least two distinctly different forms on the one hand, the country's political and intellectual leaders initiated a systematic, though not too successful effort to undo Trianon by trying to persuade the treaty's makers of its fundamental injustices, while at the same time searching for appropriate military alliances for its eventual overthrow, should all peaceful efforts at revision fail. On the other hand, some of the earlier misdirected efforts continued both in the form of the increased popularity of the Turanist self-delusions, as well as in the rise and spread of another form of "new paganism" (i.e. Fascism) that offered quick, simplistic and often less than moral solutions to the nation's complex and long-standing problems.

It can hardly be questioned that the Turanist and Fascist tendencies were misdirected. But one also has to question the

wisdom of the official anti-Trianon policy of the Hungarian government and intellectual circles. One of the greatest mistakes of the official anti-Trianon propaganda machine was that it relied too heavily on historical arguments, which carry very little weight in the twentieth century. The basic inadequacy of this approach should have been evident to the country's intellectual and political leaders all the more so, as historic Hungary's dismemberment was done in the name of the principle of national self-determination. Had they been aware of this basic tenet, they would have placed much greater emphasis on pointing out the basic injustices of Trianon precisely from the point of view of this principle. Thus, instead of arguing as to who settled first in Hungary and when, they should have demonstrated to the world that transferring one-third of the Hungarian nation under foreign rule violated the very same principle which the peacemakers used to justify the dismemberment of a long-standing historical state. Naturally, this policy would not have resulted in the re-establishment of historic Hungary, but it may have produced an atmosphere more conducive to partial revision, i.e. for the reacquisition of the Hungarian-inhabited territories immediately adjacent to the new borders. Given the shock effect of Trianon, Hungarians apparently were unable to follow a path of compromise. They stressed their unwillingness to ever give up the idea of reconstituting historic Hungary, which they embodied into the slogan "*Nem! Nem! Soha!*" (No! No! Never!). Moreover, they tried to regain everything largely on the basis of historical arguments. But in doing so, they may have relinquished the only viable argument—outside of military might — that carried weight in those days: the argument based on ethnic and linguistic self-determination. True, as time passed, the Hungarian government was increasingly forced to accept the idea of partial revision but it accepted this notion only temporarily, and then began to apply it at the wrong time and with the help of the wrong nations. Although unintended, this policy made Hungary into both the "unwilling" and the "last" satellite of Nazi Germany for which the country and the nation soon had to once again pay a heavy price.²⁶

NOTES

1. For a discussion of Hungary's territorial and population losses in consequence of the Treaty of Trianon see: C.A. Macartney, *Hungary and Her Successors* (Oxford: The

University Press, 1973). See also the relevant sections of such popular English language works as Dominic G. Kosáry and S.B. Várdy, *History of the Hungarian Nation* (Astor Park, Florida: Danubian Press, Inc., 1969); Denis Sinor, *History of Hungary* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1959): 284-5; and C.A. Macartney, *Hungary; A Short History* (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, 1962): 205-7.

2. Gyula Szekfű, *Három nemzedék. Egy hanyatló kor története* (Three generations. The history of a declining age.) (Budapest: Élet Irodalmi és Nyomdai R.T., 1920): 4.

3. The works in question are: Oszkár Jászi, *Magyar kálvária - magyar feltámadás* (Hungarian calvary - Hungarian resurrection) (Vienna, 1920); and Hugó Ignotus, *The Dismembered Hungary. Written especially for the American Readers* (Berlin, 1920). For many other similar works see S.B. Várdy's "Trianon in Interwar Hungarian Historiography," in Béla K. Király, Peter Pastor and Ivan Sanders, eds., *Total War and Peacemaking. Essays on the Treaty of Trianon* (Boulder and New York: East European Quarterly and Columbia University Press, 1983).

4. This taboo is evident in the most minimal treatment given to the nature of the Treaty of Trianon in Hungarian historical syntheses and in post-1945 historical literature in general. For example, the 1400 page György Ránki et al., eds., *Magyarország története 1918-1919, 1919-1945* (History of Hungary 1919-1945) (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1976), devotes only a page (p.303) to the discussion of the Trianon Treaty. The extent of this anti-Trianon taboo is best illustrated by the fate of short and inoffensive article published by historian Károly Vigh on the occasion of the sixtieth anniversary of Trianon: "A trianoni békeszerződés 60. évfordulójára," in *Honismeret*, 8, no. 3 (March 1980): 32-6. As soon as this issue of the periodical appeared, it was promptly withdrawn from circulation and replaced by another version without Vigh's article.

5. Péter Hanák, "Viszonylagos nemzettudat" (Relative national consciousness), in *Élet és Irodalom* (Life and Literature), 25, no. 20 (July 25, 1981): 4-5.

6. Ibid., p.4.

7. In this summary of the history of the Horthy regime I have relied heavily on my own earlier version in Kosáry-Várdy, *History of the Hungarian Nation*, pp. 247-91; and to a lesser degree on István Deák's excellent essay, "Hungary," in Hans Rogger and Eugene Weber, eds., *The European Right. A Historical Profile* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1966): 364-407.

8. In one of his most recent articles the noted Hungarian historian György Ránki has also rejected the tendency to equate the Horthy regime with a Fascist system, although he did find "some of the essential elements of Fascism" therein. Even so, Ránki views the Horthy regime primarily as a "conservative autocratic system," which basically rhymes with my own views. Cf. György Ránki, "A német-magyar kapcsolatok néhány problémája, 1933-1944," in *Valóság* (Budapest), 24, no. 9 (September 1981): 1-18; quotation from p. 2.

9. See Szekfű's chapter "Neóbarokk-társadalom" (Neo-Baroque society), in his *Három nemzedék és ami utána következik* (Three generations and what comes after) (Budapest: Királyi Magyar Egyetemi Nyomda, 1934): 407-21. On Szekfű see S.B. Várdy, *Hungarian Historiography and the Geistesgeschichte School* (Cleveland: Árpád Academy, 1974), and by the same author, *Modern Hungarian Historiography* (Boulder and New York: East European Quarterly and Columbia University Press, 1976): 62-101.

10. On electoral laws and the franchise system in interwar Hungary see Péter Hársfalvi's recent article, "A választójog a polgári Magyarországon" (The franchise system in bourgeois Hungary) in *História* (Budapest), 3, no. 2 (1981): 32-3.

11. On Bethlen's foreign policy see Gyula Juhász, *Magyarország külpolitikája, 1919-1945* (Hungary's Foreign Policy, 1919-1945) (Budapest: Kossuth Könyvkiadó, 1969), especially chapter II; and Thomas Sakmyster, "István Bethlen and Hungarian Foreign Policy, 1921-1931," *Canadian-American Review of Hungarian Studies*, V, no. 2 (Fall 1978): 3-16.

12. The right wing movements in Hungary were treated by Miklós Laczkó, *Arrow Cross Men, National Socialists, 1935-1944* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1968); and by Nicholas M. Nagy-Talavera, *The Green Shirts and Others; The History of Fascism in Hungary and Rumania* (Stanford: Hoover Institute, 1968).

13. Concerning the secret societies see György Borsányi, ed., *Páter Zadravecz titkos*

naplója (The secret diary of Pater Zadavec) (Budapest: Kossuth Könyvkiadó, 1967); and Rudolfné Dósa, *A MOVE. Egy jellegzetes magyar fasiszta szervezet, 1918-1945* (The MOVE. A typical Fascist organization, 1918-1945) (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1972).

14. Concerning Lord Rothermere and the Hungarian Revisionist League see the rather unsympathetic treatment by Dezső Nemes, *A Bethlen kormány külpolitikája, 1927-1931-ben* (Budapest: Kossuth Könyvkiadó, 1964): 167-224.

15. On these research institutes see S.B. Várdy, "A magyarság összefogásának és tudományos tanulmányozásának kísérlete 1920-tól 1945-ig," (Attempts at the unification and scientific study of the Hungarians between 1920 and 1945), in János Nádas and Ferenc Somogyi, eds., *A XV. Magyar Találkozó krónikája* (Cleveland: Árpád Könyvkiadó, 1976): 239-250; and Dezső Halácsy, *A világ magyarságáért* (For the Hungarians of the world) (Budapest: A szerző kiadása, 1944): 479-507.

16. On Klebelsberg and neo-nationalism see S.B. Vardy, *Modern Hungarian Historiography*, pp. 50-61; and Ferenc Glatz, "Historiography, Cultural Policy, and the Organization of Scholarship in Hungary in the 1920s," *Acta Historica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae*, 16, nos. 3-4 (1970): 273-93.

17. On the shock effect of Trianon upon Hungarian historians see Ferenc Glatz, "Der Zusammenbruch der Habsburger Monarchie und die ungarische Geschichtswissenschaft," *Études Historiques Hongroises 1980*, 2 vols. (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1980), II: 575-92; and S.B. Várdy, "Trianon in Interwar Hungarian Historiography."

18. Gyula Szekfű, *A magyar állam életrajza* (The biography of the Hungarian state) (Budapest: Dick Manó Könyvkereskedése, 1917; 2nd ed., 1923); and its German version: Julius Szekfű, *Der Staat Ungarn. Eine Geschichtsstudie* (Stuttgart-Berlin: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1918).

19. Cf. Dénes Némethi, "A Magyar Szemle revíziós nacionalizmusának szerkezetéről," (On the structure of the revisionist nationalism of the *Magyar Szemle*) *Történelmi Szemle*, 15, nos. 1-2 (1972): 75-110.

20. Szekfű, *A magyar állam életrajza*, p. 222.

21. *Ibid.*, pp. 204-5.

22. Bálint Hóman and Gyula Szekfű, *Magyar történet* (Magyar History), 8 vols. (Budapest: Magyar Királyi Egyetemi Nyomda, 1928-1934); subsequent editions all appeared in five volumes.

23. On the influence of revisionism, neo-nationalism, and Szekfű's views on interwar Hungarian history textbooks see Mátyás Unger, *A történelmi tudat alakulása középiskolai történelemtankönyveinkben* (The development of historical consciousness in our history textbooks for secondary schools), (Budapest: Tankönyvkiadó, 1976): 87-196.

24. In reporting to his government concerning Hungarian reaction to the establishment of the Rome-Berlin Axis in 1936, the French ambassador to Hungary, Maugras, referred to this phenomenon as follows: "There is no question that the minds of these people (the Hungarians) are filled with a certain troubadour spirit, for they are prone to view political realities from a romantic point of view. They willingly put themselves forth as the defenders of European Christianity, and believe that henceforth they will continue their Christian crusade in partnership with Italy and Germany." Quoted by György Ránki in his "A német-magyar kapcsolatok néhány problémája," p. 7.

25. On this strange phenomenon of Turanism in interwar Hungary see Gyula Szekfű, *Három nemzedék és ami utána következik*, pp. 480-92; Joseph E. Kessler, *Turanism and Pan-Turanism in Hungary, 1890-1945* (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 1967); and S.B. Vardy, *The Ottoman Empire in European Historiography; A Re-Evaluation by Sándor Takáts* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Studies in History, 1976), reprinted from *Turkish Review*, 2, no. 9 (1972): 1-16.

26. This question of Hungary's position as an "unwilling satellite" (as claimed by Ambassador Montgomery) versus her position as the "last satellite" (as asserted by postwar Marxist historians in Hungary) was examined recently by György Ránki in his already cited article, "A német-magyar kapcsolatok néhány problémája." Concerning John Flournoy Montgomery's views, who was the last American ambassador to Hungary prior to World War II, see his *Hungary the Unwilling Satellite* (New York: The Devin-Adair Company, 1947).