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TRIANON HUNGARY

If the real demise of Historic Hungary had thus preceded by some eighteen months the formal recognition of the fact, so its diminished successor, Trianon Hungary, had of necessity largely taken shape before the same treaty legalised its existence. In the spring of 1919 a group of leading politicians of the old regime had formed an 'Anti-Bolshevik Committee' in Vienna; others had set up a counter-revolutionary government, situated first in Arad, then in Szeged, and had raised a small 'national army' under the command of Admiral Miklós Horthy, sometime Commander in Chief of the Imperial and Royal Adriatic Fleet.

On the fall of Kun the two groups had joined forces and asked the Allies to recognise them as the legal government of Hungary. The Allies had hesitated to hand over the country to a regime so pronouncedly counter-revolutionary in outlook, and had insisted on the formation of a provisional government including democratic elements, to hold elections on a wide, secret suffrage. The Roumanians having with some difficulty been induced to retire across the Tisza, this government was formed, under the Presidency of K. Huszár, in November 1919, and the elections (for a single House) held in January 1920. The successful candidates then met in what was *de facto* the first parliament of Trianon Hungary.

It met in a situation of extraordinary difficulty. Overhanging the whole picture was that shadow of the impending Treaty; and it may be said at this point that resentment against and determination to reverse what almost the whole nation, with little distinction of class, regarded as an in-

tolerable injustice, was the dominating motif in the entire history of the diminished state until the extinction of its own real independence. But the situation in the spring of 1920 was also replete with immediate problems. Four years of exhausting war, in which the nation had suffered very heavy casualties, two revolutions and a predatory foreign occupation (the Roumanians had looted the country with great thoroughness, carrying off, in particular, much of its rolling-stock) would have been hard enough to repair within intact frontiers; but on top of all this had come the further blows inflicted by the dismemberment of the country and the disintegration of the Monarchy. The whole national economy had been disrupted by the disappearance behind new barriers, abruptly erected and jealously guarded, of accustomed sources of supply and markets, and the surviving national resources were being further taxed by a great influx of refugees from the Successor States.

Industrial unemployment had soared to unprecedented heights. Capital had fled headlong before the threat of Bolshevism; the national capital, estimated in 1910 at £51,794,000 foundation capital and £25,623,000 reserve capital, had dwindled by 1921 to £1,824,000 foundation and £1,153,000 reserve. The currency was following that of Austria, with which it was still linked, in a dizzy downward spiral of inflation. Shortage of labour during the war, exhaustion of stocks and deterioration of machinery had impaired even agricultural production.

There was extreme social cleavage and unrest. Both the industrial and the rural proletariats had seen their hopes raised high during the two revolutions, and were by no means willing to return to their previous condition of political impotence and social degradation. The same revolutions, on the other hand, had greatly embittered the former possessing classes (including all but the very poorest of the peasants, and some even of them), who ascribed to them

the blame for all Hungary's misfortunes. Feeling ran particularly high against the Jews, who had played a disproportionately large part in both revolutions, especially Kun's; but the Social Democrats had also compromised themselves by their alliance with Communism, and even Liberal democracy was tainted by its associations with Jewry and its share in Károlyi's regime.

Already in the preceding autumn these resentments had erupted into violence. While the Allies were still laboriously negotiating the formation of a government to allow adequate representation to the workers and Liberal elements, bands of 'White Terrorists', most of them detachments of the 'National Army', were already ranging the country, wreaking indiscriminate vengeance on persons whom they associated with the revolutions. Huszár's government itself had turned so sharply on the Social Democrats and the Trade Unions, imprisoning hundreds and interning thousands of alleged revolutionaries, that the Social Democrats had withdrawn their representative from the government and boycotted the elections. Thus even this first parliament, the liberal franchise notwithstanding, was not at all representative of the nation as a whole. It was composed – apart from numerous 'independents' and representatives of dwarf parties – of two main parties, each hurriedly drummed together: the 'Christian National Union' and the 'United Agrarians' and Smallholders' Party'. Of these, the 'Christian Nationals' were Conservatives pure and simple, on the social issue. The core of the second party was constituted by a 'Smallholders' Party' formed shortly before the War by a peasant tribune, István Szabó of Nagytád, and stood for the interests of the small peasants, and above all, for land reform, but even it contained hardly any representatives of the agricultural proletariat, so that it was true to say that labour of any class was unrepresented in the parliament.

Nor were impoverishment and embitterment confined

to the working classes. The inflation was quickly reducing a large part of the fixed income middle classes, especially those who had patriotically invested their savings in Austro-Hungarian War Loan, to great poverty. Worse situated still were the families who had fled or been expelled – a distinction which was often without a difference – from the Successor States, leaving their all behind them. By the end of 1920 nearer 400,000 than 300,000 of these unfortunates, nearly all from middle-class families, had found refuge in Rump Hungary, where many of them were existing under lamentable conditions, camped in old railway carriages and supported by the scanty relief which was all that the government could provide for them.

If the financial condition of the members of this class was far worse than that of the workman in full employment, their outlook was traditionalist and above all, nationalist. They were even more embittered than the representatives of property against the revolutions and their authors, whom they regarded as responsible for their misfortunes. Thus in the clash between Left and Right they had sided with the Right; they had, indeed, been the chief executants of the White Terror. But they regarded the crushing of Marxism as the indispensable first step towards political recovery, but only as a first step. They were of the Right, but they were 'Right Radicals', and their aspirations included fairly drastic changes in the national structure at the expense of the great landlords, banks and industrial cartels.

Finally, the nation was split from top to bottom on the dynastic question. While hardly anyone, unless among the proscribed Reds, wanted a republic, the nation was acutely divided over the question whether Charles was still the lawful King of Hungary, or whether his declaration of 13 November 1918 entitled the nation to fill the throne by 'free election'. This question took a precedence in the politics of the day that is only comprehensible in the light

of the national history, and in fact, as will be seen, ended by determining, albeit indirectly, the course taken by the national development in other fields.

It was the 'question of public law' with which the parliament necessarily dealt first. Its first act was to declare null and void all measures enacted by either Károlyi's or Kun's governments. The institution of the monarchy was thus restored, and in recognition of the new situation outside Hungary, the House also annulled the legislation embodying the 1867 Compromise. In view of the division of opinion among its own members, it left in abeyance the question of the legal relationship between the nation and the monarch, but decided to elect as provisional Head of the State a Regent holding the essential political powers normally exercised by the Crown. Admiral Horthy was elected to this office on 1 March. The Huszár government then resigned, and as the two main parties emerging from the elections were approximately equal in strength (the Smallholders being slightly, but only slightly, the larger), a coalition government was formed out of these two parties, under the presidency of A. Simonyi-Semadam.

At this time the national policy towards industrial labour was still one of simple repression, but the demand for land reform was too strong to be ignored: it was strongly pressed by Szabó and his followers, and the necessity for some concession was not denied even by some of the landowners themselves. Discussions began in May, and on 10 August (by which time the Simonyi-Semadam Government had given place to a new one under Count Pál Teleki) an Act was passed under which 1·2 million *hold* (about 7·5 per cent of the total area of the country) were to be taken from the largest estates for distribution. This was a modest figure indeed, especially when compared with the land reforms being enacted by Hungary's neighbours; but Szabó had been persuaded that a larger figure would be financially impracticable at that stage, and had accepted it on the

understanding that it was to be followed by a second instalment when times improved.

But in 1921 the Habsburg question erupted. In March, and again in October, Charles returned to claim his throne. Both times he was forced to withdraw, the command coming from the Allies, on the insistence of Hungary's neighbours; but the anti-Legitimists in Hungary were no less determined to have none of him. The question cut across the parties, for it had not been made an issue at the elections, but while the Legitimists had in the main voted for the Christian Nationals, the great majority of the Smallholders' coalition were vehemently anti-Legitimist; indeed, many of them had joined the party for no other reason, being uninterested in, or even opposed to, land reform. The Right Radicals had voted for it to a man, for in their eyes Habsburg rule was identical with the dominance of big vested interests. This gave his opportunity to the man who for the next ten years was to dominate Hungarian politics and to shape the structure in the image of his own wishes: Count István Bethlen.

A man less Right Radical than Bethlen never stepped. On every social issue he was an arch-conservative, so obviously so that, although Hungary's most experienced politician, who had played the leading part in the Anti-Bolshevik Committee in Vienna, in Hungary he had had to content himself, in 1920, with a place behind the scenes. But in March 1921, when the government (several of whose members were Legitimists) resigned, Bethlen accepted the succession, and while not pronouncing formally (except in admitted lip-service to the Entente[1]) against the king's claims, consented to cover a policy which in fact excluded his return. In return for this, the Smallholders agreed to fuse with the non-Legitimists of the Christians in a new

[1] On the Allies' orders, the Hungarian Parliament passed a law dethroning the Habsburgs, but not even Hungary's own anti-Legitimists ever took this as morally binding.

party under Bethlen's leadership and to support him in a complicated manoeuvre, the result of which was that the franchise enacted before the War, which again restricted the number of voters and restored the open vote outside towns possessing municipal charters,[1] was declared to be still legally in force. This carried (against the frenzied opposition of precisely the highest Conservatives), Bethlen held new elections (May 1922), which naturally gave a large majority to his new 'Party of Unity'; in other words, since the structure of the Party itself made it a mere rubber stamp for endorsing the will of its leader, they gave Bethlen a free hand.

Bethlen was a very long-sighted man, and a man who put first things first. If asked to name in a phrase the supreme goal of his policy, he would probably have answered, like all his class and most Hungarians, total revision of the Treaty of Trianon. But he saw that as the situation then was, with the Allies, led by France, supreme in Europe, Hungary's chief neighbours banded together in the 'Little Entente' and Hungary herself weak and isolated, revision was not, for the time, practical politics; it could only become so when Hungary had recovered her internal strength, and had also acquired influential friends abroad. Thus, if only as the indispensable preliminary to revision, but also for its own sake, the first step must be internal 'consolidation', political and social, and this again, as he saw it, depended on financial reconstruction. The fount of capital was the west, and in particular Geneva, and it was therefore necessary, as a beginning, to renounce any actions which would block Hungary's access to those waters. He refused, indeed, to undertake any obligations towards Hungary's neighbours which, in his eyes or his country's, would have implied a moral renunciation of any revisionist claim; but he discountenanced any open policy of adven-

[1] Even in these a candidate's nomination papers had to be signed by a large number of sponsors, whose signatures were open.

ture (although conniving at certain surreptitious and sometimes scandalous devices) and applied for membership of the League of Nations. This was granted (not without difficulty) in September 1922. Bethlen then applied for a reconstruction loan, similar to that which had just been granted to Austria, and when the Little Entente (fearing that the money would be used for illegitimate purposes) made difficulties, authorised the acceptance of a declaration that Hungary voluntarily accepted, and undertook to carry out strictly and loyally, the obligations of the Treaty of Trianon. The only other political treaty concluded by him was a Treaty of Friendship with Italy, signed in 1927; and this, while it proved useful afterwards as a starting-point for a more active policy, did not signify very much at the time, since Italy in the mid-twenties was concluding Treaties of Friendship with practically every Central European State.

Bethlen's political opponents accused him of having betrayed the nation's cause for gold, but if the correctness of his order of priorities is conceded, then it must also be granted that his policy was most abundantly justified by its results. The protocols of the League loan, which were signed on 24 March 1924, included also the renunciation by the Allies of the lien held by them under the Treaty on 'all Hungary's assets and resources', and the substitution of a fixed total to be paid by her in reparations; and once this agreement had been reached, an almost magical change came over the whole financial picture. Money poured into the country – not only the League loan, but private capital from abroad seeking quick and large returns, while the fugitive domestic capital also returned home.

The inflation was stopped, and a new, gold-based currency, the pengö, introduced, which proved to be among the most stable in Europe. The budgets began to close with surpluses. Agriculture still formed the backbone of the national economy, but in 1926 a new autonomous tariff

was introduced, and behind its shelter a considerable amount of industrialisation was carried through; official statistics showed that the number of establishments ranking as factories increased by two thirds between 1920 and 1929, the number of workers employed in them by a little more, and the value of their production by nearly 300 per cent. A greatly increased proportion of the national imports now consisted of industrial raw materials or half-finished products, which were worked up in the national factories. The bulk of the exports still consisted of agricultural products, raw or processed, but markets for these had been found, and prices were good. The total value of foreign trade doubled, and the calculated national income rose by 20 per cent.

Parallel with the financial rehabilitation of Hungary had gone its social and political reconstruction. Bethlen was not himself greedy for money, nor interested in squeezing the poor, and he was too intelligent not to recognise that new times brought new social forces which could not be simply repressed out of existence. But his associations with the landowning class on the one hand, and his conviction of the necessity of meeting the wishes of international capital on the other, biased his outlook strongly in favour of property; and in any case, the idea of allowing the poorer classes an effective voice in the government of the country was entirely foreign to him. His concessions to modernity were thus kept to the minimum which his great tactical ability could contrive. The keystone of his political system was the 1922 franchise, with the help of which he was always able to command a sufficient parliamentary majority for his decisions; the re-construction, in 1926, of an Upper House did not in practice weaken his position, for in a crisis, the Lower House could always impose its will on the Upper. The open franchise, combined with the complete authority exercised by him over the party machine, enabled him to eliminate foreign bodies from the

Government Party (as it was always known) by the simple process of dropping their representatives from the list of candidates, and to prevent their entering parliament in inconveniently large numbers on an Opposition ticket. With the help of these weapons, he was soon finished with the rural poor. The genuine peasant element in the Smallholders' Party had already been greatly weakened in 1921 by a grave financial scandal, in which Szabó himself was involved; and after the 1922 elections the survivors were soon quietly excreted. A close ban on any combination among the agricultural workers prevented them from making their voices heard by direct action. Nothing more was heard after this of the second instalment of the land reform, and the application of the 1920 Act itself was half-hearted. The big landlords whose estates were trimmed for the purpose were allowed to choose what land they would surrender, and naturally parted with the least fertile and most inaccessible corners of their estates. In the event, less than half of the 1·2 million *hold* was distributed to landless men or dwarf-holders, of whom 298,000 beneficiaries received an average of 1·6 *hold* apiece. The rest was retained by the state as unsuitable for distribution, and devoted to communal grazing-grounds, state farms, etc., or distributed to the 'Order of Heroes' (Vitézi Rend), a picked body of men selected for their loyalty to the regime.

The industrial workers were not muzzled quite so tightly; as early as December 1921 Bethlen had concluded a formal treaty with the Social Democrat leaders under which they had been granted an amnesty, the cessation of various forms of persecution, and the same right of association as was enjoyed by other parties, and the Trade Unions had had their confiscated funds restored to them with recognition of their right to pursue their legal activities. As, moreover, the franchise was not open in the towns, the workers' spokesmen were always able to send a quota of representatives to parliament. But these could never constitute more than a minority, and in return for these concessions the Socialists had had to promise to abstain from anti-national propaganda, to adopt an 'expressly Hungarian attitude' on foreign political questions, to abstain from political strikes, to confine the activities of the Unions to the strictly non-political field, and not to extend their agitation to the agricultural workers.

It would be an over-simplification to describe Bethlen's operations as simply putting the poor in their places, for they also included the political neutralisation of a considerable opposition – Legitimists on the one hand, Right Radicals on the other – among the ruling classes themselves. Towards these, Bethlen employed, indeed, gentler methods. Whereas apprehended Communist agents were punished with great severity, offenders of the Right were usually treated very leniently, 'patriotic motives' being accepted as a sufficient defence, or at least as a powerful mitigating circumstance, in their cases. But the iron hand was there under the velvet glove. The White Terror was liquidated quietly, but effectively, and it became not much easier (although much less hazardous) to preach active anti-Semitism than Marxian revolution.

It must be admitted that, judged by his own standards, Bethlen's political and social consolidation was very successful. The Right Radicals were found jobs in a government service which was expanded, far beyond the national needs, to receive them, and settled down happily enough in what seemed to be a new security. The Legitimist question in any case lost its acuteness when Charles died in 1922, for although he left heirs, a new claimant to the throne could not command the devotion which attached to the crowned king. Even among the workers, of either category, there was little active unrest.

Withal, only a moderate amount of pressure was needed to keep this structure intact. Bethlen was an authoritarian, but not totalitarian, nor tyrannical. Personal and political

freedoms were far more restricted than in the real democracies of the day, but generous compared with conditions prevailing in Russia, or even Italy.

Nevertheless, Bethlen's Hungary was emphatically a class state, and in a Europe which then believed itself to be advancing towards democracy, it was a conspicuous laggard; and its handsome façade, like that of Kálmán Tisza's Hungary, covered grievous unsolved social problems. Some not inconsiderable improvements were introduced in the working conditions of industrial labour in the '20s, when real wages also rose perceptibly, but neither wages nor conditions could be called satisfactory. The condition of the rural poor was worse still. Fortunately for them, their birthrate was falling rapidly, and industrialisation was now proceeding fast enough to absorb most of the surplus. On the other hand, the American legislation had closed the main outlet of emigration, so that if the rural congestion did not increase, neither did it much diminish. The agrarian census of 1935 showed that nearly three million people – 30 per cent of the total national population and 60 per cent of that employed in agriculture – was either totally landless or occupying holdings insufficient to support life in decency. Real wages in agriculture were below even the pre-war level. Even the poorer members of the middle classes – and true wealth was concentrated in a very few hands indeed – existed precariously enough, and the universities were beginning to produce a large new potential intellectual proletariat.

Many of these evils might ultimately have vanished if prosperity had continued, but the whole structure of Bethlen's system rested on two pillars: the maintenance of international credit, until such time as Hungary no longer needed to borrow, and the continuance of high prices on the world market for her exports, particularly wheat. In 1929 both of these were shaken by the collapse of world wheat prices, started by over-production in Canada, and

by the Stock Exchange crash on Wall Street. In 1930 the Government had already to support the price of wheat, but the consequences for Hungary did not become really serious until the collapse of the Austrian *Creditanstalt* in May 1931. Even this did not shake Bethlen's position; a month after it, he held elections which returned the Government Party to power with the usual large majority. But in the next weeks the full impact of the financial blizzard hit the country. Unable to meet the demands of her foreign creditors, who were trying hurriedly to withdraw their funds, she had to appeal to the League of Nations, which prescribed a policy of ruthless financial orthodoxy, including the balancing of her budget by increasing revenue by heavier taxation and reducing expenditure by salary cuts and dismissals in the public services, and the balancing of her balance of payments by the throttling of imports. Meanwhile the cascading agricultural prices had left her entire producing agricultural class practically penniless and heavily indebted to the banks to boot, while the disappearance of the purchasing power of this class, coupled with the dwindling of exports (since other countries were in the same plight) and even of imported raw materials, sent industrial unemployment rocketing sky-high.

The fantastic severity of the depression not only wiped out the economic gains of the previous decade, but also threatened the political and social consolidation. Bethlen himself resigned in August 1931. His successor, Count Gyula Károlyi, was another great aristocrat, of unbending conservatism and irreproachable probity, who set himself with determination to carry out the League's recommendations. But as one severe measure followed another, unrest grew. There were strikes and demonstrations among the workers, but more dangerous to the system was the revolt of the medium and small farmers, crushed under the weight of their indebtedness to the banks, the axed civil servants and the officers, and the jobless young university

graduates. This discontent took the form of a revived Right Radicalism, directed especially against the Jews, who were the creditor class in Hungary and whose entrenched positions in trade and industry barred employment to a class for which the state was now forbidden to provide.

In September 1932 Károlyi declared himself unable to fight any more against the clamour of the malcontents, and on 1 October the Regent yielded, and appointed to the Minister Presidency the acknowledged leader of the Right Radicals, Captain (as he then was) Gyula Gömbös.

Gömbös and Bethlen are the two anti-poles of inter-war Hungarian politics. Even their personalities form an extraordinary contrast: the Transylvanian aristocrat, in whose veins mingled the blood of half Hungary's historic families, and the up-and-coming product of west Hungarian yeoman stock, at least half Swabian; the suave grand seigneur, the theatrical poseur; the calculating and long-sighted threader and contriver of mazes, the bull-headed charger of fences. Gömbös' political creed was centred round two main tenets, both of them, indeed, the products of the same primary emotion, a passionate nationalism: a fanatical anti-Habsburgism and an equally fanatical racialism, which found its chief vent in a *bruyant* (although not sadistic) anti-Semitism. Round these two poles he had draped a sincere, although not closely reasoned, Fascism, which found room for a genuine wish to improve the social conditions of his people, whom he regarded as the exploited victims of Jewish financiers and Habsburg-tainted landlords.

His foreign political programme had no place for Bethlen's patient *ménagement* of existing forces. Early in his career he had conceived a vision of an 'Axis' (the term, in this connotation, was of his minting) which was to consist of the new Hungary, Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany; in this edition, Germany was to annexe Austria (except for the Burgenland, which she would restore to Hungary), allaying Italy's fears by guaranteeing the Brenner frontier.

These three states, linked by kindred ideologies, were to help each other to realise their national objectives (in Hungary's case, her historic frontiers) and thereafter to exercise a sort of joint leadership of Europe, a better Europe, purged of Bolshevism and its shadows.

The appointment of such a man to the Minister Presidency should have brought with it a revolution in Hungarian policy, both internal and foreign. In fact, it brought no more than a half turn. During his first three years of office Gömbös in any case enjoyed little of the reality of power. In the old days he had been Horthy's favourite, but the Regent had grown more sedate with the passing years, and Gömbös' radical tenets, good and bad, were now alike repugnant to him. He censored his list of ministers, and also refused him permission to hold new elections, so that he had to govern with a parliament mainly composed of Bethlen's adherents. On top of this, he found himself no more able than his predecessors to defy the then generally accepted rule that the creditor calls the tune, and his time was largely spent in trying to lift Hungary out of the depression by entirely orthodox methods. Finally, it was borne in on him that the said rule was not only international in its application. He consequently astounded Hungary by announcing that he had 'revised his views on the Jewish question'; and his internal political activities were as non-subversive, in this respect, as his dealings with international capital.

He made one important move in foreign policy. When he came into office, one member of the proposed Axis was in any case lacking, for Hitler was not yet in power in Germany. But Mussolini was there, and Gömbös took an early opportunity of visiting Rome, when he elicited from the Duce a public expression of sympathy for Hungarian revision. This, far more than the 1924 Treaty, really committed Hungary to an Italian orientation, for no Hungarian government could thereafter possibly disavow

the only Power of stature approximating to greatness which had said a word in favour of revision. But it did not bring the Axis nearer, for when Hitler did come into power, the only early move which he made in eastern Europe was to start an agitation in Austria. As Mussolini by no means accepted Gömbös' original Axis doctrine, but regarded Austrian independence as a vital interest of Italy's, the first result of Gömbös' policy was that Hungary was drawn into a bloc, composed of Italy, Hungary and Austria, the chief *raison d'être* of which was precisely to thwart Hitler's ambitions. Gömbös tried to keep an open door towards Germany, struck up a warm personal friendship with Göring, and wheedled a very advantageous commercial treaty out of Hitler himself, but the documents show the Germans, at this time, as highly suspicious and resentful of Hungarian policy. If, in the negotiations which began at the end of 1934 between Italy and France, France had been able to persuade her allies of the Little Entente to make any concessions of substance to Hungary, Hungary might yet have found herself a member of a new European combination directed against Germany.

The Franco-Italian negotiations, of course, failed, and were followed in due course by Mussolini's quarrel with the West and, eventually, his announcement of the formation of the 'Rome-Berlin Axis'. By this time Hitler had occupied the Rhineland and it was clear that Germany would soon be able, if she were willing, to perform the role which Gömbös had assigned to her. Further, Horthy had at last allowed Gömbös to dissolve parliament, and as a result of the elections 'made' by him in May 1935 he had brought a strong contingent of his own followers into parliament and had placed others in many key political and military posts.

But by now it was clear that the situation created by Germany's emergence was nothing like so simple as Gömbös, in his early enthusiasm, had imagined. Hitler

soon made it plain that he had no intention of simply restoring Hungary's historic frontiers for her. He told Gömbös himself, as early as 1934, that while Hungary might, if she would, take her share in the partition of Czechoslovakia, she was to keep her hands off Yugoslavia and Roumania.

Even this fraction-loaf was something which no Hungarian would refuse if it could be received safely. But Hungary was still practically unarmed, and in no case to defend herself against attack, much less attack anyone else. She needed assurances and protection. Germany might give them, but presumably, only at the price of a contractual obligation. And then, what if Germany's policies resulted in a general war? No fate could be worse for Hungary than a second time to enter a great war on Germany's side, and a second time to share her defeat.

Neither – it was now plain – could the new Germany be regarded simply in the light of a potential liberator. It was a ruthless, self-centred Power, which might well not even leave Hungary's own independence unimpaired, but seek, if not actually to annexe Hungary, to reduce it to satellite status, dominating its economy and intervening in its internal conditions. And at this point the German problem became inextricably bound up with that of Hungary's own internal politics, by reason of the ideological character of the Nazi regime, and in particular, its anti-Semitism. Those elements in Hungary which had most to fear from an extension of German-Nazi influence – the Legitimists, the Socialists, and above all the Jews – naturally saw most clearly the dangerous aspects of the situation, including – since every man's calculations are largely the children of his wishes – the international danger which association with Germany might bring, while the sympathisers with Hitler's ideology took the dangers lightly, or where they did admit them, used them as an argument in favour of their own domestic programme. The way to make sure of

Hitler's good will, they contended, was to copy his doings, while to refuse to do so was to invite his hostility. Was Hungary not merely to renounce revision, but to jeopardise her own independence for the sake of a system and an element which in their view were *per se* undesirable?

Hungarian political opinion thus split along a new line of cleavage in which the Right Radicals were faced, on the domestic issue, by a curious shadow Opposition Front, stretching all the way from the Legitimists through the traditionalist 'Liberal Conservatives' right to the Socialists; these two groups also, in the main, personifying respectively the party of caution on the international issue, and the forward party which advocated the closest possible co-operation with Germany. And even Gömbös' victory at the polls by no means meant that the forward policy was going to have a free course, for the last word in politics rested with the Regent, and the Regent's sympathies were with the traditionalists in domestic politics, while on the international issue he was strongly on the side of the party of caution, his naval past having implanted in him a strong conviction that great wars were always won by the side holding the command of the seas.

The Right was further weakened by the death of Gömbös in October 1936. None of his closer adherents enjoyed such prestige as to compel his appointment, and the Regent appointed as his successor Kálmán Darányi, who was much more of a conservative than a radical on domestic issues. In fact, the domestic legislation enacted during his term of office, which included a Franchise Act introducing the secret ballot in the rural districts, was non-contentious, and most of it had been agreed with the Opposition. In any case, Hungarian internal politics, from this date until 1944, had become little more than a function of foreign politics, and the history of Hungary during the same years is little more than that of her relations with Germany; that is to say, endeavours to pluck for herself the fruits

which Germany's growing power brought within her reach, while escaping the dangers. It was, as the following years showed, a hopeless attempt. It brought, indeed, temporary gains – the restoration of about half of what Hungary had lost at Trianon – but it ended in a fresh disaster which wiped out all those gains and left Hungary saddled with precisely the odium which she had hoped to escape. Nor is the story free from blots on Hungary's own record. Yet in the main it appears above all as a tragedy, in which good actions could do no more to arrest, than bad to precipitate, a doom dictated by forces far exceeding Hungary's own.

The Germans chose to greet Dáranyi's appointment with hostility, and his first year of office was enlivened by brisk disputes with them on Hungary's treatment of her German minority. These were smoothed over when Darányi, with Kánya, the foreign minister, visited Berlin in November 1937, on which occasion Hitler again intimated to his guests that Hungary could have Slovakia-Ruthenia when he acted against Czechoslovakia. The Hungarian General Staff now began pressing for co-ordinated agreements with Germany, but the politicians remained cautious. Close contact was made with Poland and a campaign initiated to convince Britain of the justice of Hungary's cause. A little later, when Darányi tried to reach a working agreement with the most important of the extremist parties of the Right, Ferencz Szálasi's Arrow Cross, Horthy dismissed him in favour of Béla Imrédy. It is true that Imrédy introduced (as part of a complex of legislation which included a programme of rearmament, to which Hungary now declared herself entitled) a law limiting the participation of Jews in certain callings to 20 per cent; but this measure (which had been prepared before Darányi's fall) had been approved by the Jewish leaders themselves as a prudent and not excessive sop to Cerberus. For the rest, the chief reason for Imrédy's appointment, which was

made on Bethlen's advice, was precisely that he possessed good connections with the West.

Another recruit to the cabinet was Count Pál Teleki, the distinguished geographer (thus returning to ministerial office after eighteen years), who shared to the full Horthy's belief in the invincibility of the West, while Kánya, who remained foreign minister, was the very embodiment of caution. When the Regent, accompanied by Imrédy and Kánya, paid a state visit to Kiel in August, the Hungarians, pleading their unarmed condition, declared themselves unable to take part in a military operation, and when the Munich crisis broke in September, they made almost passionate endeavours to get their claims realised on their own merits, limiting their demands, in that cause, to the ethnic frontier which they thought Britain would approve, and thereby, if unintentionally, nearly wrecking Hitler's plans.

This was their first great disappointment. Mr Chamberlain ignored them completely, and it was left to Hitler, after all (who was infuriated with them, but needed their collaboration, with that of the Poles and Slovaks, if his own gains were not to be limited to the Sudeten areas), to put their case for them. Ultimately it was referred to direct negotiation between the parties, with the proviso that if they failed to agree, it should be referred back to the Munich Powers. Naturally, they failed, whereupon Britain and France disinterested themselves, and Hungary was left alone (except for platonic and not in practice very helpful support from Italy and Poland) to face an irritated Hitler, who now showed an inclination to support the Czechs and Slovaks (who had abjured democracy and flung themselves into his arms) on the disputed issues. Yugoslavia was already very nearly in the Axis camp, Roumania moving towards it. In these circumstances, the argument that Hungary could not afford to antagonise Hitler was convincing indeed. Placatory offers were made, and although no bargain was struck at the time – the arbitral award, rendered by Germany and Italy on 2 November, gave Hungary only the Magyar-inhabited southern fringe of Slovakia-Ruthenia, which she would probably have received in any case, while denying her Ruthenia – a new course was set immediately after it. Kánya was dropped in favour of Count István Csáky, a young man who announced his policy to be 'quite simply, that of the Rome-Berlin Axis all along the line', and at a subsequent meeting with Hitler, gave him far-reaching, albeit indefinite, promises of support.

Meanwhile Imrédy, who had been profoundly disillusioned by his experiences at Munich, announced a near-Fascist internal programme, including a second Jewish Law, more drastic than its predecessor (the quota was to be reduced to 6 per cent and the definition of a Jew tightened up). This, indeed, provoked a revolt. His enemies unearthed documents which purported to show a Jewish strain in Imrédy's own ancestry. He resigned (February 1939), and the Regent appointed Teleki, whose devoted determination not to let Hungary become involved in a conflict with the West was unquestionable. But Teleki himself thought it impossible to do more than stabilise Hungary's position on the lower level to which Imrédy and Csáky had brought it. He kept Csáky at the foreign ministry, and on a visit to Berlin agreed that in a world conflict Hungary would 'take up her position by the side of the Axis Powers', only stipulating that she would not act against Poland. Similarly, he steered the Second Jewish Law through parliament. Incidentally, when, in June, he held elections on the new suffrage, with the secret ballot, all the parties of the Left-wing Opposition lost heavily, while the Arrow Cross and its allies appeared as the second largest party.

Early in Teleki's period of office came the completion of the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia, as a by-product whereof Hungary in March 1939 re-acquired Ruthenia.

Here Teleki was lucky, for although Hitler had sanctioned the operation, the West did not take it ill. He was lucky, too, when the Second World War broke out, for Germany did not ask for Hungary's participation, and for nearly a year more Hungary could still hope that the end of the conflict would leave her uncompromised. But the next developments showed how inextricable was the tangle in which she was involved. She had promised both groups of belligerents (both of whom, remarkably, wanted the same thing in this respect) not to 'disturb the peace in South-Eastern Europe' by pressing her claims against Roumania unless others took action likely to prejudice the peaceful realisation of those claims after the war. But in June 1940 the U.S.S.R. occupied Bessarabia, and Hungary now told the Axis Powers that she must receive satisfaction of her claims. By threatening to march, she forced them to render the 'Second Vienna Award', of 30 August, which gave her about two fifths of the disputed territory. But the result of her action (with Russia's and Bulgaria's) was that Roumania swung right round, repudiated the guarantee of the Western Powers, accepted one from Germany, and in a trice had become Germany's favourite client in south-eastern Europe.

Roumania as Germany's client was, in the situation of the day, far more dangerous than Roumania as her enemy, for, much more than in the parallel but less acute case of Slovakia, the situation produced a race for Germany's favour, for which Roumania bid in the hope of securing the reversal of the Award, and Hungary to ensure its maintenance. This rivalry led to Hungary's signing the Tripartite Pact, in November 1940, and the next development drew the toils closer still. A party among the Hungarians, to which Teleki belonged, had long urged reconciliation with Yugoslavia – originally, indeed, with the purpose of detaching her from the Little Entente. This consideration no longer applied, but Teleki favoured pursuing the policy,

with the idea that the two countries should help each other to resist excessive pressure from Germany. Yet Hitler, although doubtless aware of Teleki's thoughts, favoured the rapprochement as making it easier for Yugoslavia to enter the 'Axis orbit'; and that she should do so was an obvious, and understood, condition of the whole move, for close contractual relations between the two countries would have been impossible if they had been on opposite sides in the world alignment. A Hungaro-Yugoslav Treaty, called with unfortunate grandiloquence a 'Pact of Eternal Friendship', was duly signed on 12 December, and the Yugoslav Government then in fact took step after step towards the Axis. But Hitler pressed them too hard; the Opposition revolted, and on 26 March, deposed its government. Hitler in fury prepared to invade Yugoslavia and called on Hungary to join him. The Hungarians, caught in a situation which they had not at all envisaged, did not join in the attack, but did not try to stop the transit of German troops across their territory into Roumania, whence part of Hitler's attack was launched, and on 11 April, after Croatia had proclaimed itself independent, Hungary occupied the ex-Hungarian parts of Inner Hungary, claiming that Yugoslavia no longer existed.

Britain had threatened to declare war if Hungary joined the attack, and on 2 April, when it seemed likely that his policy – undertaken with such different intentions – was involving Hungary in that conflict with the West which it had been his supreme aim to avoid, Teleki had taken his own life. In the event, Britain contented herself with breaking off diplomatic relations, but a few weeks later Teleki's successor, Bárdossy, took the step which was technically decisive. The occasion was Hitler's attack on the U.S.S.R. In his preparations he had not assigned Hungary a role in the campaign, but the Hungarian generals had pressed their German colleagues to let Hungary participate, so that she should not be left behind in the race for

favour (and arms) by Roumania, which had been invited. No one calculated that Russia would hold out for more than a few weeks, nor expected complications with the West to arise.

After the attack had begun, messages from the O.K.W. and a queer incident, still unexplained – the bombing of Kassa, in north Hungary, by aircraft bearing Axis markings – convinced Bárdossy, who had hitherto resisted the representations of the generals, that Germany really wanted Hungary's participation, and would exact it in the long run; and arguing that willing compliance would be cheaper than reluctant submission to pressure, he adopted the General Staff's version that the unidentified aircraft had been Russian aeroplanes disguised, and sent an expeditionary force, conceived as a token, across the Carpathians.

This step soon brought its nemesis, for whatever the outcome might have been if the calculation of Russia's weakness had proved correct, when the resistance proved prolonged, Hungary found herself pushed fatally down the path of no return. In January 1942 the Germans arrived with a demand that she should mobilise practically her whole available manpower and send it up to the line. Meanwhile Mr Churchill had identified the cause of the West with that of Russia. In December 1941 Britain had declared war on Hungary and a few days later Hungary in her turn declared war on the U.S.A. Further, Britain had recognised the Czechoslovak Government in exile and had withdrawn recognition of the First Vienna Award; the U.S.S.R. even formally recognised Czechoslovakia's 1937 frontiers. The re-creation (in shadow form) of the Little Entente was practically complete.

Many Hungarians now thought that the only course was to fight on in the hope that the Axis would win the war. Horthy saw the situation differently. He was quite convinced that the war would end in an Allied victory, but he also believed that the West did not want the bolshevisation

of Europe, and that Hungary could regain its favour while continuing the fight in the East. In March 1942 he therefore dismissed Bárdossy in favour of Miklós Kállay, who shared these hopes, and one more attempt was made to recover the lost ground. For two years Kállay conducted a remarkable policy. He afforded to Hungary's Jews a protection then unparalleled on the Continent; allowed almost complete freedom to all anti-Hitlerite and non-Communist elements, whom he allowed to build up an 'Independence Front' which openly speculated on an Allied victory, and opened secret conversations with the Western Powers, with whom, in August 1943, he actually concluded a secret agreement to surrender to them unconditionally when their troops should reach the frontiers of Hungary. The active prosecution of the campaign in the East was, meanwhile, brought to an end by the catastrophe of Voronezh, in January 1943, in which Hungary lost half her armed forces and nearly all her equipment.

Kállay's balancing feat at least gave Hungary's traditional institutions, and also the anti-Hitlerite elements in the country, two years of life; but such hope as might ever have existed for his policy vanished when the inter-Allied strategy assigned south-eastern Europe to the Soviet armies. Further, when those armies approached the Carpathians, Hitler (to whom most of Kállay's activities were an open book) decided that he could no longer afford to leave his vital communications with the East at the mercy of a regime in whose loyalty he could not trust. In March 1944 he summoned Horthy and offered him the choice between full co-operation in Germany's war effort, under close German supervision, or undisguised occupation and the treatment afforded to a conquered enemy country. Horthy chose the former course, and appointed a collaborationist government under General Sztójay, but for some three months thereafter the Germans in practice did as they would in Hungary, the government seldom resist-

ing and often abetting them. All anti-Nazi parties and organisations were dissolved, and their leaders arrested or driven into hiding. Above all, the Jews suffered one of the greatest tragedies in the history of Israel. They were herded into camps and then deported, chiefly to Ausschwitz, where all but an able-bodied minority were sent to the gas-chambers. All the Jews outside Budapest, some 450,000 in number, suffered deportation, and of these not more than 120,000 survived. Meanwhile, another army, comprising almost Hungary's last reserves, had been sent to the Front.

After a while the pressure eased and Horthy recovered some freedom of action. He stopped the Jewish deportations before they had extended to the capital, and in August, after Roumania's surrender, appointed a new government on the loyalty of most of whose members, including the Minister President, General Lakatos, he could rely. Now he reopened secret communications with the West, but the answer was categoric: Hungary must address the U.S.S.R., whose armies were, indeed, now standing on, or across the frontier. So it was Bolshevik Russia, after all, that entered Hungary as its conqueror, although there was one more short scene before the curtain fell. A mission sent by Horthy to Moscow duly concluded a 'preliminary armistice', but when, on 15 October, Horthy announced the negotiations on the wireless, the Germans, whose forces round Budapest far outnumbered the Hungarian, seized him, forced him to recant and to abdicate and allowed Szálasi, with whom they had long been in touch, to take over the Government. The great majority of the Hungarian army itself preferred to fight on, and it was only slowly, and at the cost of bitter fighting, that the Germans and their Hungarian allies were driven westward. The last of these forces crossed the Austrian frontier on 4 April, following or preceding a great host of civilian refugees.

Meanwhile the birth of a new order had again preceded the passing of the old. Under Soviet auspices, a 'Provisional government of Democratic Hungary' had been assembled and 'appointed' on 23 December 1944, by a 'Provisional National Assembly' brought together in Debrecen by pragmatic methods. This government then signed an armistice, under which the new Hungary renounced all territorial acquisitions made since 1938. The Peace Treaty, signed on 10 February 1947, formally restored the Trianon frontiers, further aggravated by a small but strategically important frontier rectification in favour of Czechoslovakia.