

RETROSPECT AND PROSPECT

Some general remarks may be added to the chief conclusions of this work concerning both the past and the future.

As to the historical meaning of the process of dissolution, the reader will perhaps share the impression which I experienced the more my investigations proceeded, namely, that the collapse of the Habsburg empire was not anything surprising but rather the long continuance of this amalgamation of peoples without a common state idea, based on the mutual hatred and distrust of the various nations. Manifestly their inner revolutionary forces were not sufficient, in time of peace, to get rid of the Habsburg yoke. Regarding the process as a whole, the most outstanding groups of causes which undermined the cohesion of the old patrimonial state were threefold:

1. The growing national consciousness of the various nations which could not find place for a true consolidation and adequate self-expression in the rigidity of the absolutistic structure, later not changed but only modified by the semi-absolutism of the Dualistic System under which neither a confederated constitution nor even a sound local national autonomy could be achieved.

2. The economic and social pressure of the feudal class rule, allied with a usurious kind of capitalism, which did not allow the productive forces of the various nations to be developed. Vienna was not only a natural economic leader but at the same time an economic exploiter of the weaker nations through her financial and administrative monopolies. The national exasperation of the peoples was strengthened by the feeling of being a kind of a colony for German capitalism. At the same time the hunger-belt of the latifundist system paralyzed to a large extent the beneficent influences of a united customs territory. A true division of labor among the various territories remained rudimentary whereas a new national middle class arose everywhere which felt its economic interests incompatible with the supremacy of big Viennese finance.

3. The lack of any serious kind of civic education. All the nations lived as moral and intellectual strangers to one another. Both the dynastic epic in Austria and the feudal in Hungary were incapable of creating a sufficiently strong and cohesive state idea. Finally these two fallacies pushed the two hegemonic nations into a fatal conflict, even more pernicious than that in which they were engaged with their lesser nationalities.

This growing dissolution and final collapse of the Habsburg empire was mainly the work of three factors:

1. The continuous growth of the various nations which realized more and more clearly that their hope for the rebuilding of the Habsburg empire and for their reasonable national independence was a fallacious one. The ideas of separation or secession became stronger.

2. The irridentic propaganda of those surrounding countries which harbored a claim for their co-nationals living under Habsburg "oppression," partly from sentimental reasons, partly animated by the imperialistic conceptions of the respective war parties.

3. The disintegrating influence of the World War which made the latent hatred of the nations burst into flame and gave opportunity to the dissatisfied intelligentsias to form fighting diplomatic and military organizations against the empire. This internal dissension and antagonism gradually paralyzed the moral and economic forces of the monarchy.

At this juncture the emphasis of a theoretical consideration seems to me important from the point of view of a clearer understanding of the nature of warlike conflicts. Present-day pacifism, both of a bourgeois and a proletarian type, with very few exceptions, is inclined to think that all wars are exclusively undertakings of the ruling diplomatic and military gangs, allied with certain financial interests and having no connection with deeper popular currents. This war theory, though true in many cases, cannot be regarded as a serious analysis of the social transformations affected by warlike conflicts. It describes, using the terminology of Hegel, only the *List der Idee* and not the *Idee* itself. War is sometimes a kind of revolution and does the same thing as a victorious civil war: it ousts and eliminates antiquated and petrified social and constitutional structures, however unintentioned this effect may be from the point of view of those circles which launched the war. In the case of the last war, it destroyed four petrified political structures, that of the Habsburgs, of the Romanoffs, of the Hohenzollerns, and of the Sultans. In consequence a great number of state embryos in Central Europe, in the Balkans, and in the Baltic grew into an independent life and for many millions of people the road was opened toward national and social emancipation. All these oppressive dynastic structures could have lived indefinitely without the World War, because no successful internal revolution is imaginable in the period of great standing armies as long as their military force remained unshaken. This conception is naturally no justification of the war methods. It is only the assertion that on the basis of the *status quo* real peace cannot be maintained. It is with wars as with revolutions: they can only be eliminated by the elimination of their causes, of those national or social dissatisfactions which envenom the internal or external relations of the countries. No kind of jural or contractual agreement can create real peace as long as the injustices of a given

situation continue. The collapse of the Habsburg monarchy is a very decisive corroboration of this thesis.

Unfortunately, war is a very crude and poor substitute for reason and morality. Like revolution, it can solve problems only in an incomplete and summary way, arousing new difficulties, new injustices. The Habsburg monarchy was destroyed without its problems having been solved in a complete, fair, and systematic way. Though many of the old irridentas were eliminated, some new ones were created which will endanger the European situation unless better methods are employed by the new states than those utilized by the Habsburgs. As a matter of fact the newly created states are, from an ethnographic point of view, more firmly built than was the former monarchy. However, they are not national states at all in the Western sense, but are permeated with important national minorities. Thus, for instance, only 81 per cent of the Jugo-Slav state, 71 per cent of Rumania, 64 per cent of Czecho-Slovakia, and 62 per cent of Poland belong to the ruling nation and in the majority of these countries not even the ruling nation is homogeneous but is divided into important antagonistic regional groups. Also the new Russian state faces all the problems of a nationality state, complicated by many serious issues in local autonomies. Therefore, the spectre of the past Austro-Hungarian monarchy could admonish these states not to forget the disastrous lessons of this unsuccessful experiment. Their situation is even more difficult from a certain point of view because the new irridentas formed by the peace treaties are not the backward nations of the former monarchy but, in several cases, equals or superiors in cultural strength and national consciousness to the so-called state-building nations. And if it be replied that in spite of these difficulties the new situation is far more stabilized because the international friction is diminished and there are no powers which could stir the fires of irridentism in these countries, I would answer that this is hardly even true of the present situation and in the near future serious steps could be taken in this direction. Already at the present time the propaganda of the Soviets in the Balkans is far more nationalistic than Communistic, and Fascist Italy utilizes the national dissensions of the newly created states. Magyar irridentism is almost a religious dogma of new Hungary and an influential public opinion in Germany regards the Eastern frontiers as entirely transitory. The *Anschluss* movement in Austria makes rapid progress among the masses, and Albania has taken over the former rôle of Serbia as a storm center of Europe.

The dangers which most of the newly created states face are exactly the dangers of the former Habsburg monarchy: overcentralization and a system of artificial assimilation. Local, ethnic, cultural, and often religious differences have no opportunity to find adequate constitutional channels, whereas the new ruling nations continue here

and there the same political and cultural methods by which before the war Germans, Magyars, and Poles tried to maintain their hegemony to the detriment of the subject races. It is outside the task of the present book to enter upon these new experiments in the field of the old policy of artificial assimilation. Suffice it to say that some of the victorious nations did not learn from the tragic fate of the Habsburg empire and many of the old proceedings are continued both in the educational field and in public administration. Here and there the worst excesses of the nationalistic fever evenom the public atmosphere.

In a recent publication¹ a group of Hungarian professors gave us a critical survey of the public instruction of the Magyar population detached from Hungary and annexed to the new states. I am not in a position to judge how far their information is accurate. In any case a certain caution is needed because some of the authors were in pre-war times ardent adherents of the Magyar policy of artificial assimilation. Nevertheless, there can be no doubt that in several cases public spirit was not changed but only inverted. Many passages of the book sound almost as servile repetitions of the same procedures which I have portrayed in the present book, describing the methods and spirit of national intolerance and megalomania. I know that several political leaders and statesmen of the new states deplore this attitude but in many cases the governments are not willing or not able to check the chauvinistic tendencies strengthened by a sudden victory, the reminiscences of the past, and the difficulties of the present situation. The dangers of the new illusions of nationalism and the new irridentas are very great.

Unfortunately Western public opinion does not understand sufficiently the new constellation. Many think that the methods of a purely jural pacifism and of a peaceful humanitarian propaganda will be sufficient to appease the haughtiness of the victors and the revenge of the vanquished. Anyone, however, who is in more intimate touch with the psychology of Central and Eastern Europe knows very well that these methods alone cannot suffice without serious organic reform. A very interesting document in this connection is the preface of the previously mentioned book written by Professor Julius Kornis of Budapest University and President of the Hungarian Pedagogical Society. The author ridicules the endeavors of the International Commission for Intellectual Co-operation of the World Federation of Educational Associations to promote peace by the method of a pacifistic education and mutual understanding and advocates openly the necessity of maintenance of the warlike spirit. Let me quote one or two of his most characteristic passages because they throw a beam of light on the real situation of this new unstable equilibrium:

¹ *The Public Instruction of the Detached Magyar Population* (Budapest, 1927). In Hungarian.

. . . . Should we vanquished people, begin to eradicate the natural antipathy against the neighbors who robbed our property for a thousand years when our detached brothers are tortured by these neighbors with the most unbounded cruelty? The peace of today is only a silent continuance of the state of war, it is even worse than the bloody wars. Open war is destruction, suffering, death, but the present peace is the silently choking terror of brute force in which the shrieking from pain is smothered by the new international law and the courteous phraseology of the international pedagogy. In the name of universal humanism, refuted daily by the armament of the imperialistic Great and Little Entente, and by the oppression of national minorities, they will forbid the new Magyar generation the understanding and realization of the warlike exploits and glory of our ancestors, the learning of the power of the force which maintained this country through a millennium and which alone can reconquer it in the future. The sorrowful content of this book will convince the peace enthusiasts that the brilliant epoch of true peace and international good will is on the Eastern European fields not only a Utopia but a Uchronia. Here the words of Kant are particularly true: "Eternal peace? A good inscription for the door of a cemetery!"²

If political reality reflects itself so terribly in the brain of the leader of Hungarian education and if a professor of philosophy misunderstands so completely the great pacifistic message of Kant, the reader can realize the wild and brutal atmosphere of hatred and revenge which is still the dominating current of Eastern Europe. And that is not an isolated symptom but many thousands of the German so-called intellectuals echo the same feelings and convictions whenever they speak in perfect sincerity. Under such conditions only deep organic reforms could cure this envenomed mass-current which will inevitably lead to future wars. What these organic reforms should be, the lesson of the great historical drama which we have investigated in this book shows us with perfect clearness. The roads toward real peace and consolidation can be only the following: First, revision of the frontiers in all cases where homogeneous national minorities can be attached without difficulty to their connationals. Second, organization of all the national minorities in public bodies entitled to carry on their own cultural and educational system, limited only by their loyalty to the state. Third, decentralization of the overcentralized and bureaucratic states in the spirit of free local government. Fourth, elimination of trade hindrances and augmentation of the possibilities for economic and cultural co-operation. Fifth, eradication of that type of intellectualism and civic education which is represented in the above-quoted utterances.

If the League of Nations should not be capable of carrying on these fundamental reforms, all its jural and educational work will be futile. The disastrous rôle of the former Austro-Hungarian monarchy will be undertaken by other nations.

² *The Public Instruction of the Detached Magyar Population, op. cit.*, pp. 10-12.

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