

CHAPTER XV

HUNGARY. 1938-1945

A. GENERAL

1. In order to understand the events which caused Hungary to adopt the attitude she did between 1938 and 1945, and the role the political personalities of Hungary played during this period, it is important to keep in mind two things :

(a) By the Treaty of Trianon (June 1920) Hungary suffered great losses both in territory and in population. She lost nearly 69% of the area and a little over 58% of the population which belonged to historic Hungary to the neighbouring countries of Austria, Rumania, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia. Thus both her internal and foreign policy between the two wars and during World War II was aimed and backed by an intense desire to regain her lost territories through a revision of the Treaty. This explains why between the two wars Hungary was a source of friction and agitation which prevented real peace from existing in south central Europe. It also explains why Hungary looked to Germany and Italy when they began to remake the map of Europe.

(b) Following the fall of the communist regime of Bela Kun in August 1919, Hungary suffered from the "White Terror" led by the aristocratic and reactionary forces which succeeded it and which was patronised by Admiral Horthy. This frightful affair left an indelible blot on Hungary's reinstated ruling class and helps to clarify the reasons for the political scene within Hungary during the intervening years to the end of World War II.

2. During the Munich Conference, thanks to the aid of Mussolini, a clause was inserted into the agreement which provided that a settlement of the problem of the Hungarian minority in Czechoslovakia should be made. It also provided that should direct negotiations fail, the Munich powers were to impose a settlement. The negotiations did fail but instead of applying to all the Munich powers Hungary appealed to Germany and Italy, who on November 2, 1938, rendered the first Vienna Award which drew a rough ethnic frontier favourable to Hungary.

3. Imredy, who was prime minister, instituted at this time a quantity of anti-semitic legislation, which frightened the conservative and big Jewish interests which turned him out of office. He was succeeded by Count Paul Teleki, who was both cautious and an opportunist. When the disintegration of Czechoslovakia was assured, he occupied the rest of Ruthenia which then gave Hungary a common frontier with Poland. Taking advantage of the fact that the Soviet occupied Bessarabia in June 1940, Hungary appealed again to Germany and Italy regarding her claims against Rumania. As a result she was awarded a large part of Transylvania under the terms of the Second Vienna Award made on August 30th, 1940.

4. When Hitler prepared to attack Yugoslavia in 1941, he demanded the assistance of Hungary, promising a reward if this was given and threatening penalties if it was refused. Help was already being prepared with the connivance of Warth, Chief of the Hungarian General Staff. Teleki, when he heard that preparations for the attack had already begun (in contravention to a Pact of Eternal Friendship signed with Yugoslavia the preceding year) committed suicide on April 3rd, 1941. The Regent, however,

failed to protest, much less to order resistance. As a result of this, Hungary was given all the territory (excluding Croatia-Slavonia and the Banat) which belonged to her before Trianon. The occupation of this territory was distinguished by a number of atrocities which culminated in the massacre of Novisad (Ujvidek).

B. WAR ACTIVITIES OF THE VARIOUS GROUPS IN HUNGARY

5. As a result of a staged aerial attack on one of her cities, Hungary followed Germany by declaring war on Russia on June 27, 1941, the prime minister Bardossy announcing that the state of war was the result of the "unprovoked attack" by Russia. The war against Russia was not much favoured and after one defeat at the front Hungary withdrew all her troops except an army of occupation. Later Hungary declared war against the United States and Great Britain.

6. Germany who noticed the vacillations of Hungary occupied the country toward the beginning of 1944. It was Hitler's desire to transform Hungary into an armed citadel which would be capable of providing a defence against Soviet Troops. As a result Kallay, who was then prime minister, was dismissed and Sztojay, formerly the Hungarian minister to Berlin, formed a new cabinet under the Nazis. Almost immediately afterwards a terrorist regime was instituted, all political parties were dissolved and the Jewish population began to be exterminated.

7. Hungarian Gendarmerie. The Hungarian Gendarmerie (Magyar Kiralyi Czendörseg) was a pre-war semi-military body with military ranks and under military discipline. They were mostly responsible for public security.

8. Waffen S.S. units were created in Hungary which in 1942 had 30,000 members, the majority of whom were Volksdeutsche and most of whom came from those parts of Hungary which had been recently incorporated into it (i.e. Backa, Sathmar, North Siebenbuergen). However, some Hungarians who were not of German ethnic origin volunteered for these units.

9. The Arrow Cross Party (Nyilas or Pfeilkreuzler). This organisation, which was founded during the beginning of the Hitler regime by the Hungarian agitator Szalasi (of Armenian origin) and patronised by some of the aristocracy such as Count Festetic, was the Hungarian counterpart of the Nazi party in Germany. It was violently anti-semitic, anti-democratic and totalitarian and was used as a fifth column for the Germans. In 1939, as a result of German aid it succeeded in winning 42 seats in the Hungarian Parliament. As the majority of its constituents were extremists and revolutionaries they exercised some influence on events after that date. After the occupation of Hungary by the Germans, they gave vent to their feelings against both the Jews and the members of other political parties. Finally on 15 October, 1944, they installed their leader Szalasi at the head of the state. He proclaimed himself to be both the Regent and the Prime Minister. After the occupation of Hungary by the Soviet troops, he fled into Germany with a large number of his followers.

10. Hungarian National Association (Magyar Nemzeti Szovetseg). This association was founded in September 1944 by Szalasi and Imredy for the purpose of assuring that Hungary remained Nazi in character and pursued Nazi policies. Later, however, neutral elements infiltrated into the association in an attempt to prevent the scheme from being successful. Thus while the original members were adherents of Szalasi, many of the later ones were his opponents.

11. The Hunyadi Division (Hunyadi Hadosztaly) was the counterpart of the German Waffen SS and it has been reported that it was responsible for many of the atrocities which were committed by the Hungarians in the occupied areas (see Chapter XXV).

12. Ragged Gurd (Rongyos Garda). This association was formed in 1918 as

a counter-revolutionary body although afterwards activities lapsed. However, it was revived in 1939 by Hejjas and Bela Somogyi and took part (with Polish help) in guerilla warfare against the Czechs in Ruthenia. It was also used in 1939-40 to harass the Rumanian frontier. In 1942 it had about 3,000 surviving members.

13. Awakening Hungarians (Ebredő Magyarok). This was the most notorious and brutal of all the counter-revolutionary associations. It was the chief instrument of the White Terror and the author of the anti-semitic atrocities of the early period. It was dissolved by Count Bethlen. In April 1944, however, one of its ex-leaders, K. Nesz, issued an appeal to old members to get in touch with him. He was prominent in the 30's as an Arrow Cross Deputy and had to flee from Hungary. It is not known whether the association was revived but if it was it was probably closely connected with the Arrow Cross amongst whose ranks most of the ex-members were to be found.

14. Turanian Hunters (Turani Vadaszok). It was founded in the 30's and was chauvinistic, anti-semitic and anti-German in character. There were branches of this association in Transylvania and Bacska which were created as a means of penetrating into these territories.

15. Berczenyi League (Berczenyi Egyesület). This league was founded in Ruthenia in 1941 by the then High Commissioner for Ruthenia, N. Kozma, as a patriotic, para-military uniformed body composed of individuals who had been interned, imprisoned or sentenced by the Czechs for pro-Hungarian activities during the period when Ruthenia belonged to Czechoslovakia.

16. Bacska Union (Bacskai Szövetség). The Union was founded in 1941 and consists of Hungarians who were obliged to leave their homes in the Bacska during the Yugoslav rule.

17. Order of Heroes (Vitezi Rend). The Order was founded in 1921, its members being men who had received high decorations for conspicuous gallantry in World War I. Later this was extended to the eldest sons of heroes who succeeded to their father's titles and privileges. Finally heroes of World War II were admitted. In November of 1943 there was a total membership of 4,342 officers and 11,189 men with a waiting list of 8,000. The Order was not armed although they constitute a body on whose reliability the Government counted. During the war newly-appointed members were settled on lands in "recovered" territories formerly occupied by colonists of the successor states. They have also been given first priority on the Jewish-owned estates which were expropriated in 1942.

18. Levente. This association was founded in 1921 with the alleged purpose of giving physical training to the Youth of the country, but actually as a pre-military body. It is closely analogous to the Italian Balilla or the Slav Sokols. In 1942 it was formally incorporated into the army and confined itself to military or para-military training. Membership of the Levente was compulsory for all youths from 12 to 18 and there were further courses for "leaders" from 18 to 21. In 1941 a voluntary girls' Levente was formed which it is reported had a membership of 200,000.

19. Cross of National Defence (Nemzetvédelmi Kereszt). This order was created in 1941 by Regent Horthy for persons who displayed particular courage and loyalty during the revolution and counter-revolution, or during the return of the "recovered" territories. There were several hundred recipients of this Order. Many of them were members of the Vitezi Rend.

C. ELIGIBILITY STATUS OF ABOVE GROUPS

20. Hungarian Gendarmerie. Persons who joined this group after 1941 should be carefully interviewed, especially senior officers. A determination should be made whether they served in the occupied territories where many atrocities were committed.

21. Hungarian Waffen S.S. Non-Volksdeutsche members of the Hungarian Waffen S.S. who volunteered are excluded under paragraph 2 (b) of Part II. Volksdeutsche members are outside the mandate if they are in Germany or in "suspense" if in countries other than Germany.

22. Arrow Cross Party (Nyilas or Pfeilkreuzler). Members of this party are *prima facie* outside the mandate of IRO under the terms of paragraph 2 of Part II of the Definitions.

23. Hungarian National Association (Magyar Nemzeti Szovetseg). Those who can show that they joined the Association to equalise the effects of Szalasi and his followers are *prima facie* within the mandate provided they fulfill the other constitutional criteria.

24. Hunyadi Division (Hunyadi Hadosztaly). Members of this division should be assimilated in status to ordinary members of the German S.S. and are, therefore, *prima facie* outside the mandate of IRO. (See Chapter XXV).

25. Ragged Guard (Rongyos Garda). Any of the members of this association who fall under the terms of paragraph 2 of Part II are outside the mandate of IRO. They should be carefully questioned regarding their activities in Ruthenia.

26. Awakening Hungarians (Ebredo Magyarok). Members of this group were likely to have been affiliated with the Arrow Cross Party. Evidence of such affiliation will make them *prima facie* outside the mandate.

27. Turanian Hunters (Turani Vadaszok). Members of this group who were rewarded for their subversive activities in the Bacskai or Transylvania by grants of land, etc. should be excluded in so far as their activity was an essential part of the policy of persecuting United Nations nationals.

28. Berczenyi League (Berczenyi Egyesület). Any of the members of this league who volunteered or participated in the slaughter of the Jews in Ruthenia are outside the mandate.

29. Bacskai Union (Bacskai Szovetseg). Members of this Union will be dealt with on the merits of each case.

30. Order of Heroes (Vitezi Rend). The members of the Order who were admitted during World War II were the heroes of the war in Hungary. Members of the Order, therefore, should not necessarily be regarded as any worse than good soldiers and patriots. Persons of possibly reprehensible behaviour—whether by living on expropriated property or otherwise—should be excluded from the mandate in so far as their activity was an essential part of the policy of persecuting Jews and United Nations nationals.

31. Levente. No presumption will be made in the cases of members of this organisation, as membership was compulsory. However, special attention should be paid to the leaders of this group who remained after the Aztojav regime.

32. Cross of National Defence (Nemzetvedelmi Kereszt). Members of this order who were instrumental in the return of the "recovered territories" should be closely interrogated regarding their activities in those areas in order to ascertain whether or not they fall within the excluding categories of Part II of the Definitions.