

# **Mihály Károlyi and the Question of Blame for the Treaty of Trianon's Dismemberment of Historic Hungary**

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## Table of Contents

Introduction.....	2
Chapter One: The Nationalities Problem.....	6
Chapter Two: The Allies.....	19
2.1 British Policy of No Policy.....	19
2.2 France.....	23
2.3 American non-Interference.....	26
Chapter Three: Károlyi's Actions.....	28
3.1 Military Policy.....	29
Chapter Four: Historiography.....	32
Chapter Five: Blame.....	36
5.1 Trianon Trauma' as a Political Tool.....	38
5.2 Victimhood Nationalism.....	41
Conclusion.....	44
Bibliography.....	47

## Introduction

On June 4th, 1920, when the Kingdom of Hungary signed the Treaty of Trianon, it lost approximately seventy-two percent of its pre-World War One (WWI) territory. Slovakia, Transylvania, and the South Slavic lands were lost to Czechoslovakia, Romania, and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes respectively, while small territorial concessions were made to Austria, Italy, and Poland. Three and a half million people counted as ethnically Hungarian in the 1910 Hungarian census suddenly found themselves outside of the borders of Hungary.<sup>1</sup> Hungary had spent the last year and a half fighting bitterly against this territory loss, and would continue to seek to remedy it long after. It is not surprising then, that the question of blame continues to circulate to this day in the form of ‘Trianon Trauma’ and a narrative of victimhood pushed by the current Hungarian government.

One of the figures most often blamed by the modern Hungarian government is Count Mihály Károlyi, the leader of the People’s Republic of Hungary, and Hungary’s first president, whose brief time in office spanned from November 1918 to March 1919. Despite the fact that the Treaty of Trianon was not signed until 1920, long after Károlyi and his National Council lost power, Károlyi is held responsible. There are a number of accusations leveled against him, the most common involving his inability to influence the Allies’ decision through diplomatic or military means, or his decision to work with the Allies at all; his military policy; his role in the Belgrade Armistice; and his capitulations to the Democratic Socialist Party, which made up part of his National Council and played a role in bringing about the Hungarian Republic of Councils (also known as the Hungarian Soviet Republic). I will address each accusation against Károlyi before exploring why he is blamed to this day.

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<sup>1</sup> Mark Imre Major, *American Hungarian Relations 1918-1944*, (Florida: Danubian Press, 1974), 8.

In order to understand the political situation in Hungary during the People's Republic, some background must be given on Károlyi and his ascension to power. Károlyi was initially elected to parliament as a member of the opposition Party of Independence in 1910. Despite later charges that Károlyi was a socialist, or even a communist, the Party of Independence was not a group that espoused democratic socialism. Instead, it pushed an agenda of nationalism, mild republicanism, and Radicalism. Károlyi's personal politics appear to have fallen largely in line with that of the Party of Independence, save except his advocacy of land redistribution. In July, 1916, Károlyi and a group of adherents split from the Party of Independence and created the Károlyi Party, touting a platform of universal suffrage, peace, national independence, and rejection of Habsburg rule. Károlyi believed that his advocacy for Western European democracy, along with his reported close relationships with western leaders, would ingratiate him and his government in the eyes of the Triple Entente and ensure a favourable outcome for Hungary in any peace negotiations.<sup>2</sup> When Woodrow Wilson delivered his speech outlining his Fourteen Points on January 8th, 1918, Károlyi embraced them.<sup>3</sup>

Károlyi's well known anti-war sentiments and his friendly relations with the Allies made him a popular man in war-weary Hungary. After the Bulgarian Front collapsed on September 26th, 1918, the Central Powers sought to negotiate peace with the Allies, and many (Károlyi included) assumed he would be named Prime Minister by King Charles IV. This did not happen. Instead, on October 25th, Károlyi became president of a new counter-government- the Hungarian National Council, composed of the Social Democrats, Károlyi's party, and the Radical Party of

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<sup>2</sup> Mark Imre Major, *American Hungarian Relations 1918-1944*, 16.

<sup>3</sup> Peter Pastor, *Hungary Between Wilson and Lenin: The Hungarian Revolution of 1918 and the Big Three*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976), 28.

social scientist Oszkár Jászi.<sup>4</sup> The Council then released a Twelve Point Proclamation written by Jászi, which demanded among other things, an independent Hungary, an end to the war, a rejection of the alliance with Germany, and universal and secret suffrage. The Council also promised the redistribution of land and the nationalization of large industry. Notably, the program recognized the Ukrainian, Czech, South-Slav, and Austrian states, though it failed to make any mention of the Slovaks.<sup>5</sup> It laid out plans to the Peace Conference representatives who were in favour of disarmament and the establishment of “strong international organizations.”<sup>6</sup> The Council then renounced the peace treaties of Bucharest and Brest-Litovsk, as “Questions of war and peace must be decided by the representatives of the peoples of the globe.”<sup>7</sup> Finally, the proclamation finished with the request that foreign governments recognize the Council as the legitimate government of Hungary.<sup>8</sup>

Károlyi and his National Council had accrued popular support, and upon Károlyi’s return to Budapest from Vienna on October 27th he was cheered as the leader of a revolution.<sup>9</sup> The reaction outside of Budapest was not so positive, especially in rural areas where a rift existed between the peasantry and estate workers and the Social Democratic Party, which made up the bulk of the National Council. Many members of the nobility were also fearful of Károlyi’s rise to power, with a number of petitions begging for intervention bearing the names of the Hungarian upper-class being delivered to the British government.

Following a peaceful revolution carried out by the people of Budapest and the soldiers stationed there on October 30th and 31st, the King capitulated and appointed Károlyi as Prime

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>5</sup> While not mentioned, the secession of Croatia was also recognized

<sup>6</sup> Peter Pastor, *Hungary Between Wilson and Lenin*, 31.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

Minister.<sup>10</sup> Shortly after, the National Council would demand that Hungary become a Republic. On November 13th, Charles IV released Károlyi from his oath and renounced any participation in affairs of the state.<sup>11</sup>

The People's Republic was ineffective and plagued with issues from the beginning. Immense pressure was put upon this government almost instantly, both by those within and without. The coalition was broad and covered a large portion of the political spectrum, with those on the right taking umbrage with the left-wing element's proposals for land reform, causing them to lose faith in Károlyi's leadership. Those on the left, chiefly the left-wing of the Social Democrats, who were by far the most powerful group within the coalition, pushed for socialism, leading to a hopelessly gridlocked cabinet.<sup>12</sup>

The Republic would come to an end in late March 1919, when French Colonel Vyx, accompanied by three other Allied representatives, gave Károlyi a note from the Peace Conference demanding that the Hungarian Army withdraw from vast portions of the country, including Transylvania and the Banat region. The note outlined a new line of demarcation between Hungary and Romania and included a military buffer zone between the two countries.<sup>13</sup> It extended the area to be occupied by Romania fifty to eighty kilometres westwards, while giving Hungary only twenty-four hours to start withdrawing its troops.<sup>14</sup> Vyx informed Károlyi that the line of demarcation would be the provisional political border, and warned him that should Hungary reject this new line of demarcation, the Allied mission would withdraw from Budapest, effectively returning Hungary to a state of war with the Entente.<sup>15</sup> It was decided in

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<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 33-36.

<sup>11</sup> Sándor Szilassy, *Revolutionary Hungary 1918-1921*, (Astor Park, Florida: Danubian Press, Inc., 1971), 24.

<sup>12</sup> Mark Imre Major, *American Hungarian Relations 1918-1944*, 17.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>14</sup> Sándor Szilassy, *Revolutionary Hungary 1918-1921*, 31.

<sup>15</sup> Mark Imre Major, *American Hungarian Relations 1918-1944*, 22.

the National Council that the ultimatum must be rejected and war plans were drawn. Having failed to appeal to the West, the Hungarian government turned instead to Soviet Russia. The Democratic Socialists called for a socialist government capable of commanding the public will, and an alliance with Béla Kun's Communist Party was proposed with the hope of getting Russian support.<sup>16</sup> Unknown to Károlyi, the Democratic Socialists and the Communists decided Károlyi had to be removed, and Károlyi was strong-armed into resigning on March 21st.<sup>17</sup> The Hungarian Soviet Republic was proclaimed the same day. The Soviet Republic would last only until August 1919, itself collapsing from external and internal pressure; it would be followed by several iterations of a counter-revolutionary government, which would eventually become the Kingdom of Hungary, with Admiral Miklos Horthy as Regent. Under Horthy, Hungary would sign the Treaty of Trianon on June 4th, 1920, losing seventy-two percent of its territory. Since then, the question of Károlyi's responsibility for this territory loss has been repeatedly argued. As noted, critics cite his military policy, leadership, handing of power to the Democratic Socialists, and foreign policy as major contributing factors to the loss of much of historic Hungary.

### **Chapter 1: The Nationalities Problem**

Despite the blame that was laid at Károlyi's feet, the process by which historic Hungary would be dismantled began centuries earlier, having its seeds in the country's very origin. The Slavs had lived in the lands that would become Hungary long before the Magyars arrived in the Carpathian Basin in the late 9th century, and their continued presence would be tolerated by the conquering Magyar tribes. In the following centuries, more foreign nationalities would be

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<sup>16</sup> Peter Pastor, *Hungary Between Wilson and Lenin*, 139-141.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 143.

introduced as slaves, as refugees fleeing the Mongolians, as land workers, and as escorts for western European nobility marrying into the royal family of Hungary.<sup>18</sup> The demographics of the Hungarian population would shift dramatically with the arrival of the Turks in the mid 16th century. In his book *The Hungarians: A Thousand Years of Victory in Defeat*, Paul Lendvai traces the disintegration of historic Hungary back to this century-and-a-half of Ottoman rule from 1541 to 1699. The population of Hungary fell from the 3.5-4 million it had stood at during the late Middle Ages to about 2.5 million in 1600. As of 1720, following the withdrawal of the Ottomans, the population had recovered only to approximately 4 million, where as historian Thomas von Bogyay estimated that had it not been for Ottoman rule, the population would have grown at least three times over during the span of 200 years. This missed population growth came almost entirely to the detriment of the Magyars, who had made up 75-80 percent of the population before 1541. The first phase of the fighting between the Ottomans and the Kingdom of Hungary had taken place in the Great Plains and Transdanubian region, areas which were populated almost entirely by the Magyars. These regions were devastated by the conflict, and the inhabitants “wiped out”<sup>19</sup> by the mid-point of the sixteenth century. Meanwhile, Northern Hungary and Transylvania, areas which had large German, Slovakian, Romanian, and Ruthenian demographics, remained comparatively unscathed. The Magyar population was further diminished by the capture and sale of Hungarians as slaves on the Ottoman market, where they were highly valued. Finally, there was a large influx of nationalities fleeing into Hungary (mainly Slovaks, Serbs, and Romanians) in the late 17th century; followed by the deliberate

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<sup>18</sup> Sándor Szilassy, *Revolutionary Hungary 1918-1921*, 11.

<sup>19</sup> Paul Lendvai, *The Hungarians: A Thousand Years of Victory in Defeat*, trans. Ann Major (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2021), 98.



settling of Germans and Slavs in the eighteenth century. It was for these reasons that though the population of Hungary had risen to 8.5 million by 1787, only 39 percent were Magyar.<sup>20</sup>

If the change in demographics caused by the Ottoman occupation was the beginning of the process by which historic Hungary was disassembled in the Treaty of Trianon, the next step came in Magyarization and the rebirth of the Hungarian national identity in the late nineteenth century. During the Revolution of 1848-49, the Imperial Government had used the nationalities against the revolutionaries, and historian Sándor Szilassy suggests in *Revolutionary Hungary 1918-1919* that this betrayal was not forgotten by later Hungarian governments, pushing them towards strict enforcement of the Magyarization process.<sup>21</sup> The initial success of Hungary's revolution and the following April Laws, all created with the intent of winning independence for Hungary, inspired the Croats, Serbs, Slovaks, and Transylvanian Romanians to seek similar recognition. This posed a problem for the Hungarians, who had thought that the concessions they had won would benefit the nationalities and inspire appreciation. That the nationalities instead sought their own autonomy was an unexpected and unwelcome development. In the space of very little time, the Croats, Serbs, and Romanians all organized armies and managed to take significant sections of historic Hungary. The Hungarians responded by organizing an army of their own, the *Honvéd*, which was ultimately defeated by the combined forces of the Austrians, Russians, Croatians, and Serbs. Both Croatia and Serbia then fell under the terms of the administration of Austria, before being returned to Hungary almost two decades later. The nationalities received little of what they were promised for aiding Austria.<sup>22</sup> The 1867 compromise between Austria and Hungary helped to strengthen the Austrian and Hungarian

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<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 98-99.

<sup>21</sup> Sándor Szilassy, *Revolutionary Hungary 1918-1921*, 13.

<sup>22</sup> Bryan Cartledge, *The Will to Survive: A History of Hungary*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 200-213.

ruling class in the face of growing nationalism in the nationalities of the dual monarchy.<sup>23</sup>

Unsurprisingly, this only helped to inflame nationalist movements among the nationalities.

The revolution inspired a new nationalist movement among Hungarians, one which was not dampened by the subsequent compromise. Romantic nationalism was used by the Magyar ruling class to reinforce their political power. They sought an equitable union with Austria under a common monarch, returning unto Hungary its autonomy in matters of foreign affairs, finance, and defence.<sup>24</sup> In 1875, Hungarian Prime Minister Kálmán Tisza, Hungary's longest serving Prime Minister before Viktor Orbán and the man credited with the consolidation of power into a centralized Hungarian government, declared that there could only be one nation in Hungary, and that it must be a Hungarian one, rejecting the model of eastern Switzerland. Though Magyar had already been made Hungary's national language by the Hungarian diet of 1843-44,<sup>25</sup> the language now became the core of political and public existence, defining the Magyar identity. The nationalities were left out of this new definition, othered by their native tongues. This reorientation towards Magyar led to a period of Romantic Nationalism, one which saw the creation of significant literary and linguistic works- at the cost of the educated elite among the nationalities, whose nationalism was turned instead towards their Slavic, Romanian, and Germanic origins.<sup>26</sup> The effects of Romantic Nationalism were further seen through policy and legislation. The number of exclusively Magyar primary schools rose from 42 to 56 percent- at the expense of a 14 percent drop in non-Magyar primary schools. In only a decade (1880-1890), 1200 church schools were shuttered, leaving only 500 remaining, and Slovak secondary and

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<sup>23</sup> Peter Pastor, *Hungary Between Wilson and Lenin*, 7.

<sup>24</sup> Peter Pastor, *Hungary Between Wilson and Lenin*, 7.

<sup>25</sup> Jörg K. Hoensch, *A History of Modern Hungary 1867-1994, Second Edition*, trans. Kim Traynor, (New York: Longman Publishing, 1996), 4.

<sup>26</sup> Paul Lendvai, *The Hungarians: A Thousand Years of Victory in Defeat*, 299.

elementary schools disappeared entirely from northern Hungary. The implementation and enforcement of Magyarization continued into the twentieth century, with one of its main drivers being education minister Count Albert Apponyi. The *Lex Apponyi* effectively halved the number of ethnic schools in Hungary and ensured that by 1914, only one-fifth of the primary schools in Hungary still taught in a non-Magyar language. Furthermore, by the beginning of the twentieth century, though Hungarians made up only 54.5 percent of the country's population, Magyars accounted for 84 percent of secondary school graduates, and by 1910, 96 percent of all public servants reported Magyar as their mother tongue.<sup>27</sup>

The majority of the nationalities were not being assimilated. Rather, Magyars alone were being funneled into positions of authority while the Czech and Croat intelligentsia who wanted equality with their Austrian and Magyar counterparts were pushed from the academic and political spotlight.<sup>28</sup> An echo chamber was thus created in which the Magyar bourgeoisie and intellectual circles came to believe that not only was Magyarization a success, but that the government's treatment of the un-assimilated nationalities was unprecedented in its liberalism. That there even was a 'nationalities problem' was unthinkable to many, though abundantly clear to outsiders. Crown Prince Rudolph at one point observed "[t]he sad thing for Hungary is the Magyars' lack of consideration and inability to understand that nothing can be achieved by bad treatment and contempt and momentary vehement regulations with the nationalities".

Nationalistically minded Slavs and Romanians within the country put out nationalist propaganda, which further inflamed tensions between the nationalities and the Magyars. Beyond Hungary, these tensions were worsened by Russian meddling, which helped to distance the South Slav populations from the Dual Monarchy through encouragement of the Serbian

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<sup>27</sup> Paul Lendvai, *The Hungarians: A Thousand Years of Victory in Defeat*, 300-301.

<sup>28</sup> Peter Pastor, *Hungary Between Wilson and Lenin*, 7.

propaganda war against Austria-Hungary.<sup>29</sup> Word was spread abroad by the dissatisfied nationalities of their poor treatment, yet when reports of this returned to Hungary, the Magyar elites reacted mainly with indignation that such accusations were being made by those whom they had afforded so many rights.<sup>30</sup> The damage done to Hungary's reputation abroad by its treatment of the nationalities in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century was immense. The refusal of identity, territory, and personal autonomy to the nationalities, along with the violent suppression of nationalism among them drew international ire. In Britain, newspaper articles and books on the subject evoked strong public reactions, with one article in the *London Times* reporting on the deaths of fifteen people in Cernova at the hands of the Gendarmerie during the consecration of a new Church by Slovak nationalist priest, Andrej Hlinka, in 1907. The article proclaimed "Liberal Hungary adopts the policy of Russian despotism."<sup>31</sup>

Empathy for the Slovakian cause in particular was rampant in French reporting. In an article deriding the idea that Hungary enjoyed fair elections, the French *Courrier Européen* recounts how Ivan Piko, a widely supported Slovak running for office, was arrested and charged with spreading Panslavic and anti-Magyar sentiments. The newspaper reports that Piko was not allowed a lawyer, nor was he allowed to contact the Minister of the Interior or his brother. He was held in jail for two days before being allowed to return home, though he was banned from running for office. In that time, his then unopposed Magyar opponent was elected. The same article goes on to detail the cases of several more Slovakian candidates charged with inciting anti-Magyar sentiments and barred from running. The article implies that supposed Pan-Slavic agitation was in fact simply self-advocacy on the part of the Slovaks.<sup>32</sup> In another article in *Le*

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<sup>29</sup> Sándor Szilassy, *Revolutionary Hungary 1918-1921*, 11.

<sup>30</sup> Paul Lendvai, *The Hungarians: A Thousand Years of Victory in Defeat*, 301-302.

<sup>31</sup> Paul Lendvai, *The Hungarians: A Thousand Years of Victory in Defeat*, 303.

<sup>32</sup> K. Hellwig, "Liberté Électorale Magyare," *Le Courrier Européen*, Jul. 20, 1906.

*Courrier Européen*, boldly titled “L’Oppression Magyare” (Magyar Oppression), editor Bjoernstjerne Bjoernson publishes a letter he claims to have received from “some distinguished people in Bohemia” about the plight of the Slovaks in Hungary. The letter praises Bjoernstjerne for his advocacy for the Ruthenians in Galicia, and presents the plight of the Slovaks as on par with that of the Ruthenians. The letter decries the oppression and assimilation of the Slovaks under “Magyar Chauvinism” and claims that liberty in Hungary is a lie.<sup>33</sup> Articles of a similar nature decrying the treatment of the Slovaks were also published May 4th, 1906,<sup>34</sup> and on February 25th, 1908.<sup>35</sup> The perception of Hungary as underdeveloped and lacking in liberty can also be seen in the coverage of Count Andrassy’s suffrage bill.<sup>36</sup> The oppression of the Slovaks and their resistance against Magyarization is given sympathetic coverage in *La République Française*,<sup>37</sup> *La Revue Politique et Littéraire*,<sup>38</sup> and *Le Feu*.<sup>39</sup>

The English press took a slightly more nuanced position, though it still frequently mentioned the oppression of the nationalities. An article in *The Pall Mall Gazette* from April 27th, 1881, displays an acute awareness of the threat nationalism among the nationalities posed to the Austro-Hungarian Empire, observing that both the Romanians in Transylvania and the Serbians were agitating for autonomy.<sup>40</sup> An article in *The Morning Post* from 1906 reports on a debate over the treatment of the nationalities in the Hungarian parliament raised by Romanian, Slovak, and Serbian deputies. The article asserts that Magyarization is necessary for the Hungarians, as they are otherwise outnumbered, but concluded that “[unless] the Magyars

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<sup>33</sup> “L’Oppression Magyare,” *Le Courrier Européen*, Oct. 11, 1907.

<sup>34</sup> Albert Ferencz, “Les Revendications des Slovaques,” *Le Courrier Européen*, May. 4, 1906.

<sup>35</sup> Bjoernstjerne Bjoernson, “L’Oppression Magyare,” *Le Courrier Européen*, Feb. 25, 1908.

<sup>36</sup> Albert Ferencz, “Le Projet de Loi Électorale de M. Andrassy,” *Le Courrier Européen*, Oct. 10, 1908.

<sup>37</sup> “Revue des Sciences Historiques - CCX: Les Slovaques,” *La République Française*, Mar. 10, 1876.

<sup>38</sup> M. F. Amouretti, “Kossuth et la Nationalité Hongroise,” *La Revue Politique et Littéraire*, Mar. 31, 1894.

<sup>39</sup> Jules Chopin, *Le Feu*, Apr. 1, 1910.

<sup>40</sup> “Occasional Notes,” *Pall Mall Gazette*, Apr. 27, 1881.

abandon their policy of oppression for a policy of conciliation a growth of racial animosity will be inevitable.”<sup>41</sup> The English press was also not always complimentary of the nationalities. An article in *The Pall Mall Gazette* published on November 26th, 1888, reports on the murder and subsequent burglary of an innkeeper and his wife near Szegedin by a group of five Slovakian men. The men are referred to as being members of “a mongrel race,” with the Slovaks being described as drunks of the lowest caste.<sup>42</sup> An article in *The Birmingham Daily Post* describes the Slovaks, Moravians, and Czechs as essentially one people, though they may sometimes want to be distinct. The tone of the article is derisive, and comments that “the Hungarian holds them in the greatest contempt.”<sup>43</sup> However, an article in *The Daily News* talks of reports from Panslavist organizations, noting that “the Slovaks of Hungary are being shamefully oppressed by the Magyars.”<sup>44</sup> However, English reactions to Panslavism were often lukewarm, with some publications referring to it as a Russian plot.<sup>45</sup>

An article in *The Graphic* from August 1888, while largely complimentary of Tisza’s Hungary, comments on the inequality in political representation and the perception of the Magyars as “oppressors” of the nationalities.<sup>46</sup> The comment of a member of the opposition in the Hungarian Parliament is quoted as saying “Hungary is now what England was under the Ministry of Sir Robert Walpole.”<sup>47</sup> Mention is also made of a popular candidate for the parliamentary election, identified only as a ‘Transylvanian Nationalist’ who is watched by the police and whose posters are torn down as soon as they are put up.<sup>48</sup> Another article in *The*

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<sup>41</sup> “Magyars, Rumanians, and Slovaks,” *Morning Post*, Jul. 11, 1906.

<sup>42</sup> “Murders by Members of a Mongrel Race,” *Pall Mall Gazette*, Nov. 26, 1888.

<sup>43</sup> “The Hungarian Slovaks,” *Birmingham Daily Post*, Dec. 28, 1897.

<sup>44</sup> “The Slavs in Hungary,” *Daily News*, Mar. 15, 1889.

<sup>45</sup> “Occasional Notes,” *Pall Mall Gazette*, Aug. 14, 1895.

<sup>46</sup> R. B. J., “An Election in Hungary,” *Graphic*, Aug. 18, 1888.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

*Standard* reports on the extremely coercive tactics used by Tisza and his party to ensure their success in the elections.<sup>49</sup>

The previously mentioned incident in Cernova also elicited a strong reaction from within the Dual-Monarchy, inspiring the organization of the seven Slovak representatives in the Hungarian Parliament into a nationalities bloc seeking concessions to the nationalities. This bloc was soon joined by the fifteen Romanian and four Serbian representatives in the Parliament. Though initially spurned by the forty Croatian representatives, they later joined in 1908 after a confrontation with the Hungarian government, who had required that state railway workers in Croatia know the Magyar language, a hugely unpopular policy which led to the victory of a Serb-Croat coalition in that year's election. The Hungarian government responded to this development by arresting the Croatian leaders and installing a dictatorship in the supposedly autonomous kingdom.<sup>50</sup>

World War One only gave the international community (and the Allies in particular) more reason to pay attention to the nationalities problem, especially as the military value of the various independence movements among the nationalities of the Dual Monarchy became clear. Czechoslovakian, Polish, and Yugoslav legions joined the Allies in their fight against the Habsburg monarchy. April 1918 saw the Congress of Oppressed Nationalities held in Rome, proclaiming as its goal the freeing of the people oppressed under the dual monarchy. By June, the Allies had officially endorsed the Rome Resolution and the creation of independent Czechoslovak, Polish, and Yugoslav states. Within Austria-Hungary, representatives of the nationalities met at the Czech National Theatre in Prague in mid-May under the pretense of celebrating its fiftieth anniversary. National emancipation and self-determination were key issues

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<sup>49</sup> "Count Andrassy and the Magyars," *Standard*, Aug. 20, 1878.

<sup>50</sup> Peter Pastor, *Hungary Between Wilson and Lenin*, 9.

and central to the resolution passed at the meeting.<sup>51</sup> On June 28th, in response to these meetings and the activities of immigrant groups in Allied countries, the American Secretary of State declared that the Slavs should be freed from Austrian rule. Shortly after, both the French and British governments recognized the Czecho-Slovak National Council as the basis for a Czechoslovakian government within their traditional homeland. The British would go a step further on August 9th, recognizing the Czecho-Slovak National Council as a co-belligerent government. The US did the same in September.<sup>52</sup> In April, 1917, a Romanian delegation destined for Washington stopped at the Darnitzsa prisoner-of-war camp and spoke with the leaders of the Romanian POWs, asking them to put forth a proclamation demanding Transylvania be unified with Romania. This proclamation was then picked-up by American newspapers, which not only reprinted it, but dropped copies from airplanes over Austro-Hungarian trenches. Once they reached Washington, the delegation campaigned heavily for their cause, organizing mass meetings, publishing periodicals, and working with the representatives of the Czech, Polish, South Slav, and Ruthenian organizations in the United States. Their efforts were rewarded on November 4th, 1918, when the US Secretary of State proclaimed that he would support Romanian territorial rights and the Peace Conference. The National Committee of Rumanian Unity, formed in Paris on October 3rd, 1918, and was partially recognized by the Allied governments between October 12th and November 13th, further shoring up Allied support behind the Romanian cause.<sup>53</sup> The French press noted the instability in Transylvania and laid plain their sympathies with the Romanians in the region, writing “La population roumaine de

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<sup>51</sup> Gabor Vermes, “Hungarian Politics and Society on the Eve of the Revolution,” in *War and Society in East Central Europe Vol. XX: Revolutions and Interventions in Hungary and its Neighbor States, 1918-1919*, ed. Peter Pastor (New York: Columbia Press, 1988), 114-115.

<sup>52</sup> Peter Pastor, *Hungary Between Wilson and Lenin*, 24-25.

<sup>53</sup> Sándor Szilassy, *Revolutionary Hungary 1918-1921*, 18.



Transylvanie s'est soulevée contre la tyrannie magyare" (The Romanian population in Transylvania has risen up against Magyar tyranny.)<sup>54</sup> Czech, Slovenian, Polish, and Ruthenian representatives in the *Reichsrat* presented their claims and arguments for confederation following the restoration of constitutional government in Austria in 1917. In Hungary, however, though the few non-Magyar representatives in government began to speak openly of their cause in Parliament, their speeches fell on deaf ears.<sup>55</sup> Tisza's reaction to the growing power and Allied recognition of the independence movements was insufficient. In his Parliamentary speech in June 1918, he maintained the same clear Magyar supremacist views and unwavering faith in Hungarian territorial integrity. While he condemned government employees for their insensitivity in the handling of the nationalities and pushed for improved relations with the nationalities, he also introduced economic reprisals, cultural restrictions, and called for a stricter prosecution of non-Magyars spreading nationalist propaganda.<sup>56</sup>

By October of 1918, Austria-Hungary was losing control of its domestic situation. Unable to withdraw troops from the front in order to suppress the nationalities, they could only watch as the Poles, Czechs, and Croats declared their independence in rapid succession.<sup>57</sup> In a speech in the Hungarian Parliament on October 19th, Slovak National Council deputy Juriga argued that the Slovakian National Council had a right to self-determination. Any decisions made on the matter of Slovakia must be made in cooperation with the Council. Károlyi's National Council managed to come to an agreement with the Slovak National Council that would have granted Slovaks within Hungary autonomy. However, it was made clear by the Slovaks that

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<sup>54</sup> "Soulèvement des Roumains de Transylvanie," *Le Temps*, Nov. 14, 1918.

<sup>55</sup> Gabor Vermes, "Hungarian Politics and Society on the Eve of the Revolution," in *War and Society in East Central Europe Vol. XX: Revolutions and Interventions in Hungary and its Neighbor States, 1918-1919*, 113.

<sup>56</sup> Gabor Vermes, "Hungarian Politics and Society on the Eve of the Revolution," in *War and Society in East Central Europe Vol. XX: Revolutions and Interventions in Hungary and its Neighbor States, 1918-1919*, 115-116.

<sup>57</sup> on October 7th, October 14th, and October 15th respectively

as Károlyi was still the opposition, the agreement was not binding. It was later abandoned when on October 30th the Slovak National Council declared itself part of Czechoslovakia.<sup>58</sup> In his book *Hungary*, the eminent British historian C.A. Macartney emphasizes that it was the Slovak National Council that chose to join Czechoslovakia, although it did not represent the other nationalities within Slovakia, nor even the views of all Slovaks. At the same time as the Slovak National Council was meeting to decide their joining the Czechs, the considerable Hungarian Jewish population of Kassa held their own meeting where they resolved to remain with Hungary.<sup>59</sup>

Hungary's northern neighbour had not been pleased by the news of the Belgrade Agreement, assuming the temporary lines drawn within it represented potential future borders. After the Czechs sent Gendarmes into Slovakia on November 4th, Károlyi demanded that Slovakia be governed jointly by the Slovak National Council and the Ministry of Nationalities of the Budapest government; he also asked through his envoy to Prague that Slovakia be occupied by Slovak forces. As he claimed, a Czechoslovakian government had no right to occupy Slovakia until borders were formally decided at the Peace Conference. Prague countered that not only had the Allies formally recognized the Czecho-Slovak state, but that Slovakia had not been mentioned in the Belgrade armistice.<sup>60</sup> Secretary of the Czechoslovak National Council Edvard Beneš complained to France, and was assured that the Belgrade agreement had no political significance. Beneš argued quite successfully that Czechoslovakia was the only power in central Europe that could prevent the spread of Bolshevism.<sup>61</sup> Again, we see skillful political maneuvering on the part of the nationalities as a reason for their success over Hungary.

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<sup>58</sup> C. A.. Macartney, *Hungary*, (London: Ernest Benn Limited, 1934), 112-113.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 114.

<sup>60</sup> C. A.. Macartney, *Hungary*, 115.

<sup>61</sup> Peter Pastor, *Hungary Between Wilson and Lenin*, 67.

The rapidly changing situation in eastern Europe led to the US State Department reorienting itself to align American views with the foreign policy of France and Britain.<sup>62</sup> On October 17th, the US Secretary of State, repeating Wilson's response to Emperor Charles' Imperial Manifesto, declared that America's recognition of the Czecho-Slovak National Council meant that Wilson's point ten was no longer applicable. Peace with the US, it seemed, now mandated self-determination for the nationalities.<sup>63</sup> When, in a last-ditch effort to maintain the empire, Emperor Charles sent Prince Lajos Windischgraetz to negotiate for peace, Windischgraetz was handed a note indicating that the Allies did not recognize the legitimacy of the Dual Monarchy's position to negotiate in lieu of dissolution of the Austria-Hungary. Finally, on October 21st, Wilson declared that he "could no longer accept autonomy as a precondition for peace."<sup>64</sup> The Allies knew that both the monarchy and the empire were dissolving, and had resolved not to save it.

Though the nationalities had been present within Hungary for nearly a millennia, the sharp rise in their numbers and the population set-backs suffered by the Magyars during Ottoman rule resulted in a significant shift in demographics--to the detriment of the Magyars. The aggressive pursuit of Magyarization in the latter half of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries only served to further alienate the nationalities. Meanwhile, those in power, the Magyar bourgeoisie and intellectuals, were blind to the presence of a 'nationalities problem' and the growing threat it posed to the integrity of historic Hungary. Magyar supremacy and Hungarian territorial integrity were accepted facts by the vast majority of Hungarians.<sup>65</sup> The Romantic

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<sup>62</sup> Sándor Szilassy, *Revolutionary Hungary 1918-1921*, 18.

<sup>63</sup> Peter Pastor, *Hungary Between Wilson and Lenin*, 29.

<sup>64</sup> Sándor Szilassy, *Revolutionary Hungary 1918-1921*, 19.

<sup>65</sup> Gabor Vermes, "Hungarian Politics and Society on the Eve of the Revolution," in *War and Society in East Central Europe Vol. XX: Revolutions and Interventions in Hungary and its Neighbor States, 1918-1919*, 108.

nationalism of post-revolution Hungary combined with nineteenth century trends in Hungarian historiography and a belief in the success of Magyarization, which is referred to by Lindvai as "a disastrous illusion",<sup>66</sup> one that was remained even as a new vision began to emerge for the future of the Carpathian Basin. Romania, Serbia, and the Pan-Slav movement had grown in power significantly since the days of Ottoman rule, and were deeply aware of the presence and plight of their kindred within Hungary's borders. Beyond central and eastern Europe, the international community had a critical eye trained upon the Hungarian government. WWI, a conflict that the Hungarian government used "as a vehicle for the salvation of the dual monarchy,"<sup>67</sup> proved the opposite. In the face of a crumbling empire, the nationalities, through carefully maintained diplomatic ties, were able to not only declare their independence, but do so with the support of the Allies.

## **Chapter 2: The Allies**

With Allied recognition for the successor states secured and the war nearing its end, the stage was set for peace negotiations to begin. Hungary was not of much concern to the Allies, with England and America focusing their time and attention on Germany, while France concerned itself with the former Austro-Hungarian empire and how it could be used to aid with the war with communist Russia.<sup>68</sup>

### **British Policy of No-Policy**

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<sup>66</sup> Paul Lindvai, *The Hungarians: A Thousand Years of Victory in Defeat*, 302.

<sup>67</sup> Peter Pastor, *Hungary Between Wilson and Lenin*, 12.

<sup>68</sup> C. A.. Macartney, *Hungary*, 111.

In his book *Hungary Between Wilson and Lenin: The Hungarian Revolution of 1918 and the Big Three*, professor emeritus of history at Montclair State University Peter Pastor describes the British as having taken a “policy of no policy”<sup>69</sup> towards Károlyi’s government, and indeed, British government documents from the time certainly support this analysis. Though the British government had not officially recognized the Károlyi government,<sup>70</sup> both Lord Balfour and David Lloyd George supported Károlyi. Counter-revolutionary elements within the People’s Republic of Hungary sought ties with their fellow aristocracy in England,<sup>71</sup> while right wing Hungarian aristocrats taking refuge in Switzerland tried to get the Allies on their side,<sup>72</sup> although they failed to do so.<sup>73</sup> During the four-and-a-half months in which Károlyi was in power, the British government was flooded with correspondence from the Károlyi government, agents of the Károlyi government, Hungarian politicians who despised the Károlyi government yet saw its survival as necessary for the good of the country, Hungarian politicians who despised the Károlyi government and sought English help in toppling it, and an assortment of non-Hungarian individuals reaching out on behalf of the Hungarians. All impressed upon the British the need for action in Hungary in order to prevent either Bolshevik revolution or a united Slav menace. The British government reacted to these pleas with a uniform response of doubt and cold indifference. In an memorandum entitled “Political Status of Hungary after the war” from January 15, 1919, the Foreign Affairs office discusses an article written by Count Apponyi and sent to the English Lord Weardale for publishing in an American magazine. It argued against the destruction of historic Hungary. Minutes from the meeting indicate that it was decided that

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<sup>69</sup> Peter Pastor, *Hungary Between Wilson and Lenin*, 4.

<sup>70</sup> “M. Czernyak, unofficial Delegate of Hungary,” 24 January, 1919, FO 608/11/16, Hungary: Future Status and Desiderata, The National Archives, Kew (NA).

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 95.

Weardale should not receive the article, which is dismissed as “completely inaccurate.”<sup>74</sup>

Furthermore, notes from the meeting express frustration with the ongoing attempts of the Hungarians to sway British opinion, commenting that this and another report received from Vienna on January 19, 1919, showed “the absurdity of the Hungarian complaint [...] that the Hungarians have been quite unable to place their voices before us,” and claiming that they been “inundated with every Hungarian voice for many months past.”<sup>75</sup> It is similarly decided in the same meeting that a Hungarian petition addressed to the British government arguing for the maintenance of historic Hungary should not be circulated.

In another meeting, a report from the British Mission to Poland is discussed. The report recounts a conversation with Count Gyula Andrassy in which Andrassy suggests that the British send a force of around 20,000 troops to Budapest to suppress a feared outbreak of Bolshevism and asks for a definitive statement from the Allies that Hungary will not be dismantled. Andrassy proposes a federation with Austria to fight as a British ally against potential imperialist actions on the part of America and Japan.<sup>76</sup> Andrassy’s plea is rejected in the meeting with the comment that “Andrassy appeals to our humanity, our vanity, and even our stupidity.”<sup>77</sup>

The archived documents from the British Foreign Office in 1918 and 1919 certainly suggest that this policy of no policy would most likely have been extended to any Hungarian leader in Károlyi’s position. They show that Károlyi himself was not the problem. Several other prominent Hungarian politicians, most of whom were to the political right of Károlyi, reached out to the British government during the five month existence of the People’s Republic of

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<sup>74</sup> "Political Status of Hungary after the War, 397," 15 January, 1919, FO 608/11/16, Hungary: Future Status and Desiderata, NA.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> "British Mission to Poland, Report No. 6," 9 January, 1919, FO 608/11/16, Hungary: Future Status and Desiderata, NA.

<sup>77</sup> "Political Status of Hungary after the War," 9 January, 1919, FO 608/11/16, Hungary: Future Status and Desiderata, NA.

Hungary. Almost all of these politicians were ignored, with the British consistently expressing the opinion that they should not “enter into political discussions or bargains with Hungarian politicians.”<sup>78</sup> Similar sentiments are expressed in even stronger terms in a meeting on February 1st, 1919, in which Malcolm Robertson, a diplomat stationed at the Hague, is instructed not to meet with any Hungarian agents.<sup>79</sup> Count Miklós Bánffy similarly sought an audience with Robertson, arguing that Károlyi was weak and would succumb to Bolshevik elements if the Allies did not “send a small force to Hungary, or [...] were to make a definitive statement authorizing intervention in the case of outbreak of Bolshevism.” Again, Robertson was instructed not to meet with Bánffy.<sup>80</sup> On March 3rd, 1919, a Dr. Ludvig of Budapest (identified as a former employee of the Government of India) contacted the British, seeking aid in creating a government from the existing opposition, arguing that it was in England’s interest as they will be an ally “against Slav menace in E. Europe.” This proposal was deemed to be “too late” and not worth consideration.<sup>81</sup>

Of all the Hungarians to reach out to the British government during this time, only one had the distinction of gaining British attention and approval. The reason why he alone managed where so many of his colleagues and adversaries failed is obvious. A report from January 2nd, 1919, recounts an interview with József Diner-Dénes, a Democratic Socialist and former Minister for Foreign Affairs. While he discusses other topics, including agrarian and political reform, and expresses his total faith in Károlyi as the leader of Hungary, the most striking thing about the interview is that Diner-Dénes acknowledges the impending dissolution of historic

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> “Serious Situation in Hungary,” 29 January, 1919, FO 608/11/16, Hungary: Future Status and Desiderata, NA.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> “Request for British support in formation of new Hungarian Government,” 3 March, 1919, FO 608/11/16, Hungary: Future Status and Desiderata, NA.

Hungary, with the report stating that he was “in favour of close economic relations between the new small Hungary & her neighbours.”<sup>82</sup> Diner-Dénes’s acceptance of the sovereignty of, and willingness to work with the newly independent nationalities seems to have been unique among the Hungarians with whom the English interacted in this period. Károlyi, Apponyi, Andrassy, Szilassy, and Ludwig all insisted that Hungary should not be stripped of territory, and are largely belittled or ignored, while Diner-Dénes is praised in a memorandum from January 28th, 1919, as “the one Magyar who has formulated any serious views as to the future of Hungary.”<sup>83</sup> It cannot be his faith in Károlyi or his hopes for agrarian and political reforms that the British are singling out, as these beliefs were also expressed by (some of) the aforementioned Hungarian politicians. What sets him apart is his acknowledgement of the independence of the nationalities and the inevitability of Hungary’s impending loss of land.

The Allied conviction that the nationalities were to not only gain independence, but would claim territory from historic Hungary is expressed consistently in the documents of the Foreign Office. A memo from July 9th, 1919, reads “Are we to permit Hungarians to retain territories which we have assigned to other states? This is impossible,”<sup>84</sup> A telegram sent from French Prime Minister Georges Clemenceau to Béla Kun on June 13th, 1919, makes it very clear that the Allies do not intend to change their minds on the distribution of land.<sup>85</sup>

## France

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<sup>82</sup> "Situation in Hungary, 428," 2 January, 1919, FO 608/11/16, Hungary: Future Status and Desiderata, NA.

<sup>83</sup> "Situation of the Hungarian Republic," 28 January, 1919, FO 608/11/16, Hungary: Future Status and Desiderata, NA.

<sup>84</sup> "Circulated to the King and War Cabinet," 9 July, 1919, CAB 21/150, Hungary: situation in, NA.

<sup>85</sup> "Telegram from Béla Kun," 13 June, 1919, CAB 21/150, Hungary: situation in, NA.



France's actions with regards to Hungary in this period are defined by the ongoing conflict with communist Russia, which was one carried out with the hopes of replacing the communist government with one that would willingly submit to French will. The French intended to both stop the spread of Bolshevism and to use Russian resources to pay off the French war debt. France hoped to create an Eastern Europe under the French sphere of influence, which could be used to prevent any Russian and German collusion, and more importantly, to aid in their conflict with Russia. Eastern Europe (specifically Poland, Czechoslovakia, Romania, and Serbia) could then act as an ideological barrier against the spread of communism and as allies in the military conflict with Russia. Hungary itself was too far removed from this envisioned barrier, and was thus mainly useful to France as a bargaining chip with Czechoslovakia, Romania, and Serbia, who were promised large portions of Hungarian territory in exchange for their cooperation with France.<sup>86</sup>

Franchet d'Espèrey's Belgrade armistice was signed with every intention on the part of d'Espèrey to honour it. d'Espèrey expected a quick resolution to the situation in Hungary, apparently believing that Budapest would soon be occupied by the Allies and a peace agreement would be signed, deciding the new borders. Decision-making on the borders would, however, be put on the backburner while France focused on its conflict with Russia. The Czechs, Romanians and the Balkan countries took advantage of France's pre-occupation and moved to occupy the land they were claiming in Hungary.<sup>87</sup> This led to the Czechs sending gendarmes into Slovakia and the remobilisation of the Hungarian military. On November 28th, 1918, in a move unknown

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<sup>86</sup> Peter Pastor, "The French Military Mission in Hungary. 1918-1919," in *War and Society in East Central Europe Vol. XX: Revolutions and Interventions in Hungary and its Neighbor States, 1918-1919*, 252-253.

<sup>87</sup> Peter Pastor, *Hungary Between Wilson and Lenin*, 71.

to both the Hungarians and d'Espèrey,<sup>88</sup> Beneš, who was in Paris, sent a letter to the French Foreign Minister Pichon<sup>8990</sup> asking that the French break the Belgrade Agreement. He argued that as the Allies recognized Czechoslovakia and its historical boundaries, they could not stand by and allow the enemy to occupy the lands of an Allied belligerent. The French Foreign Minister replied in a letter two days later that Paris would act through the Supreme Council and order Hungary to withdraw its troops, thus breaking Article 17 of the Belgrade Convention.<sup>91</sup> Apparently aware of the possible political ramifications of breaking an agreement that was signed in the name of the Allies, Pichon sent instructions to French government agents abroad suggesting that they should not inform the other Allied nations of what they had done. The subterfuge, however, was not necessary, as the English and Americans both subscribed to the principle of 'Primary Responsibility', believing that an ally should be allowed to dictate the policy of an area where they were the primary force, as France was in East-Central Europe. The Czechs recognized this fact, and made a point of maintaining a friendly relationship with Paris, as did the successor states.<sup>92</sup> The worsening situation in Russia gave Romania the opportunity to push the French for greater territorial concessions. The Romanian Peace Conference delegate sent a memorandum to Clemenceau claiming without evidence that the Hungarians had aligned themselves with the Bolshevik movement in Ukraine and would soon attack. Clemenceau evidently believed these claims, and ordered Vyx to finally establish the neutral zone in Hungary.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Peter Pastor, "The French Military Mission in Hungary. 1918-1919," in *War and Society in East Central Europe Vol. XX: Revolutions and Interventions in Hungary and its Neighbor States, 1918-1919*, 253-254.

<sup>89</sup> Pichon did not recognize the Károlyi government or Republic, yet feared that should Károlyi step down, chaos would break out.

<sup>90</sup> Peter Pastor, *Hungary Between Wilson and Lenin*, 83-84.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

<sup>92</sup> Peter Pastor, *Hungary Between Wilson and Lenin*, 69-70.

<sup>93</sup> Peter Pastor, "The French Military Mission in Hungary. 1918-1919," in *War and Society in East Central Europe Vol. XX: Revolutions and Interventions in Hungary and its Neighbor States, 1918-1919*, 258.

Aston University professor Anne Orde argues in her article “France and Hungary in 1920: Revisionism and Railways” that while the French may have made clear their intentions of creating a united Eastern Europe under French stewardship, their vision for a Danubian empire crumbled due to a lack of planning and effort. The French presence in the region was plagued by a power struggle between General Franchet d'Espèrey, Colonel Vyx, and General Henri Berthelot. The latter pressured the French government to make the territorial concessions necessary to appease France’s Eastern European allies.<sup>94</sup> France would eventually abandon its goals of a new Danubian Union in exchange for an Italian promise not to support a federated Austria-Germany. Even if they had been more successful in their schemes, they were unlikely to have paid off, as Hungary’s newly independent neighbours were largely unwilling to enter into any agreement that would have granted Hungary any power over them.<sup>95</sup>

### **American non-Interference**

The spectre of American policy had a far stronger presence than actual American policy. Wilson’s Fourteen Points were inescapable, the People’s Republic having been shaped with them in mind. It was hoped by Károlyi and his government that by appealing to Wilsonian principles, they could ensure lenient treatment on the part of the Allies. This lenient treatment never came, and America proved unwilling to intercede on the Hungarian’s behalf, even if it voiced frequent doubts over the French approach. When the Hungarian administrations in areas occupied by the

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<sup>94</sup> Peter Pastor, *Hungary Between Wilson and Lenin*, 89-90.

<sup>95</sup> Anne Orde, “France and Hungary in 1920: Revisionism and Railways,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 15, no. 3 (July, 1980), 488.

Romanians and Serbians were rapidly deposed, Károlyi turned to the Americans, appealing directly to Woodrow Wilson. On November 16th, 1918, he sent a message stating that his government was reliant on the support and generosity of the Entente, and that without this support his government might collapse. Another message was sent within ten days after the first, asking that Wilson “come to the assistance of the young Hungarian democracy.”<sup>96</sup> No answer ever came.

In his book *American Hungarian Relations 1918-1944*, American historian Mark Imre Major singles out Károlyi, and Hungary as a whole, for their naivité in believing that Wilsonian principles would have influence on the policies of the Great War’s victors.<sup>97</sup> Yet Hungary was not alone in the belief that adopting Wilson’s principles would lead to a more compassionate treatment from the Entente; the architects of the Weimar Republic believed the same. Furthermore, Horthy’s government would make the same mistakes as Károlyi’s, interpreting Allied statements in the most positive manner possible and overestimating their own political bargaining power.<sup>98</sup> To quote Orde, “the Hungarian political class was both desperate and ignorant. It had not yet met the new Europe; it was devoted to the unitary kingdom of St Stephen; the economy was in a state of collapse; and so it overcame its hesitations about the concessions and clutched at any hope of outside aid.”<sup>99</sup> Hungary remained responsible for its political and economic isolation, alienating neighbouring states and the Allies alike by continuously rejecting the Treaty of Trianon.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Mark Imre Major, *American Hungarian Relations 1918-1944*, 20.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>98</sup> Anne Orde, “France and Hungary in 1920: Revisionism and Railways,” 481.

<sup>99</sup> Anne Orde, “France and Hungary in 1920: Revisionism and Railways,” 482.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 488.

The negotiation process for what would become the Treaty of Trianon shows the same inflexibility on the part of the Allies when it came to the question of Hungarian territorial integrity. That Czechoslovakia and a Yugoslav state would be formed from the former Austro-Hungarian Empire was not up for debate, nor was Romania's claim on Transylvania. Whatever government was in power in Budapest appears to have had little to no impact on the process. Committee reports on Yugoslav and Roumanian borders finished after Kun took power, causing unease. Nevertheless, there is no evidence that this influenced the committee's conclusion.<sup>101</sup> Nor is there any evidence of ill-will on the part of the British or Americans, with documents showing that the British did not want to break up national populations. Despite their intentions, it seems the Allies ignored Austrian requests that ownership of parts of western Hungary not be passed to them through a fiat, outraging Hungary.<sup>102</sup>

The truth of the matter is that the Allies did not want to see Hungary broken up, they wanted to see the successor states come into being, something which necessitated the stripping of Hungary's land. In the same way that France was interested in Hungary only so far as it could be used as a bargaining chip and America and England were far more focused on Germany, the disintegration of historic Hungary did not happen because the Allies wanted Hungary destroyed; it happened because Hungarian territorial integrity was not as important to them as their own goals in the east.

### **Chapter 3: Károlyi's Actions**

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<sup>101</sup> Francis Deák, *Hungary at the Paris Peace Conference: The Diplomatic History of the Treaty of Trianon*, (New York: Howard Fertig, Inc., 1972), 51.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid*, 88-89.

Having established that Károlyi had little control over the Allied decision making process, the most common reasons given for the loss of historic Hungary by Károlyi's detractors can be addressed, beginning with the Belgrade Armistice, followed by Károlyi's pacifism. The Károlyi government was anxious to enter into an armistice with the Allies, as such an agreement would mean *de facto* recognition of the People's Republic by the Allied powers. That recognition could come from one of two countries: either Italy, which had already offered to occupy Hungary with Italian troops in order to protect the country from possible annexation by more hostile Allied forces; or France, whose control over the east was waxing with Marshal Foch's promotion to supreme command, whilst Italy's importance in the conflict was waning. Ultimately, Károlyi's government chose to go to the French. At a meeting in Belgrade on November 8th, 1918, Károlyi's delegation met with Franchet D'Esperey, a French general and the Allied Commander in Chief for the South-Eastern theatre who showed open disdain for the Hungarian delegation, with the exception of Károlyi.<sup>103</sup> On November 13th, 1918, the new military convention was signed, mandating the demobilization of all Hungarian forces with the exception of six infantry divisions and two cavalry divisions and dictating a new line of demarcation.<sup>104</sup> Allied troops were to occupy this region, though the Hungarian administration would remain active. The Hungarian delegation believed this meant that the region would be occupied by Entente troops, but the occupation was instead carried out by Serbian and Romanian forces. This greatly alarmed Hungary, given the claims to this territory that had been put forth by the Serbians and Roumanians. Despite these setbacks, the Belgrade armistice was also celebrated in Budapest as a success for maintaining the autonomy of the Hungarian government.

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<sup>103</sup> Mark Imre Major, *American Hungarian Relations 1918-1944*, 19.

<sup>104</sup> Running from Besztercze in Eastern Transylvania to the Maros River, and along the Maros to the Mur River.

If there is any argument to be made that Károlyi was responsible for the loss of historic Hungary, it lies in this choice to seek an armistice with France. The Italians saw any power gained by the Serbs as a threat to Italian interests assured through the 1915 Treaty of London. They were thus inclined to side with the Hungarians on the subject of Hungarian territorial integrity. Any land gained by the South Slav states represented competition for Italy in the Adriatic. Moreover, both the Italians and the Serbs wanted the Hungarian port of Fiume. The Italians had hoped that they might come to an arrangement with Hungary wherein Italy would prevent any loss of Hungarian territory to the South Slav states and in return, Hungary would support Italy's claim to Fiume.<sup>105</sup> Had Hungary pursued an armistice with Italy, it is possible Romania and Czechoslovakia would never have occupied any part of Hungary in the lead up to the Paris Peace Conference. Given the Allies' intentions to create a Czechoslovakian state and southern Slav states, however, that Hungary may not have been occupied by the successor states does not mean the land would not have been given to them. As the Italian influence on the region was already waning, at least compared to that of France, and the Allies subscribed to the doctrine of Primary Responsibility, there's no reason to assume that the outcome would have been different in any meaningful way.

### **Military policy**

To Károlyi's detractors, his most egregious failure was the rapid disarmament of the Hungarian Army in 1918. This decision is often cited as the reason the Czechoslovak and Romanian militaries were able to move in and occupy so much of historic Hungary. This is a blatant misrepresentation of the reality of the diplomatic situation that recasts Károlyi's actions

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<sup>105</sup> Peter Pastor, *Hungary Between Wilson and Lenin*, 61.

as stemming from naive pacifism when they were in fact a pragmatic recognition of Hungary's political situation.

Upon the National Council's ascension to power, Béla Linder, Károlyi's Minister of Defence, recalled all troops from the front and instructed them to lay down their arms.<sup>106</sup> According to Károlyi, this order was principally informed by a fear among Károlyi's cabinet that soldiers would return armed, potentially causing disorder, threatening the new government, or prompting Allied intervention.<sup>107</sup> When Czechoslovak troops occupied several districts claimed by the Prague government in western Hungary on November 9th, Linder's policy was reversed and he ceded his post as Minister of Defence to Albert Bartha.<sup>108</sup> Pastor argues that Czechoslovakian territorial claims and the Allies' support of these claims were to blame for the fall of the People's Republic of Hungary. Slovakia was still under the control of Budapest. The nationalities feared that their territory claims would not be met at the Peace Conference, and hoped to secure them instead through military strength.<sup>109</sup> In a speech on November 11th, Károlyi announced that the Hungarian Army had ceased disarming and was prepared to defend Hungary from the Czech incursion. He made a point to refer to the Prague government as 'the Czech state' rather than Czechoslovakia, an indication of Hungary's unwillingness to part with Slovakia. Károlyi followed through on his promise to defend Hungary's borders, mobilizing divisions of repatriated POWs who managed to repel the Czech forces. When a new demarcation line was negotiated, Hungary ceded administration of the areas given to the Prague government, but refused to withdraw its army any further.<sup>110</sup> Linder's policy was in place only nine days,

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<sup>106</sup> Peter Pastor, *Hungary Between Wilson and Lenin*, 44.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.* 66.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 68-69.

<sup>110</sup> C. A. Macartney, *Hungary*, 115-116.



being rejected a full three days before Károlyi was even officially declared Prime Minister. Czechoslovakia and Serbia (alongside the French) were the only military forces to occupy Hungary during this period, and the Czech forces were quickly repelled by the re-armed and reorganized Hungarian army under Bartha.

The pacifist policies that were initially pursued by Béla Linder stemmed from the success of the anti-war sentiment that informed the revolution. The government believed that Hungary was past the point of military conflict, and that any future issues could be resolved through diplomacy. As domestic policy, this belief may have been shown to be naive in retrospect. Less questionable was the reasoning taken with regards to foreign policy. Demobilization was carried out with the intention of showing the Allies that Hungary was moving away from the militaristic foreign policy of Austria-Hungary.<sup>111</sup> To suggest that Károlyi's military policy was to blame for Hungary's eventual territory loss is incorrect, given that the land taken was either recaptured or occupied as dictated by a necessary armistice. As for Károlyi's capitulation to the increasingly harsh lines of demarcation foisted on Hungary, to reject any of these lines would have meant renewed military conflict in a war that Hungary had already soundly lost. Furthermore, that the National Council did sanction military action against the Czechoslovakian and Romanian incursions beyond the lines of demarcation shows a willingness to defend Hungarian territory while maintaining a relationship with the Allies. Károlyi showed a consistent willingness to take military action in order to defend Hungary's borders against Romanian and Czechoslovakian advances beyond the accepted lines of demarcation. That he didn't take similar action against

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<sup>111</sup> Ervin Liptai, "War and Home Defense, October 31, 1918 to March 21, 1919," in *War and Society in East Central Europe Vol. XX: Revolutions and Interventions in Hungary and its Neighbor States, 1918-1919*, ed. Peter Pastor (New York: Columbia Press, 1988), 26.

unfavorable lines of demarcation drawn up with Hungary's various neighbour states is merely a testament to his hopes that working with the Allies would secure a favourable peace.

#### Chapter 4: Historiography

With each new regime, the past was once again reevaluated and mined for a history that could legitimize the current system while feeding patriotic narratives. First during the Horthy era, then the Soviet era of 1947-1956, the post-revolutionary era, the 1990s and early 2000s, and finally, the Orbán era. With the narrative changing every couple of decades, historical perceptions of Károlyi and the People's Republic of Hungary have varied wildly.

Soviet Hungarian historian Tibor Hajdu blamed much of the negative perception of the revolutions of 1918 and 1919 on the counter-propaganda from the interwar period, which framed the 1919 revolution as "un-Hungarian."<sup>112</sup> Though the Treaty of Trianon was better understood in the 1920s, by the 1930s it had become the subject of a number of myths (Hajdu specifically cites the claim that Hungary had no army after WWI because of Béla Linder and that Hungary was occupied because of the Belgrade Armistice.)<sup>113</sup> Negative perceptions of the 1918-1919 revolutions were at their height between 1933 and 1944.<sup>114</sup> Frequently antisemitic, the dominant understanding of Károlyi and the People's Republic is encapsulated by this passage from Cécile Tormay's *An Outlaw's Diary*:

"It is to our everlasting shame that no single Hungarian rose to choke these words. In the Hall of Hungary's parliament Lenin's agent could unfurl at his ease the flag of Bolshevism, could blow the clarion of social revolution and announce the advent of a world revolution, while outside, in Parliament Square, Lovászi and Bokányi, accompanied by Jászi, informed the people that the National Council had proclaimed the Republic. On the staircase Károlyi made another oration.

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<sup>112</sup> Tibor Hajdu, "1918-1919: The Changing Images of Two Revolutions," in *War and Society in East Central Europe Vol. XX: Revolutions and Interventions in Hungary and its Neighbor States, 1918-1919*, 485.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 493.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 491.

Down in the square, Landler, Weltler, Preusz and other Jews glorified the Republic- there was not a single Hungarian among them. That was the secret of the whole revolution. Above: the mask, Michael Károlyi; below: the foreign race has proclaimed its mastery.”<sup>115</sup>

This passage shows that much like post WWI Germany, Hungary developed its own ‘Stab in the Back’ myth. Jászi claimed that “Magyarization was no longer either needed or wanted and neither was Jewish help in the fight against the nationalities-- hence the radical change in public opinion... the ethnic bogeyman had been replaced by the Jewish bogeyman.”<sup>116</sup>

Published in 1934, Dr. Imre de Jósika-Herczeg’s *Hungary after a Thousand Years* does nothing to disguise its contempt for Károlyi. The book, whose introduction claims that it was written for the benefit of the English-speaking world, calls Károlyi the man “who brought Hungary to ruin,”<sup>117</sup> incorrectly alleging that it was Károlyi who said that “he did not want to see any more soldiers.”<sup>118</sup> Jósika-Herczeg claims that Károlyi’s time in power “brought more loss and catastrophe to the thousand year-old nation than the World War; even more than the Battle of Mohács...”<sup>119</sup> and that the governments of Western Europe did not want Károlyi in power.<sup>120</sup> Despite his harsh criticisms, Jósika-Herczeg offers few explanations on how he came to these conclusions or found evidence for his claims. He also engages in the blurring of the lines between the People’s Republic and the Soviet Republic, at one point identifying Communist influences where there were none, and calling the November 6th riots of 1918 “communistic”, and saying they were led by Kun.<sup>121</sup><sup>122</sup> It is worth noting that Jósika-Herczeg reserves some

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<sup>115</sup> Cécile Tormay, *An Outlaw's Diary, Volume I.*, (London: P. Allan & Co., 1923), 141.

<sup>116</sup> Paul Lendvai, *The Hungarians: A Thousand Years of Victory in Defeat*, 379.

<sup>117</sup> Imre de Jósika-Herczeg, *Hungary After a Thousand Years*, (New York: American Hungarian Daily, Inc., 1934), 90.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, 121.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 127.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 119.

<sup>122</sup> Kun did not return to Hungary until a week after the protests were held.

blame for the Allies, specifically the Americans, who he sees as having failed to follow through on upholding the Fourteen Points.

Though not published until 1953, Miklos Horthy's autobiography is similarly representative of the historical narrative that dominated Hungary during his leadership. Written in Hungarian and originally published in Argentina during his exile, Horthy's book claims that Károlyi's rule set Hungary on course for a Bolshevik revolution, characterizing his time in power as merely the 'first wave' of a single revolution. He also claims that the Belgrade Armistice represented the beginning of the dismemberment of historic Hungary, while repeating the myth that the military was disbanded and that the government stood back and allowed the successor states to claim territory. It is important to note, however, that much like Jósika-Herczeg, Horthy does place some blame at the feet of the Allies, saying that they "paved the way for the Bolshevik revolution,"<sup>123</sup> citing English historian Owen Rutter in Rutter's authorized biography of Horthy published in 1939.<sup>124</sup> Historian Ferenc Laczó of Maastricht University suggests that the scapegoating of Károlyi may reflect a desire on the part of Horthy and his followers to distance themselves from the fact that they were brought to power by the same enemies whom they blamed for the Treaty of Trianon, mainly the Romanians and the Allies.<sup>125</sup>

From 1947 to 1956, the 1919 revolution was characterized as a "collection of errors."<sup>126</sup> Considered too problematic for the period, the left-wing narrative was that the revolutionaries had done too many things wrong and that their leaders had been traitors, with some communist

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<sup>123</sup> Miklos Horthy, *The Annotated Memoirs of Admiral Miklós Horthy, Regent of Hungary*, ed. Andrew L. Simon (Safety Harbor, Florida: Simon Publications, 2000), 114.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 110-113.

<sup>125</sup> Csaba Tibor, Tóth Ferenc, Laczó Gáspár, and Papp Marius Turda, "A Bridge that Nobody Crosses: History and Myth regarding 1918–20 in Hungary and Romania," trans. Ferenc Laczó, *New Eastern Europe*, June 25, 2020. First published in Hungarian by *Mérce*.

<sup>126</sup> Tibor Hajdu, "1918-1919: The Changing Images of Two Revolutions," in *War and Society in East Central Europe Vol. XX: Revolutions and Interventions in Hungary and its Neighbor States, 1918-1919*, 484.

academics going so far as to argue that Károlyi and his ilk had infiltrated the unions and appropriated their messages. In the early 1950s, Károlyi could not be mentioned, positively or negatively.<sup>127</sup> The historical narrative changed again after the failed revolution of 1956. In his 1988 essay aiming to answer the question of why the revolutions of 1918-1919 were not particularly influential on the consciousness or future of the Hungarian nation, Tibor Hajdu suggests that some viewed them only as the byproduct of a collapsing regime, that they represented an aberration, a temporary divergence from the course of Hungarian history. Nevertheless, Hajdu and his contemporaries recognized the revolutions as legitimate steps forward in Hungarian history and the precursors to the modern People's Republic. He suggests that part of the reason they often went unmentioned was because of their failure and lack of obvious influence on subsequent policy.<sup>128</sup> Hajdu's own biography on Károlyi portrays him in an extremely flattering light, going so far as to say "unlike many of his fellow politicians, he did not implement public activities to achieve individual goals; on the contrary, he was ready to sacrifice his private interests in the name of his conviction at any time."<sup>129</sup> Unsurprisingly, Hajdu places little importance on Károlyi's aristocratic background, de-emphasizing it for his communist audience.<sup>130</sup>

The transition to democratic liberalism in the 1990s saw a generally positive evaluation of Károlyi and his government, which were now regarded as early signs of Hungary's destiny as a democracy--an important step towards modernity.<sup>131</sup> By the late 2000s, however, the

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<sup>127</sup> Tibor Hajdu, "1918-1919: The Changing Images of Two Revolutions," in *War and Society in East Central Europe Vol. XX: Revolutions and Interventions in Hungary and its Neighbor States, 1918-1919*, 496-497.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid, 483-484.

<sup>129</sup> Máté Fábrián, "Some Historiographical and Methodological Issues of 20th Century Hungarian Biography Writing," *Pro&Contra* 1, (2018), 9.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>131</sup> A. Kurimay, "Interrogating the Historical Revisionism of the Hungarian Right: The Queer Case of Cécile Tormay," *East European Politics and Societies* 30 (2016), 8.

excitement around a Europe-aligned, liberal democracy was gone. Instead, far-right, anti-EU nationalism was on the rise. With the controversy surrounding the Hungarian Socialist Party in 2006, the 2008 economic crisis, and the re-election of Viktor Orbán and his increasingly right-wing Fidesz Party in 2010, a new narrative once again appeared, one with Hungary as the victim of foreign interference, hobbled and controlled by others. Though not as sudden a shift as previously experienced, the last sixteen years have seen a slow but certain return to something not-unlike the Horthy Era narrative. Made possible by Orbán's gradual rehabilitation of Horthy's image, this narrative once again laid the blame for Trianon and Béla Kun's Soviet Republic at Károlyi's feet. The Aster Revolution became "The 'Aster' putsch"<sup>132</sup> and Károlyi took on the dramatic but wholly inaccurate moniker of "The Red Count."<sup>133</sup> The People's Republic was no longer a step towards Hungary's destiny as a liberal democracy; it was now the prologue to left-wing tyranny in the form of Béla Kun and the Red Terror, as argued by historian and senior advisor to Orbán, György Granasztói.<sup>134</sup>

### Chapter 5: Blame

If Károlyi is not responsible for the destruction of historic Hungary (as I hope I have proven), then the question must be asked as to *why* he has been widely blamed during the Orbán era. The answer seems to be that Károlyi's guilt is integral to a carefully constructed historical narrative that has proven central to Orbán's political strategy. Orbán has created a restrictive popular understanding of Hungary and its people through which he is able to present himself as a representative of 'true' Hungary, and any opponents as potential traitors, pawns of foreign, anti-

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<sup>132</sup> "Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's speech at the commemoration ceremony marking the one hundredth anniversary of the death of Count István Tisza," Website of the Government of Hungary, November 1, 2018, <https://2015-2019.kormany.hu/en/the-prime-minister/the-prime-minister-s-speeches/prime-minister-viktor-orban-s-speech-at-the-commemoration-ceremony-marking-the-one-hundredth-anniversary-of-the-death-of-count-istvan-tisza>

<sup>133</sup> "Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's speech at the commemoration ceremony marking the one hundredth anniversary of the death of Count István Tisza."

<sup>134</sup> Stéphane Kovacs, "La réaction nationaliste des Hongrois," *Figaro*, April 9, 2012.

Hungarian forces.<sup>135</sup> In the same way that the Horthy Era saw the spread of the myth that the People's Republic and the Soviet Republic had been the machinations of outsiders, Orbán's enemies are now pawns of the EU. The same matters dominate politics: border issues, the right to self-determination, and the perception of Hungary as being under attack from outside forces trying to impose their will upon the country. In the interwar period, these nefarious forces were the Allies, the Jews, and Soviet Russia (the latter two often being conflated). Now these enemies have been swapped out for migrants, Brussels, and the EU.<sup>136</sup> With Orbán going so far as to compare the EU's intervention in Hungarian politics as 'colonization'.<sup>137</sup> Orbán's narrative also brings back a populist versus urbanist framing, where rural Hungary is painted as 'true' Hungary while the urban population is self-interested, weak, othered, and worse: fundamentally anti-Hungarian. This can be seen in a speech delivered by Orbán commemorating Istvan Tisza's death, wherein he states "The leader of the Socialist Operetta Republic and his henchmen saw Tisza in the same light as Historical Hungary: they hated him because he was proud and strong, and because he was imbued with the consciousness of a people which had lived and survived in the heart of Europe for a thousand years." In the same speech, urbanites are described as "[t]he hussars of the salon and the foolish dreamers."<sup>138</sup> Orbán's new historical narrative brought back the same framing of Károlyi, the National Council, and their supporters as not being 'real' Hungarians, drawing a distinction between "the interests of classes, aristocratic factions, ideologies or economic interest groups" and "the interests of the entire Hungarian nation – from the most remote Hungarian villages to the most inconspicuous working-class enclaves."<sup>139</sup> This

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<sup>135</sup> Michael Toomey, "History, Nationalism and Democracy," *New Perspectives* 26, no. 1 (2018), 89.

<sup>136</sup> Michael Toomey, "History, Nationalism and Democracy," 97.

<sup>137</sup> Stéphane Kovacs, "La réaction nationaliste des Hongrois," *Figaro*, April 9, 2012.

<sup>138</sup> "Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's speech at the commemoration ceremony marking the one hundredth anniversary of the death of Count István Tisza."

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*

effort to paint the left-wing opposition to the right-wing populist narrative as being fundamentally anti-Hungarian can be seen in the major news publications of Hungary, with the conservative *Magyar Nemzet* describing modern left-wing support of Károlyi as playing “the game of foreign takeover of Hungary.”<sup>140</sup> The idea that Károlyi and the National Council were acting in their own self-interest has also been repeated by Orbán, who stated that “Károlyi and his people wanted power, but could not rise to the greatness of the Hungarian people, because they could only hope for support from our enemies, and from anarchy.”<sup>141</sup>

In the same way Hungarian politicians at the time vastly overestimated their own bargaining power, Horthy then and Orbán now push a narrative that paints Hungary as far more important to the events that directly followed WWI than it was. So it must be that *someone* wanted Hungary destroyed. The Jews, the Romanians and the Russians are the most popular culprits, though the Allies (especially France) are also blamed. So the narrative becomes that of the urbanist Károlyi, who was either too incompetent to stop the enemy (the Allies, the Romanians, the Czechs, the Jews, the Russians), or was a pawn of said enemy. This is an important distinction: a cultural destabilization like Trianon Trauma is generally understood to have been inflicted by an outside power.<sup>142</sup> It is possible to blame Károlyi without identifying him as the cause of the trauma.

### **'Trianon Trauma' as a Political Tool**

Hungary marks June 4th as a Day of National Unity, an occasion on which the shared history of all Hungarians, within and without the borders of Hungary is recognized, and the

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<sup>140</sup> Pihál Tamás, “Long live the Hungarian-Romanian Friendship!” *Magyar Nemzet*, July 27, 2023.

<sup>141</sup> “Prime Minister Viktor Orbán’s speech at the commemoration ceremony marking the one hundredth anniversary of the death of Count István Tisza.”

<sup>142</sup> Michael Toomey, “History, Nationalism and Democracy,” 89.



injustices of the Treaty of Trianon are mourned. Despite ninety years having passed since the signing of the treaty, the Day of National Unity was not recognized until 2010, when it was introduced by the recently elected Fidesz Party. The creation of a holiday commemorating an event ninety years after the fact serves to reinforce the idea of Trianon Trauma, or Trianon Syndrome. Trianon Trauma is a cultural upset that references the collective suffering of the Hungarian people inflicted by the loss of land and separation of people as dictated by the Treaty of Trianon. A collective cultural trauma occurs when a cultural group believes themselves to have been the victims of a rapidly occurring traumatic event that has a lasting impact on the cultural psyche of said group.<sup>143</sup> The trauma then takes shape as individuals within the group articulate the perceived injustices. The ensuing conversation builds, reinforces, and spreads the idea of the trauma as it reaches the ears of those who recognize their own experiences and feelings within the conversation. That a collective trauma exists does not necessarily mean that a traumatic event was experienced by that culture. As events are not inherently positive or negative, but receive these connotations from the observer, an event cannot be traumatic, it can only be perceived as traumatic. This does not mean that those who considered it traumatic cannot be traumatized, merely that that trauma is subjective rather than objective. The trauma narrative is not constructed solely on the 'traumatic' event, but on how that event is remembered within the affected society, its staying power in the collective conscience, which in turn is decided by how the powers within that society choose to memorialize the event.<sup>144</sup> American political scientist Adam B. Lerner argues in his article "The Uses and Abuses of Victimhood Nationalism in International Politics" that cultural traumas must have some underlying truth in order to be

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<sup>143</sup> Michael Toomey, "History, Nationalism and Democracy," 89.

<sup>144</sup> Adam B. Lerner, "The Uses and Abuses of Victimhood Nationalism in International Politics," *European Journal of International Relations*, 26, no. 1 (March 2020).

effective; otherwise, given enough time, their narrative will collapse. Collective cultural traumas like Trianon Trauma are socially constructed traumas, shaped and communicated by ‘carrier groups’, for whom these traumas can be wielded to achieve political and material ends.<sup>145</sup>

The idea that Trianon was traumatic is not new, seeing its roots in the Horthy regime in the 1920s and 1930s, but it disappeared from the discussion following Hungary’s inclusion in the Soviet sphere of influence after WWII. Trianon Trauma re-entered the public consciousness in the late 2010s, and has been championed by Orbán, who has pushed the idea of a national trauma through the National Day of Unity, his appeals to Hungarian irredentism, and his promises to regain the land and people lost in the treaty. Having brought back the post-WWI fight for territorial concessions, Orbán positions himself as the next Horthy- the leader who is fighting to resolve this trauma.<sup>146</sup> Referring to it as "the Hungarian issue", Orbán has announced that his government would be seeking the return of territory within the Carpathian Basin. Though this announcement sparked anxiety and derision from Hungary's neighbours, historian Michael Toomey argues in “History, Nationalism and Democracy” that Orbán's words were meant for a Hungarian audience, not a foreign one.<sup>147</sup> That Orbán has taken no meaningful steps to attempt the impossible task of regaining these territories is not an accident, as “by engaging in a perpetual battle to restore the country’s lost honour, he continues to reconstruct the Trianon trauma, while also consolidating his image as the tragic national saviour.”<sup>148</sup> Orbán himself states “I am an old-fashioned freedom fighter.”<sup>149</sup> Historian Marius Turda argues that “What

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<sup>145</sup> Michael Toomey, "History, Nationalism and Democracy," 90.

<sup>146</sup> Michael Toomey, "History, Nationalism and Democracy," 88.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid., 97.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid., 101.

<sup>149</sup> Cabinet Office of the Prime Minister, "Speech by Prime Minister Viktor Orbán at the opening of CPAC Texas," Website of the Government of Hungary, August 4, 2022, <https://2015-2022.miniszterelnok.hu/speech-by-prime-minister-viktor-orban-at-the-opening-of-cpac-texas/>

Trianon offers, as clearly understood by Orbán Viktor, is a prism through which to re-claim Hungary's greatness in the region."<sup>150</sup>

### **Victimhood Nationalism**

Victimhood nationalism occurs when a nation centres its identity on its perceived victimization by foreign powers. Built on the construction of a narrative of trauma, Lerner notes that “victimhood nationalist narratives, unlike other narratives of collective trauma, break down the idealized victim–perpetrator relationship and project grievances onto otherwise uninvolved international actors, including other nation-states.”<sup>151</sup> This framing leads to irrational, violent action against nations which may have had no hand in inflicting the collective trauma. As victimhood nationalism is not an identity built on one specific instance of victimization, but rather on a generalized victimhood, one can become a victim of anything at the hands of anyone. Victimhood nationalism thus proves itself to be a powerful tool in the hands of manipulators and can be used to unite and mobilize the supposed victims.<sup>152</sup>

Despite grounding his narrative of collective cultural trauma in the Treaty of Trianon, Orbán's focus on Hungary's victimization at the hands of the EU displays this disconnect between trauma and response, presenting Hungary as a general victim without a defined perpetrator. The malevolent actor harming Hungary is easily swapped out to suit the narrative du jour, whether it is Brussels trying to meddle in Hungarian internal affairs, Western Europe trying to ‘colonize’ Hungary, or Ukraine persecuting its Hungarian minority.

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<sup>150</sup> Csaba Tibor, Tóth Ferenc, Laczó Gáspár, and Papp Marius Turda, "A Bridge that Nobody Crosses: History and Myth regarding 1918–20 in Hungary and Romania," trans. Ferenc Laczó, *New Eastern Europe*, June 25, 2020. First published in Hungarian by *Mérce*.

<sup>151</sup> Adam B. Lerner, "The Uses and Abuses of Victimhood Nationalism in International Politics."

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*

Lerner notes that “the sympathy that victimhood nationalisms frequently evoke can be used for the absolution of guilt for past crimes or to evade critical scrutiny for ethically dubious actions in the present.”<sup>153</sup> Victimhood is performed both for the benefit of the citizens of the state and for the international community, serving to unite citizens under one easily mobilized identity and to earn sympathy from foreign powers (and often to excuse illegal or morally condemned actions by the state). Hungary sets itself apart from other prominent examples of victimhood nationalism by its seeming disinterest in weaponizing its supposed victimhood to appeal to the international community.<sup>154</sup> Instead, as noted by Toomey, Orbán uses the international community's perceived lack of empathy for Hungary to craft a narrative wherein Hungary is pitted against the world, with Orbán as an almost romantic hero fighting for his country. Still, it should be noted that complete isolation is not the goal. Orbán's Hungary maintained close ties to Poland, to America under Donald Trump's presidency, and with Putin's Russia. The loss of the alliances with Poland and with the United States were not desirable outcomes.

Orbán has gone to great lengths to both rehabilitate and to emulate Miklos Horthy (or at least to be perceived as emulating). And while there are similarities between Orbán's narrative and Horthy's, the most glaring difference may be that while Horthy utilized a narrative of collective cultural trauma following the Treaty of Trianon, the Kingdom of Hungary cannot be said to have engaged in victimhood nationalism. The perpetrators of the trauma, whether correctly identified (England, France, America, Romania, Czechoslovakia) or not (Russia, Jewish people, communism), were always clearly identified, and compensation was consistently sought. While Hungary made some gains from its perceived victimhood in the sympathy they

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<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

<sup>154</sup> Adam B. Lerner, “The Uses and Abuses of Victimhood Nationalism in International Politics.”

elicited from the international community in the years following Trianon, that sympathy was always used to further Horthy's goal of regaining lost land. While sometimes viewed as a victim from both within the country and without, there was always a clearly defined perpetrator and the victimhood was not by and large generalized. Historian Ferenc Laczo argues that the Horthy government "promulgated a plan of restoration fixated on the past. They were looking for ways to realise their plan of restoration beyond the symbolic through territorial expansion."<sup>155</sup>

The victimhood narrative further allows its proponents to cast their nation's past atrocities as being the products of greater international conflicts, distracting from the state's complicity and or responsibility for these actions. Lerner cites Germany and Japan as examples, with some in both countries using their status as victims of the Allied bombing of Germany and Allied division of the country, and the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki respectively, to excuse German and Japanese war crimes.<sup>156</sup> Similar examples can be found in the historiography championed by Orbán. Orbán's narrative emphasizes the atrocities of the Red Terror of 1919 while downplaying the subsequent White Terror of 1919/1920 and the rampant antisemitism of interwar Hungary is a prime example. The emphasis placed on the Red Terror by the Orbán government is an important step in the rehabilitation of Horthy. By constantly reminding Hungarians of the evils of the Soviet Republic, the ensuing White Terror is justified. Orbán has also pushed a narrative which exonerates Hungary of the genocide of Hungarian Jews in 1944 by presenting the entire country as victims of the Nazis following the fall of the Horthy government in October 1944. This effort to deflect blame can be observed in the narrative surrounding events going as far back as 1914, with Orbán stating in a speech given in Budapest, October 21st, 2018,

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<sup>155</sup> Csaba Tibor, Tóth Ferenc, Laczó Gáspár, and Papp Marius Turda, "A Bridge that Nobody Crosses: History and Myth regarding 1918–20 in Hungary and Romania," trans. Ferenc Laczó, *New Eastern Europe*, June 25, 2020. First published in Hungarian by *Mérce*.

<sup>156</sup> Adam B. Lerner, "The Uses and Abuses of Victimhood Nationalism in International Politics."

that Hungary's entrance into WWI was unavoidable: "The shadow cast by several bad decisions rendered us Hungarians unable to make a good decision: we were not a sovereign state, we were chained to a multi-ethnic empire."<sup>157</sup>

Orbán's current narrative of Hungary as the victim cannot entertain the true causes of Hungary's land loss at Trianon, as that would compromise his framing of Hungary as victim. To admit that the nationalities had legitimate grievances would be to admit that they were victims of Hungarian oppression, that the breaking-up of historic Hungary was not SOLELY an injustice against Hungary. Furthermore, to admit to the poor treatment of the nationalities would be to admit to the flaws of Magyar chauvinism and of Magyarization, the latter being too closely tied to the birth of the modern Hungarian identity in the latter half of the 19th century.

As for why Károlyi is blamed over Kun, there may be a number of reasons. Kun could be seen as an external threat, a Jewish man bringing a foreign ideology from a foreign land, while Károlyi was an insider, an establishment figure of the old order. He can be identified as the point where that order was failed. Furthermore, Károlyi is a far more useful scapegoat to the current political establishment. Fidesz's liberal opponents are easily smeared by their comparison to Károlyi, who was already used to repudiate democratic liberalism of the 1990s and early 2000s. Orbán has pushed a narrative wherein progressive liberals and communists are one in the same, with Horthy outright stating at the 2022 CPAC convention in Texas that "[i]f somebody has doubts whether progressive liberals and communists are the same, just ask us, Hungarians. We fought them both, and I can tell you: they are the same."<sup>158</sup> Both Károlyi and Orbán's opponents are thus rendered as dangerous radicals.

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<sup>157</sup> "Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's speech at the commemoration ceremony marking the one hundredth anniversary of the death of Count István Tisza."

<sup>158</sup> Cabinet Office of the Prime Minister, "Speech by Prime Minister Viktor Orbán at the opening of CPAC Texas," Website of the Government of Hungary, August 4, 2022.

## Conclusion

Historic Hungary was lost because the nationalities who made up the majority of the population in most of those regions were chafing under the Hungarian yoke. Oppression and forced assimilation ingratiate no one, and these nationalities were canny in their organizational efforts both at home and abroad. They sought the sympathy of the Western World and found it. All the while, the Hungarians failed to recognize the failures of Magyarization, the suffering and resentment it caused, and their poor reputation in the foreign press. By the end of WWI, the existence of the successor states was all but assured by the Allies, each of whom had their own plans for Eastern Europe that necessitated these states' existences. By the time Károlyi took power, the process by which historic Hungary would be dismantled had already begun. There is little (if anything) he, or any other Hungarian politician in his position could have done by that point to protect Hungary's territorial integrity. The charge that he caused the land loss by disbanding the military and allowing the French and Romanians to occupy the country has already been dismissed. Béla Linder's anti-military policy was reversed almost immediately, and the Hungarians took up arms to push the Czechs in the North and the Romanians in the south back to their designated zones. Their occupation of these zones did not occur because Hungary could not defend itself; it was allowed when Hungary signed a very necessary armistice.

Why then, is this not more widely understood? Why is Károlyi blamed and the organization efforts of the nationalities ignored? The truth does not paint Hungary in the kindest of lights, but rather, depicts them as oppressive rulers on par with the Austrians, from whom they had sought freedom. To admit that historic Hungary was lost because the nationalities got organized and agitated for freedom is to admit that Hungary had been such a poor master that

they drove the nationalities to do so. This is not a nice thing to admit about one's country; it demands a certain amount of self-reflection. By ignoring the nationalities and blaming Károlyi, and in turn painting Károlyi as not a 'true' Hungarian, any responsibility on the part of the Hungarian state is absolved, and a convenient myth is born, one which has allowed the current Hungarian government to maintain power through its embrace of victimhood nationalism.



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