

Horthy, Hitler and the Hungary of 1944*

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Was the Hungarian Regent deluding himself when on the seventeenth of March, 1944, on Hitler's invitation, he left Budapest on a special train to meet the *Führer* at Klessheim castle near Salzburg? We know today that in Horthy's own entourage there were a few who had tried to dissuade him from making this journey. But the 76 year old head-of-state was still thinking in terms of the political morality which had prevailed in the days of Emperor-King Francis-Joseph. He had no conception of totalitarian politics, albeit the example of President Hacha (whom Hitler had lured to Berlin in 1939 so that he could bully this sickly man into consenting to a German occupation of rump-Czechoslovakia) should have made him wary of Hitler. But Horthy welcomed the German invitation: he did want to talk to the *Führer* in person, so that he could intervene with him personally and effect the release of the Hungarian divisions still fighting on the Eastern Front. "These divisions must be used to strengthen the Carpathians," was Horthy's excuse: in the spring of 1944 the Red Army was not more than a hundred kilometers from the Hungarian border.¹ In reality, through the return of the troops, Horthy had hoped to effect the defection of Hungary from the Axis in spite of the fact that the plan which he and Premier Miklos Kallay had concocted earlier (calling for Anglo-American paratroopers in the heart of Hungary) had proved unworkable.²

Ever since the spring of 1942, the Regent and the Premier had sought the opportunity and the means of taking Hungary out of the "German war" as smoothly as possible. After the Axis disasters at Stalingrad and Voronezh, they had put out feelers even to Moscow, but the response of the Soviets was negative.³ The discussions with the Anglo-Americans had gotten under way in earnest only after the fall of Mussolini; but plans which might have had concrete results were formulated in theory only, and were executed only on "paper".

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The Kállay government's freedom of action was limited by Hungary's geographic location. Not without good reason did Horthy complain in the summer of 1943 to Colonel Gyula Kádár, the Chief of the Counter Intelligence Division of the General Staff: "Many urge that we should get out of the war, but no one can tell me how. I cannot simply appear on the Royal Palace's balcony and shout: I have defected! In 24 hours the Germans would bring [i.e., install in office] Szálasi . . ."⁴

By this time Horthy had behind him the tense encounter with Hitler of April, 1943 (also in Klessheim). On this occasion the *Führer* had denounced Kállay, accusing him of "treason" and "dealings with the enemy". He had demanded the Premier's removal and urged Horthy to implement "strict controls" over the Jews of Hungary. Ribbentrop, who was also present, abetted Hitler: all Jews were paid agents of the British Secret Service, they must not be allowed to come and go freely. In Hungary, *horribile dictu*, there were Jews sitting even in Parliament! According to the records of the meeting which have survived, Hitler advised Horthy to collect the Jews in concentration camps and put them to work in the mines. Horthy defended Kállay and denied his "English connections." In regard to the Jews, he declared with indignation: "He had done everything against the Jews that can be done with decency. After all, he could not murder them or do away with them in some other way!"⁵

The war years had made relations between Hitler and Horthy tense. In 1936 the Regent, after their first encounter, had talked with admiration of the *Führer*. After the Kiel visit of 1938 (when Hitler had tried to get the Hungarians to join in on an invasion of Czechoslovakia) his enthusiasm diminished.⁶ The conservative Horthy was repelled by the primitiveness of Hitler and his parvenu followers. The Regent's dislike of Hitler was reciprocated by the latter. "Moreover," explained Edmund Veesenmayer to this writer in a letter, "[Horthy] despised [Hitler], believed him to be untruthful and lacking all traces of humanitarian feeling. Horthy was smart enough to respect the enormous power of the German *Reich* and try to use it to his own advantage, but he did not and could not like Hitler even as a politician. Von Papen stood ten times closer to the Regent. After all, Papen was a former diplomat, an ex-officer who had the manners of a landed aristocrat. This was Horthy's world! Hitler represented the exact opposite . . ."

Veesenmayer, German Minister and Plenipotentiary in Hungary during the last year of the war, was familiar with conditions in that country and had kept a close eye on Horthy. In 1943 he had prepared a detailed report on Hungary's internal and external policies and had been one of the originators of the idea of the occupation of Hungary by German troops. He did not have a high opinion of Hungarians as a

nation, albeit in his private conversations he still likes to reminisce about the "beautiful days in Budapest." Veesenmayer arrived in Hungary in Horthy's company on 19 March 1944. What had transpired in Klessheim during the previous 48 hours is quite well known, although no official German record of these discussions has been found to date. The fact that, after Hitler's threats and arguments, Horthy gave his consent to a "peaceful" German occupation of his country, was a recognition of the realities of the situation. The German war-machine had gone into action on the 18th of March, it could not have been called to a halt easily. Moreover, the Hungarian military leaders, who were summoned to a conference with Kállay in the early hours of the 19th, with the exception of General Lajos Veress, voiced the hopelessness of armed resistance. Kállay was not blind and knew what he was saying when he said: "I will not be a part to a comedy! Either the nation resists as a whole, or it does not resist at all!"⁷ Horthy's assurances, sent by telegram from his special train, dashed all thoughts of resisting that had been entertained in government circles.

Why did the Regent consent to the German occupation? Why did he buckle under before Hitler and if he did, why did he not resign and give up his exalted position? Horthy answers these questions honestly and in detail in his memoirs. What he had written is confirmed by the numerous documents that have come to light since. Horthy had agreed to replace Kállay, to appoint a government agreeable to the Germans and to mobilize Hungary for total war in the interest of Nazi Europe. In return, Hitler promised that no Slovak, Croat and especially, Rumanian units would participate in Hungary's occupation and that the German troops would remain for three months only at the most, until the new German Ambassador and Plenipotentiary, "Parteigenosse Veesenmayer" would assure the *Reich's* government that Hungary was fulfilling its obligations toward the Axis. All what Horthy saw in this was that, even though he would have to toe the German line at first, *later* he could use his influence as head-of-state to turn events to his country's advantage. Even communist historians admit the rationale and soundness of this approach.⁸

As Horthy arrived in the Royal Palace of Buda, he was met by German guards. It was only now that it really registered in the old man's mind that Hungary had come under German occupation. Kállay had fled to the Turkish Embassy. Many of his associates had been arrested by the Gestapo, while his friends and acquaintances were hiding in the country. Colonel Kádár describes the spirit of Hungary after March 19th in his unpublished memoirs:

Unfortunately I cannot say that in Budapest there was general bitterness or even indignation. Rather, a kind of submissiveness had taken over the city. The people blamed Kállay who, according to them, had gone too far. If someone's arrest became known, people said there must have been a reason for it. At General Staff Headquarters retired officers sought their reinstatement in active service; others demanded their overdue promotions saying that they had been passed over because of their rightist outlook. The right-radicals were celebrating . . . As far as the general public was concerned, there was no reaction worthy of mention. In the offices and factories the work continued as if nothing had happened . . . Leftist groups went underground.⁹

Kádár (who was arrested several days later by the Gestapo because of his English connections) spent the next couple of days trying to reach Miklós Horthy Jr. (the official leader of the "Bureau of Defection"). On March 22, in the midst of a downpour, he sought admission at the gate of the Royal Palace. "In the courtyard, huddled to the wall, German soldiers stood in raincoats with their sub-machine-guns. All exits were closed. Near the gates guards stood with machine-guns. The young Horthy informed me that his father had been confronted by a German ultimatum. If no government was appointed by 6 p.m., the Germans would take power themselves. And then he said that preparations had been taken for resistance—with a handful of guards? Not one of the units of the Honvéd knew about these preparations . . ."10

That same evening Horthy consented to the appointment of the cabinet of Sztójay.¹¹ Veessenmayer must have been satisfied. At least this is what his telegram to Ribbentrop suggests. Ribbentrop took the message to the *Führer* who was in conference with Marshal Antonescu. Hitler explained to the Rumanian leader, who must have been elated with joy, that Hungary had lost his trust forever, and that he would tighten the regime of occupation if necessary. As far as Transylvania was concerned, he could say that for him the Vienna Award of 1940 had lost its validity. Through her double dealing, Hungary had lost her right to Northern Transylvania. But the tense political situation in the Danube Valley required that for some time this decision be kept secret. Common interest required that there should not be partizan resistance in Hungary. Every division that can be diverted from Hungary, will strengthen the Eastern Front!¹²

Contrary to the wishes of Regent Horthy, Sztójay's cabinet became a coalition. Veessenmayer had desired it so. Every right-wing group was represented in it except the Arrow Cross Party of which Hitler's plenipotentiary thought very little. And 112 hours after the occupation, Horthy had to agree to a joint Hungarian-German press release, according to which the *Wehrmacht* had entered Hungary as a result of a "mutual agreement."

The following weeks were spent in the country's "total mobiliza-

tion" for war on the German model. The establishment of a full Hungarian army was completed, and it was sent to the front beyond the Carpathians. Rationing of food and consumer goods was introduced and work discipline was tightened especially in munitions factories. Legislation was passed dissolving all leftist and liberal parties and associations. Their press organs and assets were confiscated. The Gestapo, along with the suddenly reorganized Hungarian secret police, began hunting down people whose names appeared on "political black lists." The radical solution of the "Jewish question" became one of the main tasks of the new government. The wearing of the yellow star was enforced, and the collection of Jews in "ghettos" started. Next came the deportation from Hungary of the Jews living outside the capital. From the Royal Palace Horthy viewed these developments with resignation. He felt a prisoner in his own residence. Right before his eyes his country, until then an oasis in wartorn Europe, became a supply base for the *Wehrmacht*. He had been informed of the deportations from several sources. But he, like his immediate associates, were under the illusion that the Jews were being deported "only" to work in Germany where there were great shortages of labour. "We at that time had never heard of the extermination camps: how could we even think that such things existed?"¹³

During mid-May, however, reports concerning the treatment of the Jews by the gendarmerie and their fate in German concentration camps, became more frequent. The Hungarian churches protested. The papal nuncio to Hungary appealed to Horthy in a note. In June the Jewish Council also succeeded in reaching the Regent: through the late István Horthy's widow and through Miklós Horthy Jr. they let Horthy know about the terrible fate that awaited Hungarians of the Jewish faith abroad.¹⁴ Horthy still did not want to believe that a cultured nation like the German could be capable of such barbarities as the senseless slaughter of defenceless persons. But when the so-called "Auschwitz record book" reached his hands, Horthy decided to act. In his note of early June to Sztójay, he requested "the curbing of the excesses in the implementation of the measures designed for the solution of the Jewish question" and stated:

I have not had the power to veto any measures which had been taken by the Germans or by the government on German wishes. Although I have never been told of these measures in advance, and have not kept informed on many of them at all, recently it has been brought to my attention that in this regard often more is done here than in Germany, and in such brutal and even inhuman manner that has no parallel in the measures taken by the Germans.¹⁵

Next, Horthy argued for the exemption of certain Jews on grounds of their profession or religious beliefs and demanded that the

During early June, Horthy thought of replacing the Sztójay government with Géza Lakatos and other loyal men through a *coup d'état*. But the General excused himself on various grounds and refused to accept the task assigned to him. This incident should have served as a warning to Horthy that he may not be able to co-operate fully with Lakatos. During the next few weeks Horthy was conspiring to bring home the Hungarian units from the Front. In this matter he again approached Hitler. At the same time he summoned General János Vörös, the Chief-of-Staff, and put the question to him squarely: if Hitler refuses to consent to the withdrawal of the Gestapo and the SS from Hungary, would the Hungarian Army be ready and able to confront the Germans in a military showdown? General Vörös described his answer in his personal diaries:

I reported that our strength was inadequate for an armed confrontation with the Germans. In spite of their many difficulties on the fronts, the Germans still had enough strength, especially heavy armour, to crush any resistance here. In this case the country would look as it did after the Mongol invasion. Such a move would cause the weakening of the Carpathian front and would free the road for a Soviet invasion of the Danube Valley. This would mean our certain destruction. I emphatically asked his Highness not to entertain the idea of such a military solution under the present circumstances . . . ²⁰

On July 17th Horthy received the Minister of Defence, Lajos Csataj and General Vörös. The subject was again the question of military action against the Germans. Vörös once again opposed the idea. "The Eastern Front would collapse, the Soviet troops would pour in, from the south Tito's partizans would come; the whole country would become a battlefield. The best service we can do for the civilized West is to resist the advance of Bolshevism with our blood . . ." ²¹ And when Horthy declared that he would not wait any longer for Hitler's reply and at the end of the month he would appoint a new government without consulting Berlin, Vörös, instead of supporting him, responded negatively. ²² That same day, moreover, the Chief-of-Staff revealed the contents of the interview to his deputy and to Colonel Lajos Nádas, the Chief of Defence Operations, who (as it became known later) was a secret member of the Arrow Cross Party and was Szálasi's adviser on military matters.

On the 22nd of June the Soviet Army launched an attack on a wide front north of the Carpathians. As a result of the Russian's success, the 1st Hungarian Army was split in two. The German commander of the North Ukraine Army Group ordered General Károly Beregfy to hand his command over the Hungarian units north of the Carpathians to the 1st German Panzer Army for the duration of the defence of Lemberg (Lvov). Beregfy delayed with the execution of this order. The Germans took the matter to Horthy. The Regent got

two officials in charge of deportations László Endre and László Baky, be dismissed from the government. By the time these lines had reached Premier Sztójay, the fate of the Hungarian Jewry had been sealed. From a report of Veessenmayer we know that to the end of June, 437, 402 Magyar Jews had been deported from the country.¹⁶

As a result of Horthy's emphatic intervention, the Jews of Budapest, some 200,000 people, were saved from deportation. But Horthy had done even more. When, on July 2nd, on the orders of Baky, 1,500 gendarmes arrived in the capital and some three to four thousand took up positions in its environs in order to start the deportations there, the Regent, acting through the liberal wing of the resistance movement, had some Honvéd units put on alert to forestall the plan.¹⁷ Albeit Horthy was never a friend of the Jews, his anti-semitism stood far removed from that of Hitler. The Regent can be blamed for much, with or without good reason, but he cannot be accused of inhumanity. His stand on the question of the Hungarian Jewry was a belated one, but he stuck to it during the following months and made no concessions. He emphatically rejected all attempts by the Sztójay government aimed at elevating its anti-Jewish measures to laws. This had led to the resignation of Deputy-Premier Jenő Rácz who left office in protest over the Regent's veto. Vessenmayer was forced to report to Berlin at the end of June: ". . . nothing has happened in connection with the Jewish question. The halt [in deportations] is still in effect on the Regent's orders. He is completely unbending on this issue."¹⁸

In May Horthy had received Szálasi, on the Arrow Cross leader's repeated requests. He never expected much of the man who saluted him with the words "Heil Horthy" [Kitartás Éljen Horthy!], but formed the worst opinion of him after a ninety minute interview. Later, before his confidants, Horthy called Szálasi muddleheaded and a political fanatic. By this time Horthy had begun to formulate a plan for the regaining of control over the direction of the country's affairs. Following the advice of Count István Bethlen, he wished to dismiss the Sztójay government at the first opportunity and replace it with a cabinet of military men. For his next premier, Horthy decided on General Géza Lakatos who had just returned from the Front in possession of a German Iron Cross; as such he was above suspicion in Hitler's eyes. Early in June, before D-day, Horthy wrote a letter to Hitler. He described developments in Hungary and asked for an end to the occupation. In rather frank and undiplomatic language Horthy outlined his country's situation and even complained about the occupation. "In contravention of the orders of their superiors, the Gestapo and the SS treat Hungary as an enemy country. I refrain from detailing what has gone on here and what is still going on . . ."¹⁹ Horthy's letter remained unanswered.

through to Beregfy on the telephone. "The German Minister had just left my office," he said. "He registered his protest according to which you are not executing the orders of the German command. You know that the units on the front are subordinate to the Germans and their orders have to be carried out. But do you remember the verbal instruction I gave you the last time we took leave of each other? Do you recall what I told you when you took command of the army?" Beregfy replied with a yes. And when the call was ended, the General wiped his perspiring forehead, stared in front of him for a moment and turned to the two other staff officers present in the room:

Although I should not, I must tell you what his Excellency had told me when we last took leave of each other. He had advised me that according to the agreement with the Germans he had no say in the deployment of Hungarian units on the front. But, if the Germans attempt to take away as much as one single division from the Carpathian zone, the agreement becomes void. Hungarian units can be deployed only in the Carpathian sector and can withdraw only in the direction of the country's boundaries!²³

On the 31st of July General Beregfy was replaced. The new commander of the 1st Hungarian army, which by this time was moving towards the Carpathians, became Béla Miklós, the former director of Horthy's Military Bureau. It was at this time that the still existing and, indeed, very active "Bureau of Defection" succeeded in finding someone with contacts in Soviet Russia. He was, by his own confession, a former landowner from Upper Hungary who had fought in the Russian Civil War on the side of the Reds. He claimed to know the Soviet leaders and said that he had been a friend of General Voroshilov.²⁴ In the Royal Palace of Buda there was a sigh of relief: the contact man had been found! The reason for this feeling of satisfaction in Budapest was the fact that the Regent, while making the preparations for the changeover in Hungary, was also anxious to make the necessary foreign policy moves. In Switzerland, György Bakách-Bessenyei (Hungarian Minister in Bern until March 19th 1944) began discussions with Allen Dulles and the British. What he was aiming for was a joint Anglo-American occupation of Hungary. But the Red Army could not be neglected either. Strange as it may seem, however, the Hungarians had no contacts whatever with the Soviets. In the neutral countries, Hungary's representatives had resigned in March to protest the German occupation. They were replaced mostly by pro-German *chargés*. And in Switzerland, where the loyal Bakách-Bessenyei was operating, there were no Soviet diplomats.

Early in September Rosemberg, the "former landowner" and the newly found contact man, was taken by special limousine to Huszt, the headquarters of the 1st Hungarian Army. But there he had a

change of heart. "He brought up all kinds of excuses, including his advanced age, and said that he was afraid to go on the mission" wrote the officer who had accompanied Rosemberg on a subsequent car trip to Budapest.²⁵ Soon thereafter, on the initiative of the Bureau of Defection and a few leaders of the resistance movement, attempts were made to establish contacts with the Soviets. But none of the Hungarian agents had official accreditation, and Moscow did not react to the feelers. In fact, the Soviet leaders took the mission of Baron Ede Aczél almost as an insult: how could Horthy entrust the negotiation of an armistice to an ensign?

The month of August had brought many important, in fact, fateful developments both in the realm of the internal and that of external affairs. Horthy received representatives of the liberal resistance movement who came to him with a completed government list. Either Zoltán Tildy, the leader of the Smallholder Party, or (temporarily) István Bethlen must become the new premier. There must be a coalition government in which all the democratic parties and even the communists had representation. Horthy announced that he had decided to break with the Germans for good. At the first opportunity he would appoint a military caretaker government. This would do what he wanted it to do because he would "retain control over the forces."²⁶

On the 23rd of August King Michael of Rumania had the pro-German government of Antonescu removed. The Marshal himself was arrested in the Royal Palace. The new government, headed by General Sanatescu, appealed for and obtained an immediate armistice with the Allies. Responding to a Royal proclamation, the Rumanian Army opened the front before the Soviets. In his rage, Hitler had Bucharest bombed. What this had achieved was that the Rumanians declared war on their former allies and began hostilities against them. Horthy used these dislocations in the political and military affairs of southeastern Europe to make his move. While assuring Veesenmayer of Hungary's continued loyalty and promising to "send all available units" to the front to compensate for the Rumanian perfidy, Horthy sent for Lakatos and on the 25th forced Sztójay to submit his resignation. Still, the formation of the new government took four days. Veesenmayer refused to agree to the appointment of the Lakatos government unless two reliable pro-Germans (Béla Jurcsek and Lajos Reményi-Schneller) were included in it.

The government of Géza Lakatos was the government of "defection." At least, this was the task assigned to the General by the Regent. Although we have no reason to doubt Lakatos' honesty and his loyalty to the Regent, events proved that the Premier was more of a hindrance than an asset to Horthy's subsequent plans. He could not

understand that the extraordinary times and circumstances had placed special demands on him and his country. He wanted to discharge the responsibilities of his high office in strict observance of constitutional formulas as if it had been peace time. One must agree with Lieutenant-General Béla Aggteleky, presently of the city of Genf, who, after many years of research, has come to the conclusion that the appointment of Lakatos as Premier was a grave mistake which predetermined the outcome of the events of October 15th.

Immediately following his appointment, Lakatos was confronted by several important decisions. As a result of Rumania's defection, the Transylvanian question again became the central issue of Hungarian politics. Extreme nationalists and even some high-ranking officers were calling for the invasion of southern Transylvania: here was the opportunity to regain the rest of Transylvania from the "perfidious Rumanians." The strategic situation also demanded that Hungarian or German forces occupy the passes of south and eastern Transylvania and thereby prevent the Red Army from crossing the Carpathians. But neither Hungarian nor German troops could be spared for this purpose. And Hitler was still hoping to establish a Rumanian "counter-government" with whose aid he could dislodge the "king and his clique" in Bucharest. If he consented to a Hungarian occupation of southern Transylvania, however, no Rumanian politician would cooperate with him. In Budapest, the Council of State also dealt with the question of southern Transylvania. By that time Horthy had in his hand a telegram from Bakách-Bessenyei warning against any anti-Rumanian moves: after all, Rumania had joined the Allies and it would be a grave mistake to get involved in a war with the Sanatescu government.²⁷ The question of the uprising in Slovakia was also discussed. This anti-Nazi rising had broken out on the 29th of August. The Germans had asked for Hungarian troops to help to quell it, but the Lakatos government refused the request on various grounds.²⁸ By doing so it made a significant contribution to the initial success of the uprising.

On the 31st of August the new Rumanian government officially requested Budapest to evacuate Northern Transylvania which had been awarded to Hungary "illegally through the Diktat of Vienna."²⁹ Hungary was given 48 hours to accept the ultimatum. Even before this time was up, military operations were started by Rumania. In response to this an attack was launched by the Honvéd in the Kolozsvár-Torda sector.³⁰ After some successes the Hungarian offensive was halted; moreover, the Rumanians soon mounted a counter-offensive with the aid of Soviet units which in the meantime had crossed the Carpathians. Within two weeks the Soviet-Rumanian forces reached and in some places even crossed the pre-1940 border of Hungary.

The whole month of September was spent in frantic discussions. Horthy wanted to return to the basic foreign policy line of the Kállay government and call for an English-American occupation of Hungary—even if only with a token force of one or two divisions of paratroopers. He sent General Náday to Allied headquarters in Caserta, Italy, for negotiations. Through Colonel-General Gustáv Henyey, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, he tried to attain his aim in the secret discussions with Allied representatives in Bern. All this was done in spite of the fact that Bakách-Bessenyei had warned in a telegram already at the end of August: “. . . in order to avoid any misunderstanding, it must be made clear that discussions cannot be limited to the English and the Americans; every attempt at the exclusion of the Russians from them could lead to disaster.”³¹ And when Horthy continued to adhere to the idea of an “Anglo-American” solution, the message arrived from Bern on the 21st of September. “Nothing,” began the telegram in a plain and clear language, “but an unconditional surrender can be entertained. It is hopeless to imagine that the English and the Americans will sacrifice their own troops so as to save us who have persevered against them to the very end, from the Russians and the other, smaller allied powers. The only course of action left to us is to offer an unconditional armistice and thereby prevent the further waste of Hungarian blood!”³²

Among Horthy’s advisers perhaps the only realistic statesman was Count Bethlen.³³ He had realized early in September that for an armistice Hungary had to turn to the Russians and could not turn to anyone else. Bethlen had reached this conclusion in spite of the fact that the wildest rumours were reaching the Palace in these days. “Well-informed members of the resistance movement” on the fifth of September claimed to have learned from the Swedish Embassy that an Anglo-American force was to appear on the Drava River within five days. Indeed, in mid-September some English units landed on the islands of the Dalmatian coast. In the Royal Palace in Budapest this was taken as the beginning of the long awaited invasion of the Balkans by the Western Powers.

In the meantime there were talks and more talks. Horthy received General Guderian and, on several occasions, Ambassador Veesenmayer. He held discussions with the more prominent figures of the resistance movement and, on the 14th, even Samu Stern, the President of the Jewish Council, paid a visit to the Palace. From the beginning of the month, Horthy was stressing the need for a break with the Germans and the ending of Hungary’s involvement in the war at “any price.” On the 7th there was a meeting of the Council of State presided over by Horthy himself. The whole cabinet was there as well as the Chief-of-Staff and the heads of the Regent’s Military Bureau and

Bureau of State. At this meeting Horthy "officially" announced his plan. Lakatos immediately asked to speak and declared that without the consent of Parliament he, as Premier, would not undertake the task. The Regent replied that "Parliament no longer reflected the will of the nation because many members were under arrest, others were hiding and the rest were intimidated. He did not agree with the Premier's views. He concluded the debate by the sentence: I stand accountable before the nation and history!"³⁴

In his recollections, written on 28 October 1944 in Tihany, Lakatos described the Regent's plans in the following way:

The difference of opinion between His Excellency the Regent and the union government had become manifest already during the first weeks . . . He was guided by the highest of ideals when he repeatedly voiced the view that a way had to be found to approach the Allies lest the end of the war would find us on the side of vanquished Germany. This was in essence his basic aim. It must be added that through this policy he wanted to prevent useless loss of blood and the slaughter of Hungarian youths. He was confident that if the Russians flooded the country not as conquerors but as a force occupying a country which had concluded an armistice, the extermination of the educated, the mass deportations and material destruction would take place on a reduced scale . . .³⁵

On the 11th of September, at a meeting of Horthy's "secret advisers" the decision was reached: Hungary had to turn to the Soviet Union for an armistice. Gradually Horthy realized that in this manner he could not count on the support of the Lakatos government. But that government could not be replaced. "[Horthy] was determined to carry out his plan . . ." wrote Lieutenant-General Antal Vattay, the Regent's aide-de-camp, in his unpublished memoirs, "even though he was left to himself; there was no other solution for him: he had to leave the government out and act alone!" Vattay remarks that "At the time the Regent was 77 years old but despite this he undertook the difficult step, against his government's wishes. Everyone in close contact with him could notice that the years and the many family tragedies did not pass him by without leaving their marks. His will and vitality was not the same any more, the signs of advanced age were showing, but in spite of his many years he persevered in his decision even though his spirit had been strongly shaken by the behaviour of his government."³⁶

During the next few weeks the delegation which was to be sent to the Soviet government was selected, while the tireless Lieutenant-General Bakay reinforced the security forces of Budapest and began preparations for the expected developments. Through General Újzászy, and with the aid of Imre Kovács, contact was made with the leaders of the illegal Communist Party, László Rajk who promised to arm the workers of Budapest if the party could get weapons from the

army.³⁷ (Rajk was under false illusions: his party had a "membership" of 80 to 100 men. The workers followed either Szálasi or Demény and Weissshaus, the leaders of the Communist Party's Trotskyist faction.) Strangely enough, the Regent trusted Chief-of-Staff Vörös and even on the 15th of October, he was convinced that his orders would be obeyed by the Honvéd down to the last man. Only Colonel-General József Heszlényi, the pro-Nazi commander of the 3rd Army, was slated for dismissal. General Ferenc Farkas, the commander of the Fourth Army Corps, was to take over the 3rd Army. The Commanders of the other two armies, Béla Miklós and Lajos Veress, were dedicated followers of the Regent. When they advised Horthy to issue the armistice proclamation from the headquarters of the 1st Army in the Carpathians, the old gentleman indignantly rejected the suggestion: in these stormy days how could he leave the ship's bridge that the Palace represented?

The well-known events of the 15th of October quickly foiled the plan which had taken Horthy many months to prepare. The reason for this is easy to establish from the distance of three decades: the pro-Nazi elements within the government and the high command were informed about every move made by the Regent. They alerted the Germans who, with Veessenmayer at the helm, could take immediate counter-measures. In fact, the Germans even had an advantage: they had plenty of time to prepare Szálasi's *coup d'état*. In the critical hour Horthy found himself alone. The Germans had made sure that his most loyal followers: Generals Szilárd Bakay, Kálmán Hárty, Lajos Veress and Béla Aggteleky, were not at their assigned posts. Moreover, by kidnapping Miklos Horthy Jr., the Germans assumed the initiative. The population of the capital and the country watched the unfolding of events in the Royal Palace with apathy, as if their fate was not affected by the struggle. The members of the resistance movement, liberals or communists, did not stir. Only in three places in Budapest was there armed resistance against the Germans and their Arrow Cross allies: in the Royal Palace, where General Lázár and the palace guards fought a besieging force under SS-Colonel Skorzenyi, on Népszínház Street where Jewish conscript workers fired on a column of Arrow Cross men, and in the Andrásy Armories where officers with Arrow Cross sympathies shot Colonel István Latorczay as he tried to rally the soldiers to the defence of the Palace. On the front, the units were silent. János Vörös went into hiding so that while matters were being decided he did not have to give orders. Local commands seeking directives were instructed by Colonel Lajos Nádás in accordance with Szálasi's wishes.

The last act of the tragedy that had taken place in the Palace, started on the 16th. From Lakatos down almost to the last man, all

urged Horthy to reach a compromise with the Germans: to withdraw his proclamation of the previous day and resign. The tension of the past 24 hours had broken Horthy. In return for the life of his one remaining son (whose safety Veesenmayer swore to guarantee) the Regent signed the papers placed before him including the appointment of Szálasi as Premier.

No, Horthy did not become a General Moscardo as the Palace of Buda did not become the Alkazar of Toledo. To his credit, Horthy in the last hour had tried to save his country from destruction by the German and Russian armies. In the interest of his nation he was willing even to come to terms with the Soviets, although (as Imre Kovács puts it in one of his studies) "what communism represented and practiced went against his upbringing, heritage, ideals and entire past . . ." In connection with the "defection," Horthy himself had committed blunders: he made a poor choice of associates, trusted blindly in the loyalty of the army and refused to attack his former ally, the *Wehrmacht*, in the back. Furthermore, to the very end he honoured the promise he had given to Hitler that if Hungary ended the war against the Allies, he would inform Berlin in advance.

In the evening of the 16th, the Germans took ex-Regent Horthy and his family to Kelenföld station where a train was waiting for them. On Hitler's orders, they were to be taken for detention to Hirschberg near Weilheim in Barvaria. Almost twenty-five years earlier Horthy had arrived at Kelenföld station to start his march into the "evil city" to restore order. The era associated with his name was born then in blood and disgrace. Now, in 1944, that era expired in blood and disgrace despite Horthy's best intentions.

NOTES

1. Miklós Horthy's letter to Adolf Hitler in the matter of the withdrawal of the Hungarian divisions on the front to the Carpathian line of defence. Miklós Szinai and László Szücs (eds.), *Horthy Miklós titkos iratai* [The confidential papers of Miklós Horthy] (Budapest: Kossuth Könyvkiadó, 1962), p. 409.
2. For details see: Nicholas Kállay, *Hungarian Premier: A Personal Account of a Nation's Struggle in the Second World War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1954).
3. Sándor Radó, *Dóra Jelenti* [Dóra reports] (Budapest: Kossuth Könyvkiadó, 1971), p. 269. Radó, a colonel in the Red Army, was the chief of Soviet intelligence operations in Switzerland during World War II. At the end of February, 1943 the Hungarian Ministry of External Affairs contacted Radó in Bern, requesting that he mediate between the Soviet Union and Hungary concerning a peace-pact. In March of 1943 Radó got a negative answer from Moscow. In his recollections he writes: "This move had no chance of ascertaining the attitude of the Soviet Union toward a compromise peace!"
4. Gyula Kádár, "Emlékezés az ország német megszállására: 1944 március 19" [Memories of the country's occupation: 19 March 1944] *Hadtörténelmi*

- Közlemények [Military History Communications] 1974 no. 1, p. 78.
5. Andreas Hillgruber (ed.), *Staatsmänner und Diplomaten bei Hitler. Vertrauliche Aufzeichnungen über Unterredungen mit Vertretern des Auslandes, Zweiter Teil: 1942-1944* (Frankfurt am Mai: Verlag Bernard & Graefe, 1970) p. 245.
 6. For details see: Pál Pritz, "A kieli találkozó" [The Kiel meeting], *Századok* [Centuries] 1974 no. 3, pp. 646-679.
 7. *A tízhónapos tragédia. 1944 március 19 - 1945 január 20* [The ten-month-long tragedy: 19 March 1944 to 20 January 1945] First and second part. (Budapest, 1945), p. 47.
 8. György Ránki, *1944 március 19* [19 March 1944] (Budapest: Kossuth Könyvkiadó, 1968).
 9. Kádár, *op. cit.*, p. 90.
 10. *Ibid.*
 11. Döme Sztójay, Hungarian Minister to Berlin, 1936-44; Hungary's Premier from March to August of 1944.
 12. Hillgruber, *op. cit.*, p. 392.
 13. Information from a source very close to the Horthy family.
 14. For further details see: Ernő Mucsi, *Hogyan történt? Adatok és okmányok a magyar zsidóság tragédiájához* [How did it happen? Facts and documents on the tragedy of the Hungarian Jewry] (Budapest: Renaissance Kiadás, 1947), especially chapters 5 and 6.
 15. Miklós Horthy's memorandum to Döme Sztójay in the matter of the moderation of the excesses of the government measures taken for the "solution" of the Jewish question, also in the matter of the dismissal of László Baky and László Endre. Szinai and Szücs, *op. cit.*, pp. 450-53.
 16. Veessenmayer's telegram to the German Foreign Office, 11 July 1944, in György Ránki *et al.* (eds.) *A Wilhelmstrasse és Magyarország. Német diplomáciai iratok Magyarországról 1933-1944* [The Wilhelmstrasse and Hungary. German diplomatic documents on Hungary, 1933-1944] (Budapest: Kossuth Könyvkiadó, 1968), p. 881.
 17. See the manuscript of Ferenc Koszorus, "Az első erőszakos náci hatalom átvételi kísérlet meghiúsítása Budapesten 1944 júliusában" [The defeat of the first Nazi attempt to take power in Budapest, July, 1944], in the author's possession. Colonel Koszorus was the commander of the armored division which, on Horthy's order, was dispatched in the direction of Budapest in order to prevent by force a possible coup by the gendarmerie.
 18. Veessenmayer's telegram to Ribbentrop, 21 July 1944, in Ránki, *et al.*, *op. cit.*, p. 455.
 20. Peter Gosztony (editor and translator), "Das private Kriegstagebuch des Chefs des ungarischen Generalstabes vom Jahre 1944," *Wehrwissenschaftliche Rundschau* 1970 No. 12, p. 706.
 21. *Ibid.*, p. 708.
 22. *Ibid.*
 23. Béla Király to Peter Gosztony. In 1944 Király served with the Fourth Hungarian Army Corps as a captain of the General Staff. He had been present during Beregfy's telephone conversation.
 24. The letter of Lieutenant-Colonel Lajos Csukássy-Gartner to the author, 25 February 1969. Csukássy-Gartner was Béla Miklós' personal aide in 1944. According to other sources, Rosenberg claimed to have made the acquaintance of Voroshilov in the 1930's when he had sold horses to the Soviets.
 25. The letter of Csukássy-Gartner, *cit.*
 26. For details see István Pintér, *Magyar antifaszizmus és ellenállás* [Hungarian anti-fascism and resistance] (Budapest: Kossuth Könyvkiadó, 1975) pp. 346ff. See also the unpublished recollections of Dr. Pál Jaczkó dealing with the liberal resistance movement of 1944 (MS in the author's possession).
 27. János Csima (ed.), "A horthista diplomácia előzetes fegyverszüneti tárgyalásai Bernben 1944 augusztusának végén és szeptember havában. Táviratok."

- [The preliminary armistice negotiations of horthyite diplomacy in Bern at the end of August and in September of 1944. Telegrams], *Hadtörténelmi Közlemények* [Military History Communications] 1965 No. 4, p. 732.
28. The manuscript of István Bárczy de Bárcziháza on the 1941-44 period, p. 97. Copy in the author's possession. (From 1928 to 1944 Bárczy was the *chef de protocole* of the Premier's office as well as the keeper of the minutes of the Ministerial Council.)
 29. V. Anescu *et al.* (eds.), *Rumania in razboiul antihitlerist 23 august 1944 - 9 mai 1945* [Rumania in the war against Hitler 23 August 1944 to 9 May 1945] (Bucharest: Editura Militara, 1966) Also: Daniel Csatári, *Forgószélben. A magyar-román viszony, 1940-1945* [In the whirlwind: Hungarian-Rumanian relations, 1940-1945] (Budapest: Akadémiai Könyvkiadó, 1968).
 30. For details see Lajos Veress, *Magyarország honvédelme a II. világháboru előtt es alatt, 1920-1945* [Hungary's defence before and during World War II, 1920-1945] (Munich: Nemzetőr, 1973), Vol. III. pp. 9-68. During the autumn of 1944, General Veress was the commander of the Transylvanian (Second) Hungarian Army.
 31. Csima, *op. cit.*, p. 732.
 32. *Ibid.*, p. 734.
 33. Count István Bethlen, from 1921 to 1931 Hungary's Premier during the Second World War one of Horthy's pro-English advisers.
 34. Bárczy, *op. cit.*, p. 118.
 35. Peter Gosztony (ed.), "Lakatos Géza beszámolója a miniszterelnöki tevékenységéről" [Géza Lakatos' account of his activities as Premier] *Új Látóhatár* [New Horizon], 1970, No. 5. p. 444.
 36. The recollections of Lieutenant-General Antal Vattay; a manuscript written in 1965. Copy in the possession of the author.
 37. For details see Imre Kovács, *In Schatten der Sowjets* (Zürich: Thomas Verlag, 1948), pp. 50-54.
 38. János Kádár, "A Kommunista Magyarországi Pártja felosztása körülményeinek és a Békepárt munkájának néhány kérdéséről, 1943 június - 1944 szeptember" [Concerning the circumstances of the dissolution of the Hungarian Communist Party and the work of the Peace Party, June 1943 to September 1944] *Párttörténelmi Közlemények* [Party History Communications] 1956, No. 3, p. 20.
 39. Imre Kovács, "Kiugrási kísérletek a második világháboruban" [Attempts at separate peace during the Second World War] *Új Látóhatár*, 1963, No. 3, p. 266.

Book Reviews

Das Völkerwanderungszeitliche Graberfeld von Környe. By Ágnes Salamon and István Erdélyi. (Studia Archaeologica, V.) Budapest: Akademiai Kiado, 1971. 184 pp., 31 fig. 14 plates, \$16.00.

This book, which was extremely well received by Eastern and Western European scholars, has to my knowledge not yet been reviewed in an American periodical. Among Eastern European scholars, Russians, Czechs, Rumanians, and Hungarians wrote extremely favorable critiques. In the West, German, Swiss, and Austrian experts have also found the work to be trailblazing, opening up a new direction in the research on the Great Migration period after the collapse of the Western Roman Empire. The book presents documentation which will require a revision of the currently accepted chronology of the appearance of the early Avars in the Carpathian Basin.

The material treated came from 152 graves near the town of Környe. It is worthy of note that about 50% of the bone material discovered was suitable for anthropological examination. The biochemical examination of the skeleton findings was made by I. Lengyel; the morphological and general anthropological analysis, by T. Toth. The book is written in German with the exception of the analysis by Toth, which appears in English.

Toth's anthropological analysis also suggests a possible need for correcting the chronology of the appearance of the Avars in the Danubian area. Toth believes that the predominance of the Proto-Europoid and Mediterranean characteristics of the Avars is possibly connected with an autochthonous group of the Roman period both in the Central Danubian Basin and in the Transdanubian area. All the foregoing shows strong analogies to the early Avaric period. It is noticeable that many horse burials were discovered at Környe. The orientations of certain group graves indicate a possible family burial system. In addition to the assembled wooden coffins, many coffins were carved out of tree trunks.

In the third part of the book the authors describe all their findings in great detail. The presentation of the findings was made by the Computer Code System which Salamon established for Avaric remains and published in 1966.