

The Hungarian General Staff and Diplomacy, 1939-1941

N. F. Dreisziger

The subject of the role of the Hungarian General Staff in the formation of Hungarian diplomatic efforts on the eve of World War II has been at once neglected and abused. It can be regarded as "neglected" in that, despite the mass of literature dealing with Hungarian foreign policy before and during the War, only a handful of historians focus on this question and treat it in a scholarly manner; and as "abused" in that usually it has been tied to the highly politicized issue of war-guilt, a question which defies impartial analysis. There is no need here to review the historiography of the broader problem of Hungary's involvement in the Second World War; however, a few words should be said about literature that centres on the role of the Hungarian General Staff in foreign policy. In Hungary the theme has been treated by a number of scholars who, in general, condemn the "Horthyite military" for aspiring to political supremacy in Hungary and for outdoing the country's civilian leaders — often without the knowledge or prior sanction of the latter — in the appeasement of the Germans.¹ Opinions on this subject are not appreciably different in North America. The earlier works of Professor C. A. Macartney notwithstanding, it is the impression of recent North American students of pre-war and war-time Hungarian history that the military, in particular the General Staff, made a conscious effort to determine the direction of the country's foreign policy and that it was, by and large, successful in this effort.²

There are no grounds for quarrel with many of the observations of Hungary's best scholars, and even less for disagreement with the overall conclusions of recent western studies. Still, there is need for a general reassessment of some aspects of this question, for in many ways the impression created by Hungarian and Western works is somewhat misleading. A careful study of the evidence reveals that the hold Hungary's soldiers attained over their country's external policies was rather precarious, and that effective meddling by the military in the conduct of foreign policy was not a permanent feature of Hungarian war-time

politics after 1939. Nevertheless, the influence exercised by the General Staff in foreign policy matters was at times extensive, causing much difficulty and embarrassment for the country's civilian leaders. It is an unfortunate fact of Hungarian history that the high point of the military's influence was reached in 1939–1941, a period in which Hungary's leaders were confronted by several fateful decisions, including the question of participation in the War.

One reason for selecting this particular period as the focal point of this essay is the fact that 1939–1941 represents the most crucial years of the Hungarian historical development during the Horthy Era. Another is that in recent years both the preceding period and that which followed have received detailed treatment by scholars from Western countries.³ In dealing with the events of this period, we shall try to avoid involvement in the controversial issue of war-guilt, hoping that the present study will help to explain developments rather than fix blame on certain groups or individuals. Yet, because of the very nature of the topic, it seems well-nigh impossible not to express opinions as to the question of responsibility for Hungary's drifting into the War. Besides, it is hoped that this study will shed light on a much larger historical question, the problem of some East European governments' weakened determination, or even virtual inability, owing to friction between civilian authorities and military commands, to resist German diplomatic pressure.

The nature and aims of Hungarian diplomacy during the opening phases of the Second World War cannot be well understood without a reference to the immediate post-World War I era, the formative years of interwar Hungarian policies and leadership. Most historians agree that this was a period of vast change in Hungary. But while war, defeat, revolution, foreign intervention and civil war caused severe dislocation in many areas of national life, Hungary's officer corps survived this time of troubles with surprising cohesion. True, the size of the country's military establishment was drastically curtailed by the peace treaty, but this fact had little effect on the officer class' *esprit de corps*. On the contrary, the real and alleged injustices that the country had suffered at the hands of peacemakers and left-wing revolutionaries, only inflamed the officers' nationalism and desire for revenge.

This feeling of outrage against the peacemakers who had carved up historic Hungary and the nation's "internal enemies" who had taken the country down the slope of revolution, was not confined to the officer corps. It was also felt by the country's civilian elite. It is not surprising under the circumstances that the foremost national aim of Hungary in the interwar period became the reversal of the misfortunes that befell the

country in 1919 and 1920, and the revision of the admittedly draconic provisions of the Treaty of Trianon emerged as the prime objective of its government. In this respect there was no fundamental disagreement between the country's civilian leaders and officer corps. Differences arose only in regard to the question of when and how to attain these aims.

In the quarter century from the end of the First World War to the end of the Second, the Royal Hungarian Army possessed an influence in public affairs out of proportion with its size. The reasons for this were numerous. It was the Hungarian Army, more than its Austrian counterpart, which appeared to have been the descendant of the imperial forces of Austria-Hungary. Because of the nature of the regime which was set up in Hungary after the revolutionary experiments of 1918-1919, high-ranking officers of the former Habsburg Imperial forces were allowed the choice of continuing their careers in Hungary. As a result, that country "inherited" several hundred of the late Emperor Francis Joseph's colonels and generals, many of whom were German-speaking. The second reason for the Hungarian Army's high profile was the fact that in the post-1919 era, rightly or wrongly, the military were looked upon as the country's "saviours" from the Bolsheviks and other revolutionaries. The Army were also seen by many Hungarians as the most likely tool for breaking the chains that their country had been put into by the peace-makers. Moreover, the interwar head-of-state, the Regent Miklós Horthy, was himself a member of the military profession, although as a naval officer he did not always see eye-to-eye with the army officers and did not always command their respect and devotion. More important than Horthy's military background was the fact that in 1932 Gyula Gömbös, an army officer, became Premier. Gömbös admired the Italian patterns of politics and, during his term in office, promoted like-minded officers to high positions in the *honvédség** and the civil service. Gömbös's programme was cut short by his death in 1936 and was not continued under his successors.

The problem of the military's influence on foreign policy was not a serious issue until the second half of the 1930s. The country's military and its civilian government concurred on the question of treaty revision and, until 1937 or 1938, there seems to have been a consensus that the time had not yet arrived for action. A serious divergence in views between the civilian government and the officer corps came gradually into

*The Magyar term for the Hungarian army.

existence only as a result of the disruption of the European balance of power caused by the rise of the Rome-Berlin Axis. This disagreement eventually turned into a bitter, though covert, tug-of-war between the government and the General Staff. The emergence of Italian and, especially, German strength in Central Europe had accentuated the differences of outlook between Hungary's civilian and military leaders. Most members of the former group looked askance at Hitler's and Mussolini's radical domestic and adventurous foreign policy moves. The latter, on the other hand, were impressed by the scope of Italian and German rearmament and admired the way Hitler had gradually and deftly freed Germany from the fetters imposed at Versailles. German economic and military strength and the effectiveness of Hitler's diplomacy contrasted sharply with the weakness of Hungary and the failures of her foreign policy. Relations between the country's civilian leaders and its more impatient military men became particularly strained during the late summer and autumn of 1938, when the Hungarian government refused to promise participation in the planned German invasion of Czechoslovakia. The invasion did not take place in 1938: the Munich "surrender" deprived Hitler of the strategic reason as well as a diplomatic excuse for his planned military adventure. Although Hitler had been cheated out of what he expected to be another triumphant march into another of Central Europe's ancient capitals, Munich appeared to have been a great victory for German diplomacy. But for Hungary, Munich was a disaster. Once German demands were satisfied, there was no reason why the Czechs and Slovaks should yield to further demands. At Munich, Hungarian aspirations for revision were not considered. After Munich, the conditions for the realisation of these aspirations were no longer favourable. In the end, in an arbitrary award, decided on by the German and Italian Foreign Ministers in Vienna, Hungary was given back a part of the territory she had lost to Czechoslovakia in 1919. But the so-called First Vienna award did not satisfy the Hungarian military who continued to accuse their country's "timid" civilian leadership of "missing the boat" in September when a bolder policy might have led to a more drastically favorable revision of Hungary's northern borders.⁴

In 1939 recriminations between the civilians and the military diminished in intensity. In September 1938 the soldiers had been angry with the civilians for getting nothing for Hungary during the Munich crisis; in subsequent months, they also became resentful against the Germans for failing to give adequate support to Hungary's territorial claims during the negotiations which preceded the First Vienna Award. Growing German hostility towards Poland and the announcement in August of 1939

of the Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact, also perturbed Hungarian officers whose anti-Bolshevism was genuine. The German attack on Poland also upset many. Most Hungarians were greatly sympathetic with the plight of the Poles. It is well known that the Hungarian Government refused to co-operate with the Germans in September of 1939 and even opened the country's northeastern borders to Polish refugees. There can be little doubt that the Government's stand was whole-heartedly approved of by most of the country's soldiers. But the detente between the more cautious elements in the Government and the more impatient members of the military was not destined to last for long. Neither the internal political situation nor the course of international events in Eastern Europe favoured the prolongation of such an accord.

The crises of 1938-39 had not passed without leaving indelible marks on Hungarian politics. The international upheavals of these two eventful years were accompanied by internal changes, many of which strengthened the influence of the military in national affairs. In particular, the year 1938 witnessed the long-awaited beginning of a rearmament programme.⁵ Even more important was the passage in 1939 of the Home Defence Act (*Honvédelmi Törvény*). This law re-introduced the principle of universal liability for armed service, restricted certain political freedoms (such as the freedom of assembly and association), provided for military supervision of the press and industries involved in the production of a wide range of war materials. The act created a new decision-making body, the Supreme Council of Home Defence, made up of the Regent, the members of the Ministerial Council, the Chief-of-Staff and the Commander-in-Chief of the Army. From then on, there was a body above the civilian government, a body in which the Armed Forces had direct representation, to make decisions in regard to the vital question of war and peace.⁶ But the significance of the rearmament programme and the new home defence act was surpassed by the changes which had taken place in this period, particularly during the autumn of 1938, in the composition of Hungary's civilian and military leadership.

Perhaps the most important of these changes was the dismissal of Kálmán Kánya from the Ministerial Council. He had always been a cautious man who distrusted the Axis leaders as he distrusted the Hungarian military. Prior to Munich, he had been the most adamant opponent of the idea of Hungary's collaboration in a German invasion of Czechoslovakia. Kánya's successor was Count István Csáky, a vain, impressionable, but talented diplomat. Csáky shared neither his predecessor's caution nor his distrust of the Axis. Kánya's departure from national politics, however, was counterbalanced a few months later by the

replacement of Béla Imrédy by Pál Teleki as Premier. During the Sudeten Crisis, Imrédy had become a convert to the Axis cause and for some five months he sponsored measures that were designed to bring Hungary's internal and external policies more in line with those of Germany and Italy. But his efforts alarmed Hungary's conservatives and liberals alike and he was manoeuvred into resigning from office. After assuming the premiership, Teleki made many efforts to prevent or delay the implementation of Imrédy's pro-Axis programme.

Another important change in Hungarian leadership during the autumn of 1938 was the appointment of General Henrik Werth as Chief-of-Staff. Werth was still another of the high-ranking officers of the General Staff with a German ethnic background. Moreover, he spoke German as his native tongue and had married a citizen of the Third *Reich*. There is no evidence that the above factors had played a significant role in Werth's selection, nor that there had been representations from Berlin asking for his appointment.⁷ But once established in his new post, Werth became one of the most persistent advocates of aligning Hungarian foreign and military policies with those of the Axis powers. Werth was to receive active support from General Károly Bartha, the Minister of Defence in the period under discussion in this paper.

The international developments of the first year of the Second World War had a further unsettling impact on Hungarian politics and, especially, on civil-military relations. The war, first in Eastern Europe and then also in the West, witnessed the crumbling away of a greater and greater portion of the international order established by the Paris peace settlements. This process increased most Hungarian leaders' expectations about new and more extensive revisions of the territorial settlement in East Central Europe especially in the East, at the expense of Rumania. Most Hungarian leaders were confident that the long-awaited opportunity to regain Transylvania would soon present itself. They had every reason to think so. Rumania's international position continued to deteriorate after September 1939. The existence of the secret protocol which accompanied the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact was suspected in diplomatic circles at the time. While its details were unknown, there were few doubts that the Pact's provisions regarding Rumania had ominous implications for that country's future. Indeed, as early as November, Moscow began to voice its interest in Bessarabia, the region in Rumania which had belonged to Russia before the First World War. Rumania was also a possible target of attack by Germany, either as part of a joint Russo-German military occupation on the Polish model, or as a result of a pre-emptive strike by the *Wehrmacht*, undertaken to fore-

stall a possible Russian move into the oil-rich Ploesti region. Despite the guarantee Britain had extended to Bucharest in the case of a German invasion, Rumania had no real defence against the dangers posed by the new order which had unfolded in Central Europe in the fall of 1939.

Rumania's difficulties gave rise to various plans in Budapest for the solution of the Transylvanian question in a manner satisfactory to Hungary's expectations. How differently Hungary's civilian and military leaders approached this issue is illustrated by the plans that were advanced by ex-Premier Count István Bethlen and General Werth. The scheme of the former, outlined in a secret memorandum to the Government, started with the premise that Germany would lose the war. Accordingly, Bethlen argued, Hungary should remain neutral and preserve her strength for the attainment of her national aims at the end of the war. Bethlen hoped that by participating in some kind of a security arrangement for post-war Europe, and by not annexing Transylvania but allowing it to become an autonomous member of a loose East European federation, Hungary could solve the Transylvanian question according to her interests.⁸

Werth's plans were quite different. The Chief-of-Staff was not willing to wait until the outcome of the war was settled. Long before the Russian threat against Rumania became acute, Werth urged his government to prepare for the recovery of Transylvania by force should an armed conflict develop between Moscow and Bucharest.⁹ In April 1940 Werth submitted a memorandum on this subject to Horthy and the leading members of the Government. The Chief-of-Staff discussed at length the probable outcome of the European war. Unlike Bethlen, he concluded that Germany would more than likely emerge as the victor, but even if she did not, a complete German defeat was impossible because of the superior strength of the *Wehrmacht*. Werth, who had just held discussions with representatives of the German General Staff, informed his civilian superiors that the Germans had offered their co-operation against Rumania. But simple military co-operation was not sufficient according to Werth. Hungary should abandon her neutrality and become an ally of Berlin so that she could regain the lands she had lost in the wake of the First World War.¹⁰

To Werth's disappointment, a Hungarian-German alliance against Rumania never came about. From the late spring of 1940 on, Hitler was preoccupied with the Western front and, for the time being, did not wish to undertake any military ventures in the East. Interestingly enough, Hitler's desire to maintain peace in Eastern Europe and the Balkans nearly gave Hungary an opportunity to achieve revision in Transylvania

on her own terms. That, in the end, the solution of the Transylvanian question in 1940 should have been made on terms dictated not from Budapest but from Berlin, was in part the result of a conflict between the Hungarian Government and the military, in particular, a clash between Teleki and Werth.

The approach that the Hungarian leadership adopted towards the question of Transylvania differed appreciably from that advocated by Werth. Teleki was repelled by the idea of abandoning the country's neutrality and joining Germany. Unlike Werth, Teleki was doubtful about the prospects of a German victory. He felt that the superiority of moral strength and physical resources was on the Allied side. He could not accept Werth's suggestion that Hungary should become an ally of Germany. He rejected the Chief-of-Staff's proposals in a letter to Horthy. He stressed to the Regent that Germany's victory was not a foregone conclusion and, therefore, it was not advantageous for Hungary to side with her completely. Werth, the Premier argued, did not see the problem of Hungary's interests from the point of view of a Hungarian.¹¹

Although Teleki rejected Werth's plan of regaining Transylvania with German military help, he did not give up the prospect of attaining a revision of his country's eastern boundaries through some other means. The opportunity seemed to have presented itself in the summer of 1940. At the time Hitler was still hoping to force Britain to her knees and thereby to end the war in Western Europe. To do this Hitler needed peace elsewhere in Europe, especially in the southeast, from where came many of the foodstuffs, fuel and raw materials needed by the *Wehrmacht*. In the meantime, the Russians had decided to act. At the end of June they confronted Rumania with an ultimatum demanding the return of Bessarabia. The Soviet move caused much hectic activity in Hungary.¹² The *honvédség* mobilized and frantic efforts were made to ascertain Rome's and Berlin's attitudes to a Hungarian occupation of Transylvania in case of a Russo-Rumanian conflict. But that conflict never came about. Rumania surrendered Bessarabia without a fight. And from Berlin came word that Germany would be most unhappy about any disruption of the peace in Eastern Europe.¹³ Even though the best opportunity for regaining Transylvania was now gone, the Hungarians continued their menacing attitude towards Rumania, demanding at the same time that the dispute be submitted to a conference attended by the statesmen of Germany, Italy, Hungary and Rumania. Teleki's aim was evident: threatened by a Hungarian-Rumanian conflict at the time when Germany's interest demanded peace in Eastern Europe, the Axis powers would be forced to support the Hungarian claims in any

negotiations on the issue.¹⁴ But, for the time being, Hitler did not wish to act as a mediator. He rejected the idea of a four-power conference and told the Hungarians to negotiate with the Rumanians alone.¹⁵

The Hungarian-Rumanian discussions achieved nothing. Rumania was no longer an isolated power which had to make concessions. She had embarked on a pro-Axis policy, and had acquired a new friend: Germany. The Hungarians could do no more than continue their intimidating stance against Rumania and hope that Hitler would change his mind, and for the sake of peace in southeastern Europe, would intervene in the dispute.

At the end of July Hitler changed his policy. Almost overnight it seems, he decided to see to it that all outstanding international disputes were settled in Eastern Europe. The reason for this complete turnabout in Germany's policy lay in international developments. In July, the Nazis failed to force Britain to come to terms with them. To deprive the British of their last ray of hope, Hitler decided to smash the Soviet Union in a single huge campaign next spring. With Russia under German rule, Japan would be free to turn against the U.S., and Britain would have no hope of holding out against Germany. To prepare for this bold venture, Hitler needed tranquility in Eastern Europe, and to achieve this he had to settle the question of Hungarian-Rumanian relations. This was exactly what the Hungarians desired in August 1940, but they wanted Hitler to act as a mediator in the dispute and not as an arbiter. They did not want to see another Vienna Award announced in which Germany and Italy imposed a settlement favourable first and foremost to German interests. If everything else failed, Teleki was prepared to accept arbitration, but he wanted the Rumanians to ask for it: if Bucharest called for such an award, Budapest could insist on certain pre-conditions. Moreover, if the revision of the boundaries came about through arbitration requested by Rumania, the settlement would have greater legitimacy in the eyes of the world.

The essential feature of Teleki's plan was to threaten war in southeastern Europe and compel the Rumanians to request Hitler's diplomatic intervention. But Teleki was double-crossed. At the critical moment, Werth informed the Germans that, as a final measure, Hungary was willing to accept arbitration rather than go to war.¹⁶ After such a disclosure it was easy for Berlin to call Teleki's bluff. In the end the fate of Transylvania was settled by another German-Italian dictum. The region was divided between Rumania and Hungary.

Werth's indiscretion deeply perturbed the sensitive Premier. He decided to resign and announced his decision in a letter to Horthy. Teleki

disclaimed any personal antipathy towards Werth. He complained of not being able to "prevail against the military." He accepted part of the blame for that unfortunate state of affairs; he had allowed the soldiers to become "too powerful." As a result, he no longer felt suitable to carry out the demanding task of leading the country in such difficult times. Someone else would have to be appointed who would end the division between the Government and the *honvédség*.¹⁷

Teleki followed up his letter of resignation with a memorandum outlining in detail the question of civil-military relations in Hungary. He began by saying that the existing legal framework of these relations was satisfactory. The problem was, he argued, that there had been a departure from that legal basis, and Hungary was drifting towards a sort of "military dictatorship" imposed from "below" rather than "from above." In Hungary, he continued, "there seemed to be two governmental machineries." One was the legal government, the other was the military establishment which extended to "all branches of civil administration" and whose activities the "lawful governmental system" was unable to supervise. What was needed, was to appoint a new premier who could end this state of affairs by gathering in his hands the highest executive powers.

In the last part of the memorandum, Teleki discussed the role of the military in foreign affairs. He admitted that the soldiers had to gather information abroad and had to have their own staff for this purpose, but this task needed to be done in tandem with the intentions and policies of the government. In Hungary, much was lacking in the co-ordination of the activities of diplomats and soldiers abroad. He, as Premier and Minister of External Affairs, was not receiving all the reports Hungarian military attachés sent home from abroad. It was imperative, he stressed, that he should at least see instructions that the Chief-of-Staff despatched to military attachés. If this had been done, many unpleasant misunderstandings might have been avoided. The Chief-of-Staff had caused great harm when he had informed the Germans that Hungary wanted arbitration in the future of Transylvania. In concluding his memorandum Teleki asked Horthy to convey to the military his request for the separation of civil and military authority in Hungary and the subordination of the latter to the former in all cases not exclusively military in nature.¹⁸

In response to Teleki's protest Horthy agreed to see to it that several of the grievances were remedied; but he refused to accept the Premier's resignation. Thus, Teleki remained at the helm of the Hungarian ship-of-state for another six months.

The half-year which followed the Second Vienna Award witnessed a

further erosion of Hungary's neutrality. The two milestones of the process are familiar to students of war-time history: Budapest's consent to the transit through Hungary of German troops destined for pro-Axis Rumania, and Hungary's accession to the Tripartite Pact. As well, civil-military relations remained tense, a fact which became evident during the next crisis in Hungary's external relations: the German-Yugoslav confrontation in the early spring of 1941.

The last months of 1940 saw a diplomatic rapprochement between Hungary and Yugoslavia. Budapest's efforts to seek friendship with Belgrade were sincere. Although the issue of the Hungarian irredenta in Yugoslavia remained unsolved, the need for a neutral friend in a sea of Axis neighbours was a real consideration in the minds of Hungary's best statesmen. The rapprochement led to the signing, in December, of a peace and friendship pact between the two countries.

Better relations between Budapest and Belgrade were viewed with satisfaction in Berlin. The Hungarian-Yugoslav Pact of Peace was seen by Hitler as a stabilizing factor in southeastern Europe, and stability there was essential because of the approaching conflict with Russia. But Hitler's expectations were dashed when in March 1941 Yugoslavia's government was overthrown by anti-German elements of its military. Hitler, in his rage, decided to crush Yugoslavian resistance. To do this he needed the co-operation of Hungary. Accordingly, he despatched a message to Horthy, promising to return to Hungary large areas which had been awarded to Yugoslavia by the peacemakers in 1919. Hitler's price was permission for the *Wehrmacht* to march through Hungary as well as Hungarian participation in the hostilities. The final Hungarian decision on the German request was taken at a meeting of the Supreme Defence Council on the first of April, almost a week after Hitler's plan had been brought to the Hungarian Government's knowledge. It is revealing of the state of politics in Budapest that, prior to the convening of the Council, Horthy had replied to Hitler's message in a letter whose tone was quite affirmative,¹⁹ and that a tentative but complete agreement had already been drawn up between Generals Paulus and Werth on the details of Hungarian-German military co-operation in the coming campaign.²⁰ At the meeting itself, Werth, supported by several ministers including Bartha, demanded Hungary's unconditional participation in the German invasion of Yugoslavia. But Werth and his supporters were out-voted by those who felt that, for the sake of the country's reputation in the West, participation in the German campaign had to be limited and had to be tied to certain definite conditions. In insisting on these conditions, Teleki and his associates had hoped to maintain some of Hun-

gary's neutrality, save the nation's honour and, particularly, retain the goodwill of Britain. The next day, when he learned that the imposition of the conditions on Hungary's participation in the invasion would not be enough to achieve the last of these objectives and might not even forestall a British declaration of war, Pál Teleki committed suicide.²¹

The Yugoslav crisis of the spring of 1941 brought to a close still another phase of Hungary's descent to the status of an Axis ally and satellite. It did not prove to be a final stage; the consequences of the crisis were not so drastic as Teleki had expected: the crisis had not brought a British declaration of war. With military activities in the Yugoslav lands having come to an early end for the time being, Hungary returned to the state of precarious *de jure* neutrality in the European conflict. But this state of affairs was not to last long, for the next crisis in Eastern Europe, Hitler's invasion of the USSR in June 1941, meant the realization of General Werth's hopes for a German-Hungarian military alliance.

The story of the diplomatic and political antecedents of Hungary's involvement in the German invasion of Russia need not be repeated here.²² It should be enough to say that Hungarian participation in the preparations for the attack was not envisaged by Hitler: the Führer distrusted the Hungarians. Nor did Hungary receive an official invitation to join the war even after the outbreak of the German-Russian conflict. While German pressure for Hungary to join was there, the decision to enter the War was made in Budapest. And in this decision the country's military — in particular, Generals Werth and Bartha — played an all-important role.

While diplomatic relations between the German and Hungarian governments were cool, as illustrated by Hitler's refusal to inform Budapest of his planned campaign against Russia, contacts between the two countries' army officers of high rank were frequent and close. Contrary to what may have been expected, the contacts were not sought by the Hungarians alone. In the months before the start of Operation *Barbarossa*, the German High Command had to take certain precautionary measures of which the Hungarians could not be left out. The German military wished to be assured that Hungarian defence works on the Russo-Hungarian border were adequate against any possible Soviet incursion. Accordingly, they sent one of their staff officers to Hungary and, with the consent of the Hungarian command, had him inspect the new defence works in Subcarpathia.²³ The Germans were also concerned with what they considered to be the inadequate equipment and training of the *honvédség* in certain areas; for example, in communications. As a result, they pressed for and obtained an increase in the number of German

military advisers and training officers attached to Hungarian units. As well, close collaboration came to be maintained between the two countries' forces in the field of military intelligence operations.²⁴

In addition to these official contacts, there were direct, secret discussions between high-ranking German and Hungarian generals on several occasions during the long months before the German invasion of Russia. Whether these discussions had resulted in the Hungarian military being informed about Operation *Barbarossa* is an open question. Communist historians in Hungary claim that certain German generals informed their Hungarian counterparts of Germany's true intentions as early as the autumn of 1940 and repeated their warnings about the imminence of a Russo-German war during the Yugoslav crisis.²⁵ This claim is not borne out by reliable sources. Indeed, if any German officer informed the Hungarians, he did so in contravention of Hitler's orders. We have it on the authority of Field-Marschals Keitel and Paulus that any reference to Operation *Barbarossa* was forbidden to German officers holding discussions with the Hungarians.²⁶

Whether Hungary's military leaders were informed about Hitler's plans by their German counterparts, or whether they guessed the Führer's intentions from the Nazis' all-too-obvious preparations, is irrelevant. The fact is that by early May, General Werth seems to have been in full knowledge of the German plans.²⁷ And he did not remain silent. On the 6th of the month he approached the country's new Premier, László Bárdossy, with a memorandum. He argued that the need for new resources would soon drive Germany into a conflict with Russia, and in this war the Germans would expect Hungary to co-operate with them. He urged that the Hungarian Government should anticipate the outbreak of the Russo-German war by offering a military alliance to Germany. Bárdossy answered Werth by questioning the imminence of war between the *Reich* and the USSR, and by expressing doubt about Germany's willingness to come to a military agreement with a small country like Hungary.²⁸

Not satisfied with the Premier's reply, on the 31st the Chief-of-Staff approached Bárdossy with another plea for a Hungarian-German military pact. Arguing along the same lines as before, he asked for permission to take up this matter with German military leaders. Not having received a reply to his latest proposal, on 14 June Werth again submitted a memorandum to the Premier. He predicted that the question of war between Germany and Soviet Russia would be decided "very soon." He also assured Bárdossy that, in view of the *Wehrmacht*'s past record and the doubtful strength of the Red Army, it was certain that the Germans

would achieve victory in a short time. Hungary's participation in the war would last for a very short while. The reserves could be demobilized by "harvest time." It is interesting to note why Werth felt that Hungary had to participate in the expected German invasion of Russia. Hungary was already committed to the Axis. Her Christian and nationalist ideology and anti-Bolshevik outlook obliged her to participate. The preservation of the country's territorial integrity and of its social and economic order also argued for the elimination of the Soviet Union, a potentially dangerous neighbour. Another reason for participation, Werth stressed, was the question of Hungarian territorial aggrandizement. Hungary's expansion depended on his participation in the German campaign. The situation was critical, according to Werth. Rumania had already committed herself to participation in the German war against Russia. If Hungary refused to join, the Chief-of-Staff argued, she would not only have to give up hopes of regaining more of Transylvania, but would have to face the prospect of losing the areas she had obtained in 1940.²⁹

Werth's latest memorandum was discussed by Hungary's civilian leaders at a meeting of the Ministerial Council on 15 June and was rejected. That same day the message came from Ribbentrop informing the Hungarian Government that German-Russian relations would be "clarified" by the first week of July at the latest.³⁰ The note from Berlin did not mention the question of Hungary's role in the coming showdown. Evidently, Hungarian participation in the opening phase of the attack on Russia was not desired. More ominous was the fact that the Germans announced the planned visit to Budapest of a member of their General Staff for the purpose of conducting discussions with the Hungarian military command. In anticipation of these talks, Bárdossy felt obliged to remind Werth of the Government's position on the question of the country's participation in the war. But the Premier's warning proved unnecessary, for the German emissary, General Franz Halder, came to Budapest a few days later with the aim of obtaining Hungarian cooperation in minor matters only.³¹

Prior to the 22nd of June no demand was made by Berlin on either the Hungarian Government or the military to effect the country's involvement in the war. Nor did this situation change on the 22nd, the day of the launching of Operation *Barbarossa*. It was only on the following day that an ominous change took place in the attitude of the Germans. On that morning General Kurt Himer, the *Wehrmacht*'s special representative in Hungary, visited Werth to convey the view of the German High Command that support by Hungary would be most welcome. This sup-

port, however, would have to be offered voluntarily: Germany would make no formal requests.³²

Himer's message to Werth introduced a new factor into the growing clash of views within Hungary's leadership on the question of participation in the war. Up to this time it was only the Hungarian military which demanded involvement. Now it became known that this was Germany's wish also. The civilian government was still opposed; in fact, the Ministerial Council once more rejected the idea at a meeting held on the morning of the 23rd.³³ But the Cabinet does not seem to have been firm on its decision. A few of its members undoubtedly favoured participation in the war, while many others, including Bárdossy himself, felt increasingly uneasy about Hungarian inaction. To mollify those who demanded a demonstration of Hungarian solidarity with Hitler's "crusade against Bolshevism," the Council decided to break diplomatic relations with Moscow. This move may have given some relief to those who wished to avoid tackling the larger question of the day: the issue of Hungary's role in the German war. But it was temporary relief only, for the question of participation in the conflict was to return very soon to haunt Hungary's leaders.

When Bárdossy was informed of the contents of Himer's message, he summoned Otto von Erdmannsdorff, Germany's Minister to Budapest, for an interview and informed him that the question of Hungary's participation in the war was up to the civilian authorities to decide. His government would be willing to review the question, but only if it was asked to do so through diplomatic channels. Communist historians usually claim that Bárdossy refused voluntary participation in the war because he wanted to exact a price for Hungarian help. It is more likely, however, that he was still in favour of staying out of the conflagration but did not want to admit this before the Germans. Accordingly, he tried to avoid Hungarian involvement by insisting on what the Germans were not willing to provide: a formal request for Hungarian assistance.³⁴ But the pressure on Bárdossy to yield continued to grow during the next forty-eight hours. On the 25th a message arrived from Rome bringing Mussolini's warning that continued inaction by Hungary could have unfortunate consequences for the country. Later that day came the news of Slovakia's entry into the war. The Axis front was now almost complete, only Hungary was missing. And, on the next day, an incident occurred which resulted in the entry into the war of that country as well: the air-raid on the city of Kassa (Košice) and other points in north-eastern Hungary.

Much has been written on this perplexing incident of modern Hun-

garian history and yet next to nothing is known as to who carried out the attack and why. The raid, which in Kassa resulted in about sixty casualties and much material damage, was perpetrated by a small number of planes in broad daylight, in full view of Hungarian military authorities. Still, no positive identification of the aircraft was made, and commentators on the incident have been left guessing as to the nationality and motive of the attackers. The Hungarian military blamed the attack on the Russians, a view which became the official explanation of the incident at the time. Yet, already during the war, rumours circulated in Hungary that the bombing was the work of the Germans who wanted to drag the country into the war. This version was accepted after the war by Horthy and his supporters as the true explanation. Communist historians have consistently blamed German and Hungarian "fascists" and "militarists" for the incident, while a life-time student of Hungarian history, Professor C. A. Macartney, endorsed still another contemporary rumour, according to which the raid was carried out by Czech or Slovak deserters flying German planes, on their way to Russia.³⁵ In 1972 the argument came round full circle when the present writer argued in an article that neither the "German" nor the "Slovak" version stood the test of evidence and that the most likely explanation of the riddle was that Russian planes bombed Kassa by mistake.³⁶ Recently an American historian reopened the debate by presenting some circumstantial evidence indicating that the raid may have been masterminded by one or more members of Hungary's officer corps.³⁷

Who bombed Kassa and why may never be known. And it does not really matter. What is more important is that the bombing precipitated a number of decisions in Budapest which ended in Hungary's entry into the war. The report of the attack was first received by Werth, who, accompanied by Defence Minister Bartha, hurried to consult with Horthy. On hearing the news, the Regent became agitated and called for retaliation against Russia. By the time Bárdossy arrived at the meeting, a decision had been arrived at in favour of immediate action. Bárdossy insisted that before any steps were taken, the Ministerial Council had to be summoned. This was agreed to and the fateful meeting of Horthy, Werth, Bartha and Bárdossy came to a hasty end. By the time the ministers assembled the Premier had already made up his mind. The Hungarian military had wanted war all along. The Germans, whom he instinctively believed to be the real perpetrators of the air-raid, wanted Hungarian participation badly enough to resort to such vile means to achieve their ends, while the Regent clamoured for retaliation against Russia. In view of this situation, Bárdossy believed that there was only

one course for him to follow: to obtain the Cabinet's consent to a declaration of a state of hostilities between Hungary and the USSR. The Cabinet consented without much disagreement. It is ironic that Bárdossy may have been mistaken on two counts in his analysis of the situation. The Kassa raid may not have been a German "plot," and it is not certain that by calling for a reply to the attack Horthy meant a declaration of hostilities or only reprisals against a selected Soviet target.³⁸ But before matters could be clarified, the decisions had been taken and there was to be no retreat. And so it came to pass that on the morning of 27 June 1941, Hungary's involvement in the war was announced in Budapest.

Viewed from an historical perspective, the events of 26 June 1941 appear to have been the outcome of a trend in Hungarian politics which had its beginnings in the years before the outbreak of the Second World War. Ever since the premiership of General Gömbös, the influence of Hungary's military had been growing in the country's affairs. As war approached in Europe, this increased strength of the military resulted in a tug-of-war between the country's civilian leaders and its generals on the question of strategy in a rapidly deteriorating international situation. The country's soldiers, with few exceptions, favoured closer association with the Axis and a more energetic programme of "gathering in" the lands that Hungary had lost in 1919-20. The civilian government was often divided on these questions. Its best elements wished to follow a cautious approach: they wanted to avoid an irreversible commitment to Germany and involvement in a European war.

The division within Hungary's leadership was not the only factor which worked to the advantage of the country's officer corps. The international situation was increasingly conducive to a pro-Axis orientation. The fact that more and more of East Central Europe came under Nazi control, undoubtedly enhanced the influence of Hungarian officers advocating closer co-operation with Germany; and Hitler's stunning victories in 1939 and 1940 helped to confirm the wisdom of their arguments. In the mid- and late 'thirties it was still possible to argue that Hungary had much to risk by tying her fate to an aggressive Germany, but after the spring of 1940 such arguments carried little weight.

Still another factor which had helped the growth of the military's influence in Hungary had been the increasing radicalization of the country's politics after the mid-'thirties. Fueled by the discontent caused by the Depression and the slowness of social reform, right-radical groups and movements mushroomed in some segments of Hungarian society. They often drew their inspiration from the success of German economic recovery and rearmament as well as an effective German foreign policy.

Attempts to stem the rising rightist tide in Hungary brought only temporary relief. The country's conservative and liberal elements could only fight a rear-guard action against the rightist onslaught. Since the time of Gömbös, every Hungarian premier had come into office with the intention to reverse or at least to slow down this trend, but not one of them succeeded. Some, like Imrédy, became converts to the rightist cause, while others collapsed or gave up under the strains and frustrations of the struggle. The most obvious victim of this process was Teleki, but there were others as well. And the departure of such men from the top leadership of the country as Teleki, Kánya and Bethlen had drastic consequences for Hungarian policy-making. In their own time these men counterbalanced the influence of the radical right and the military. They restrained the Regent, this septuagenarian gentleman who was given to fits of temper and over-enthusiasm in times of crisis. In June 1941, however, Bárdossy, the only man who could have restrained Horthy, lacked the moral courage to do so.

The real tragedy of 26 June was that the two men who broke the news of the air-raid to Horthy happened to be two pro-German generals. By the time Bárdossy arrived at the meeting, the ex-admiral was in agreement with the soldiers on the need for immediate, emphatic action. As head of state, Horthy should have exercised more caution; while Bárdossy should have protested the haste of the soldiers. But, he seems to have lacked the resolve to resist when confronted by an emphatic and unanimous demand. Under the circumstances the Cabinet could do very little. A few of its members voiced their disapproval, but they were voted down. Only a statesman of much wisdom, foresight, and high moral scruples could have saved the country from the decision to join the German war. Hungary had several such statesmen during the Horthy era. But in June 1941 not one of them could be found among the top leaders of the country. They had fallen victims to the power struggles of the previous three years.

A fair assessment of the subject of the Hungarian military's relationship to diplomacy should include an examination of the war years, up to 1944 when the Horthy era came to an end in the midst of a Nazi *coup d'état*. Such a study is beyond the scope of this essay (and has been beyond the energies of this writer in spite of persistent plans to embark on it). Fortunately, considerable work is available on the subject,³⁹ which enables us to make some relevant observations.

The general belief among scholars not familiar with the best research on wartime Hungarian history seems to be that Hungarian diplomacy continued to be dominated by a pro-German orientation inspired mainly

by the country's military until about the time of German reverses in North Africa and at Stalingrad. But the evidence does not support such an interpretation. On the contrary, the available data suggests that the hold which General Werth and his followers had on Hungarian diplomacy was short-lived.

The fact is that Werth was removed from his post as early as September 1941. The circumstances of his dismissal cannot be related here in detail. It must suffice to say that the whole affair originated in a disagreement over the extent of Hungary's participation in the German war effort during the summer of 1941. The limited nature of Hungarian military help to the Germans irritated Werth. To bring about a larger Hungarian role in the fighting in Russia, Werth approached the government with another of his long memoranda in which he accused the civilian administration of obstructing the war effort and thereby conducting a policy detrimental to Hungarian national interests. Werth also made promises to the German General Staff for the escalation of Hungarian military effort against the Russians. But he overreached himself. Premier Bárdossy resented both the content and the manner of the Chief-of-Staff's protests and decided to complain to Regent Horthy.⁴⁰ At the same time Werth encountered opposition from an unexpected quarter. Another of the country's influential soldiers, Lieutenant-General Ferenc Szombathelyi, the commander on the Russian Front, spoke out against the Chief-of-Staff's views in a memorandum in which he deemed the outcome of the war uncertain, and the best policy for Hungary, a withdrawal of her troops from Russia. Next, Szombathelyi was summoned to Budapest for consultation. After hearing both sides of the argument, Horthy asked for Werth's resignation and appointed Szombathelyi as the Chief-of-Staff.⁴¹ Although Szombathelyi was also an ethnic German (his original name was Knauz), he proved to be a loyal supporter of the pro-allied orientation of Premier Nicholas Kállay (1942–1944). This change in Hungary's military leadership was a significant one and has been called a "reversal of policy" whose causes remain "one of the mysteries of Hungary's role in World War II."⁴²

What happened in September 1941 was not really a "reversal of policy" nor is it a "mystery." It can more accurately be described as a return to the situation which had prevailed before that eventful spring and summer of 1941. For blind and one-sided alignment with Germany was never the policy of Hungary's leaders, and the country's military, however influential and however meddlesome, did not completely dominate foreign policy except for a brief period in 1941. Prior to 1941 their attempts to gain an upper hand in diplomatic decision making had been

repeatedly frustrated. Gömbös's drive to create a new Hungary on the Italian model was obstructed. During the Czechoslovak crisis, the military's advice was disregarded. Next, their new-found ally, Imrédy, was driven from office. Werth's 1940 proposal for a military pact with Germany was dismissed. His demands next spring for unconditional cooperation in the German invasion of Yugoslavia was not heeded, though by this time the military almost had its way. Still later the Chief-of-Staff's calls for a German-Hungarian alliance against the USSR fell on deaf ears until the crises of late June unnerved the civilian government. The balance-of-power between the civilian leaders and the military had gradually become more and more precarious as the war progressed, and as Nazi armies scored one triumph after another. In the summer of 1941 the balance tipped in favour of the Hungarian military or, more precisely, its pro-German elements. But the supremacy of the General Staff in diplomacy proved to be a brief one; unfortunately for Hungary, it also proved to be one in which irreversible decisions were taken. Of course, it is by no means certain that Hungary could have remained neutral in the war much beyond 1941 even if Werth and his supporters had not been there to exert an impact on the country's affairs. One should not forget the fact that by this time Germany wielded enormous power in East Central Europe. One only has to think of the pressure which Berlin put on Budapest early in 1942 to bring about a great increase in the Hungarian war effort. Yet the country's civilian government, headed after March of 1942 by Kállay, was in command of policy and used it, as much as the difficult circumstances permitted, to further Hungarian, as opposed to Axis, interests.

ABBREVIATIONS

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| DGFP | R. J. Sontag, <i>et al.</i> , eds., <i>Documents on German Foreign Policy, 1918-1945</i> . Washington, 1949-1963. |
| DIMK | László Zsigmond, gen. ed., <i>Diplomáciai iratok Magyarország külpolitikájához, 1936-1945</i> (Diplomatic Documents on Hungary's Foreign Policy, 1936-1945), Budapest, 1962f. |
| HK | <i>Hadtörténelmi Közlemények</i> [Studies on Military History]. |
| <i>Horthy Papers</i> | Miklós Szinai and László Szücs, eds., <i>Horthy Miklós titkos iratai</i> [The Secret Papers of Miklós Horthy]. Budapest, 1965. |
| MMV | László Zsigmond, <i>et al.</i> , eds., <i>Magyarország és a második világháború: titkos diplomáciai okmányok a háború előzményeihez és történetéhez</i> [Hungary and the Second World War: Secret diplomatic documents on the origins and history of the war], 3rd ed. (Budapest, 1966). |
| TMWC | <i>Trial of the Major War Criminals before the Inter-National Military Tribunal</i> , 42 vols., Nuremberg, 1946-1950. |

NOTES

1. Hungarian literature on the subject of Hungary's military before and during the war is too extensive to be reviewed here in detail. One representative sample is György Ránki's *Emlékiratok és a valóság Magyarország második világháborús szerepléséről* [Memoirs and the Truth about Hungary's Role in the Second World War] (Budapest, 1964), especially pp. 180–91. Another is János Csima's "Adalékok a horthysta vezérkarnak az ellenforradalmi rendszer háborús politikájában betöltött szerepéről" [Data on the Role of the Horthyist General Staff in the War Policies of the Counter-revolutionary Regime] *HK*, 15 (Fall, 1968), 3, pp. 486–510. For two other Hungarian works on this theme see footnotes 24 and 25 below.
2. The most recent North American treatment of Hungary's role in the Second World War is Mario D. Fenyo's *Hitler, Horthy, and Hungary: German-Hungarian Relations, 1941–1944* (New Haven and London, 1972). A work which focuses on the specific problem of the military's role in foreign policy during the pre-war years is Thomas L. Sakmyster's "Army Officers and Foreign Policy in Interwar Hungary, 1918–41," *Journal of Contemporary History*, 10 (January 1975), 1, pp. 19–40. Still another work is this writer's "Civil-Military Relations in Nazi Germany's Shadow: The Case of Hungary, 1939–41," in Adrian Preston and Peter Dennis, eds., *Swords and Covenants: Essays in Honour of the Centennial of the Royal Military College of Canada, 1876–1976* (London, 1976), pp. 216–247, a study on which this paper is based in part.
3. The 1937–38 period by Sakmyster and the post-1941 years by Fenyo. The publications of both of these authors developed from Ph.D. theses written on these two periods respectively.
4. Thomas L. Sakmyster, "Hungary and the Munich Crisis: The Revisionist Dilemma," *Slavic Review*, 32 (December 1973), 4, p. 740.
5. For details see C. A. Macartney, *October Fifteenth: A History of Modern Hungary, 1929–1945* (Edinburgh, 1956), vol. 1, pp. 212–19. Also, Sakmyster, "Army Officers," pp. 26f.
6. Gyula Juhász, *A Teleki-kormány külpolitikája, 1939–1941* [The Foreign Policy of the Teleki Government, 1939–1941] (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1964), pp. 15–16. György Ránki, *Emlékiratok*, pp. 180–81.
7. Vilmos Nagy de Nagybaczon, *Végzetes esztendőök, 1938–1945* [Fateful Years, 1938–1945] (Budapest, 1946), p. 30.
8. *DIMK*, vol. IV, doc. no. 577. Also, N. F. Dreisziger, "Count István Bethlen's Secret Plan for the Restoration of the Empire of Transylvania," *East European Quarterly*, 8 (January 1975), 4, pp. 413–423.
9. Macartney, *October Fifteenth*, vol. 1, pp. 388–89.
10. Juhász, pp. 103f.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 106.
12. *Ibid.*, pp. 121–24.
13. *Ibid.*, pp. 122–24. András Hóry, *Még egy barázdát sem* [Not even one Furrow] (Vienna, 1967), p. 38.
14. N. F. Dreisziger, *Hungary's Way to World War II* (Toronto, 1968), pp. 129–131. For a different interpretation of Teleki's aims, see Juhász, pp. 150f.
15. Juhász, pp. 144–49.
16. The evidence on Werth's indiscretion is a memo from Teleki to Horthy (see fns. 17 and 18 below). Historians have generally accepted this evidence.
17. Memorandum by Teleki addressed to Horthy, 1 September 1940. *Horthy Papers*, doc. no. 49 (pp. 233–39).

18. Appendix I to the above document. *Ibid.*, pp. 239–51. Dreisziger, “Civil-Military Relations,” pp. 230–32.
19. Horthy acknowledged the existence of Hungarian territorial claims against Yugoslavia and welcomed the proposed discussions between the German and Hungarian general staffs. *MMV* doc. no. 127; also, Nagy, pp. 61f. For an English translation of Horthy’s letter, see Macartney, *October Fifteenth*, vol. I, pp. 475ff.
20. Juhász, pp. 301–2. *MMV* doc. no. 130.
21. On Teleki’s death see Macartney, *October Fifteenth*, vol. I, pp. 486ff. Also, Loránt Tilkovszky, *Teleki Pál: legenda és valóság* [Pál Teleki: The Legend and the Truth] (Budapest, 1969), Chapter I and pp. 515f.
22. C. A. Macartney, “Hungary’s Declaration of War on the USSR in 1941,” in A. O. Sarkissian, ed., *Studies in Diplomatic History and Historiography* (London, 1961), pp. 153–165. Juhász, pp. 157–167.
23. The testimony of Lieutenant-General Gunther Krappe. *TMWC*, vol. VII, pp. 336f.
24. Joseph Kun, “Magyarország második világháborúba való belépésének katonapolitikai vonatkozásai” [The Military-political Aspects of Hungary’s Entry into the Second World War], *HK*, 9 (1962), 1, pp. 21–22.
25. György Ránki, “Magyarország belépése a második világháborúba” [Hungary’s Entry into the Second World War], *HK*, 6 (1959), 2, p. 40. Kun, p. 21.
26. W. Keitel, *The Memoirs of Field-Marshal Keitel* (New York: Stein and Day, 1966), p. 156. The memoirs of Ernst Alexander Paulus are cited by Mario D. Fenyó, *Hitler, Horthy, and Hungary*, p. 13.
27. András Zákó, “Egy emlékezetes évforduló” [A Memorable Anniversary], *Hadak Utján*, 13 (June 1961), 146, p. 8. Also, Macartney, *October Fifteenth*, vol. II, p. 18.
28. Macartney, *October Fifteenth*, vol. II, p. 18.
29. *MMV* doc. no. 141.
30. *DGFP* Ser. D. Vol. XII, doc. no. 631.
31. Juhász, pp. 343f.
32. *DGFP* Ser. D. Vol. XIII, doc. no. 54. The German High Command had favoured Hungarian involvement in the war all along; however, Hitler had forbidden it to express this view to the Hungarians until after the start of the invasion.
33. Juhász, p. 346.
34. N. F. Dreisziger, “New Twist to an Old Riddle: The Bombing of Kassa (Kosice) June 26, 1941,” *Journal of Modern History*, 44 (June 1972), 2, p. 235. For a Marxist interpretation see Juhász, pp. 351–52.
35. Macartney, “Hungary’s Declaration,” p. 165.
36. Dreisziger, “New Twist,” p. 242.
37. Sakmyster, “Army Officers,” p. 36.
38. Macartney, *October Fifteenth*, vol. II, p. 26, especially note 1.
39. The two most notable ones in English are Macartney’s *October Fifteenth*, vol. II, and Fenyó’s work.
40. *Horthy Papers*, doc. no. 59.
41. The official reason given for Werth’s resignation was “ill health.” 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, 1968), doc. no. 441. Simultaneously with Werth’s dismissal, another pro-German staff officer, General H. László, the Chief of the General Staff’s Operational Section, was also replaced. His successor was General János Vörös.
42. Fenyó, p. 30.

The Irrelevance of Ideology: The Fall of Marxism and the Rise of the Last Man

Robert Blumstock

Hungary has, since the end of World War II, staggered from a slavish obeisance to Soviet directives; through a heretical and violent outburst in 1956; an innovative, yet failed plan to decentralize industry and generate efficiency and profit; to a current impasse, which sees centralized controls returning, while the doctrinal laxity generated in Kádár's famous dictum, "those who are not against us, are with us,"¹ has fostered a situation in which official declarations of socialist solidarity meet with a public ennui supported and accompanied by the inscrutability of macro-economic theory linked to dialectical postulates.

Wandering around the streets of the inner city of Budapest, does not give the casual visitor the impression that he is in the centre of a society in which the austere maxims of Marx and Lenin really touch the lives of many people. The chic young men and women staring at the window displays on Váci utca, the murmur of the polite and often multi-lingual conversations in the crowded coffee shop of the Duna Intercontinental Hotel, and the musty chandeliered, decaying elegance of the Gerbaud, now the Vörösmarty café, where an older clientèle dip into their creamy cakes, sip their brandy, and fondle their glasses of soda water while in heated discussion about the results of the latest soccer game, defines this second city of the Austro-Hungarian Empire as surviving in its own way despite the alien and imposed constraints enforced by the presence of Soviet troops. The wags of the city, cheerfully and with a droll cynicism characterize Hungary as, "the best barracks in the whole camp."

To a North American, the crowded and yet frequently available buses and the streets busy with shoppers carrying net bags full of an assort-